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Book Review

Entrepreneurship as Social Change

Lori Wagner Snyder

Chris Steyaert and Daniel Hjorth, eds. *Entrepreneurship as Social Change. A Third Movements in Entrepreneurship Book*, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006. 327 pages, \$120.

Grounded in the theme of “earth,” *Entrepreneurship as Social Change* takes a part evolutionary, part revolutionary approach to societal “wellness.” Challenging traditional definitions of social entrepreneurship, the series goes beyond mere “inventive stewardship” of current principles to investigate and reassert the transformative process of *creative destruction* through socioethical discourse and regrounding within the public space of current, real-life community contexts. The collection of essays, drawn from an entrepreneurship workshop, organized by the Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research Institute (ESBRI) and held in Sweden in June 2001, is one of several in the *Movements in Entrepreneurship Series*, edited by Steyaert and Hjorth.

Separated into two sections: “Conceptualizing Social Entrepreneurship” and “Contextualizing Social Change,” the book supports a deconstruction from predetermined concepts and hierarchies of traditional definitions, practices, and understandings of entrepreneurship and encourages regroundings within multidiscursive spaces. By bringing entrepreneurship into academic discourse, the contributors to the collection allow for a discourse analysis that subjects the field to a variety of approaches and theories (or experiments).

In part one, the theoretical basis for the book, six essays reveal an organic, as opposed to mechanistic, view of social entrepreneurship—one that sees creative potential within connections and relationships and supports dynamic process and a deobjectification of the human element. The discussions begin with a renewed understanding of the entrepreneur as “economic actor” who causes development or *creative destruction*, a definition credited to the early German theorist, Joseph Schumpeter. In the first two essays, Richard Swedberg and Yohann Stryjan support the idea of recombining existing resources in new ways to create dynamic potential for entrepreneurial activity. In Chapter 3, Anderson,

Honig, and Peredo assert that this potential should originate from “basic human needs and desires” and should contain indigenous (as opposed to preestablished) cultural and social identities that promote well-being—an ethical view of entrepreneurship (p. 75). Ellen S. O’Connor emphasizes that entrepreneurship should emerge through an ongoing process in which the “entrepreneurial actor” and societal norms meet within cross-domains of knowledge to create a dramatic and transformational impact (p. 82), and Hjorth and Bjerke add that this “organic” and ethical process depends on connections between desiring citizens (p. 120) within a public space. The power for change emerges from within dynamic relationships—in the spaces and dialogs created by these new connections. This view sees entrepreneurship not as a societal force, but as a society-creating force (p. 120). To reach those new “connections” and find new spaces for novel understandings, Pascal Day, in Chapter 6, brings entrepreneurship formally into the academic realm, and using language and discourse theory, introduces traditional entrepreneurship as *text* to be reread. By subverting the prevailing discourse (p. 137), and revisiting the marginalized or supplemental *other*, entrepreneurship can move from logocentrism to finding new “connections” and creating “empty” spaces for exploring human possibility and potential.

In part two of the book, “Contextualizing Social Change,” the essayists use and apply “deconstruction” and “reconstruction” theories within real-life community contexts to show how boundaries, identities, and space can be subverted and organic interdependence can be used in lieu of hierarchical systems. Fletcher and Watson begin the six remaining chapters by asking “who is *the other*” within communities. Using an example of counter-urbanization, the chapter explores the relationality of emergent entrepreneurship within life-changing processes. Kathryn Campbell goes on to view the *other* as those nonhierarchical communities which explore interdependence with the earth and compares the language of sustainable agriculture to sustainable communities. Primarily a feminist reading, Campbell’s thesis supports long-term sustainable entrepreneurship as a “shared text” (p. 191) and notes that “when power is shared, it transforms communities” (p. 181). In Chapter 9, Johannsson and Wigren continue to explore the dynamics of sustainable “community identity

making” (p. 201) and emphasize the dynamic relationship between master narrative and those “silenced voices” that become the seeds of alternative collective identity (p. 207). By using the example of Gnosjö in Sweden, the chapter notes that both diversity and movement perpetuate a continual forming and reforming of “identity”—thereby ensuring sustainability. Picking up on this theme of dynamic interactions, Lindgren and Packendorff, use the example of Hultsfred, Sweden to demonstrate the delicate balance between deviation and belonging and to reassert an organic view of connection and the process of *always becoming*. In Chapter 11, Karin Berglund sums up ideas of discursive diversity and the equality of discourse, the promotion of the *other*, and a new (and always renewing) process of viewing entrepreneurial identity as a “complex collection of processes intertwined and woven together” (p. 247) to form nonstatic, nonhierarchical community frameworks. She encourages businesspeople and scholars to continue to consider alternative ways of speaking about entrepreneurship, so as to promote healthy interchange and viable community systems. Timon Beyes concludes the series of essays by exploring “urban entrepreneurial space,” using discourse and spatial theory to demonstrate what he calls the *theatre of entrepreneurship*. By embracing the “experimental,” collapsing borders, and allowing for novel interactions within the new spaces between established and new narratives, the “new social entrepreneur” (a blend of Foucaultian actor and creative energizer) can reveal untapped potential and new spaces (nontexts) for relationships within both communities and within current understandings of entrepreneurship.

In reading entrepreneurship as *text*, the essays in this col-

lection express “tectonic shifts” of understanding, as the goals of the book shape and remake the “landscape” and texture of the field of entrepreneurship itself. Serving as its own example of *creative destruction* and dynamic renewal, the collection of essays, as a discursive, interdependent “community,” exploring theories of entrepreneurship as social change within an academic context, proves itself entrepreneurial in this new sense.

Although seeking to present alternative views of social entrepreneurship, the book relies on methods of exploration now fairly traditional to academic scholars. Primarily quoting language and deconstructionist theorists such as Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida, the application of systems renewal and the exploration of new “paradigms” goes back to Thomas Kuhn and other “new historical analysts.” Additionally, 18th-century European ideals of organic, never-ending processes are re-presented and recycled to meet the needs of the new reader and are reapplied here within the entrepreneurial arena of almost primarily Swedish contexts. Still, the arguments for placing entrepreneurship under “academic scrutiny” ring bold and true, and the text(s) support their methods convincingly. The essayists investigate areas for entrepreneurship that are seldom heard and rarely considered. And in doing so, they create a new “read” that shakes up the field of entrepreneurship and prepares for a long-needed shift in the expectations and definitions of economic process.

In presenting entrepreneurship in new ways and in challenging seekers to confront new territories and chart new grounds in the field, *Entrepreneurship as Social Change* comes across as a refreshing, innovative, and provocative addition to the academic and business community.



About the Author



LORI WAGNER SNYDER (loriwagnersnyder@comcast.net) holds a B.A. from Lebanon Valley College and an M.A. and A.B.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. Her prior publications have concentrated in cultural studies, cultural studies of science, and the relationships of language/literary theory to cultural-scientific paradigms. Formerly an assistant professor, she has taught courses in science and society, as well as leadership and business courses and maintains an interest in bridging the gap between academic discourse and entrepreneurship within the societal landscape. In addition to her consulting business, Ms. Snyder currently continues to teach and to write.