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## A bibliometric analysis of social entrepreneurship☆

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## ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship is a relatively new topic which is gathering researchers' attention because of the social input and the boom of this kind of business. The main aim of this article is to orient researchers in creating a theoretical framework and to guide researchers who are new in social entrepreneurship research so that they know which journals and authors to consult when studying this phenomenon. To do so, this study uses the *Web of Science* database to determine the research areas with the greatest research output, the countries and languages responsible for most social entrepreneurship research, the year in which research on social entrepreneurship began, the journals that publish most research, and the most relevant authors with publications on social entrepreneurship.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, interest in social entrepreneurship has increased noticeably. The importance of social entrepreneurship lies in its impact on economic and social development (Peredo & McLean, 2006). Social entrepreneurship adds value to society, offers solutions to social problems, and seeks to increase personal wealth (Peredo & McLean, 2006). Social entrepreneurship not only generates social value, but also creates jobs and wealth. The process of social entrepreneurship originates from a personal mission: the desire to trigger a change or social transformation (Yunus). By pursuing material goals and aims, social entrepreneurs' mission is to make a profound contribution to society. To achieve their aims, social entrepreneurs mobilize resources to resolve social problems and satisfy basic human needs (Yunus, 2007).

Despite this growing interest in social entrepreneurship, however, analysis on the status of social entrepreneurship is scarce. Scholars have yet to determine the amount or quality of research conducted in this area (Peredo & McLean, 2006). This limits research into social entrepreneurship and justifies the need for the present study.

This article presents a bibliometric analysis using the *Web of Science* database to determine the research areas with the greatest research output, the countries and languages responsible for most social entrepreneurship research, the year in which research on social entrepreneurship began, the journals that publish most research, and the most relevant authors with publications on social entrepreneurship. This

study thus aims to orient researchers who are new in social entrepreneurship research so that they know which journals and authors to consult when studying this phenomenon.

## 2. The concept of social entrepreneurship

The newness of the term 'social entrepreneurship' means that some controversy remains surrounding its definition. In recent years, scholars define social entrepreneurship as a sub-discipline within entrepreneurship (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). The literature contains numerous definitions of entrepreneurship (Ribeiro-Soriano & Roig-Dobón, 2009; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2010; Ribeiro-Soriano & Castrogiovanni, 2012; Roig-Dobón & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2009). Thake and Zadek (1997) define social entrepreneurship as the desire of entrepreneurs to obtain justice in society and ensure that all people have a decent quality of life. In this case, social entrepreneurship aims to provide financially sustainable solutions that help fulfil this purpose. Carraher and Welsh (2015) define social entrepreneurship as the process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities which trigger social change and address social needs. Peredo and McLean (2006) define social entrepreneurship as the identification of a situation that marginalizes or excludes a group of individuals who lack the resources or capabilities required for a decent quality of life and the identification of an opportunity to resolve this problem by creating a company. Weerawardena and Sullivan Mort (2001) conclude that social entrepreneurship is a source of sustainable competitive advantage over time, which enables the fulfilment of a social mission.

This study uses the definition by Alford, Brown, and Letts (2004), who define social entrepreneurship as "a process that creates innovative solutions to immediate social problems and mobilizes the ideas,

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capacities, resources, and social agreements required for this sustainable social transformation.” Although social entrepreneurs have a social mission, they may also seek profit. Social entrepreneurs may pursue goals or missions that are social, commercial, or both (Davis, 1997). The most striking element of social entrepreneurship is its capacity to combine elements from private business and volunteer organizations, although this combination may also represent the biggest obstacle to defining social entrepreneurship because these terms are difficult to delimit (Certo & Miller, 2008).

### 3. Method

A bibliometric analysis consists of applying statistical methods to determine qualitative and quantitative changes in a given scientific research topic, establish the profile of publications on the topic, and detect tendencies within a discipline (De Bakker, Groenewegen, & Den Hond, 2005). In addition, this type of analysis provides useful information for experts seeking to evaluate scientific activity (Duque Oliva, Cervera Taulet, & Rodríguez Romero, 2006) because a bibliometric analysis acts as a guide to the status of research into social entrepreneurship.

This study uses the *Web of Science* (WOS) online database, which houses scientific documents across all disciplines. The fact that the WOS provides data on scientific research output enables the bibliometric analysis because the WOS offers data on output, dissemination, collaboration, and impact (De Bakker et al., 2005). This type of analysis constitutes a methodological innovation with respect to traditional literature reviews (De Bakker et al., 2005).

### 4. Unit of analysis

The analysis of the WOS database focuses on social entrepreneurship research (bibliometric analysis took place in February, 2015). To do so, this study analyzes all documents on this subject found in the WOS. The resulting sample comprises 2922 documents, including articles, proceedings, reviews, book review, editorial material, book chapters, meeting abstracts, notes, and letters. This article uses the term document as opposed to article to refer to any of these forms of research output.

The bibliometric indicators used in this research are as follows:

- Language of publication of research on social entrepreneurship
- Areas of knowledge within which authors have published research on social entrepreneurship
- Change in the number of social entrepreneurship research documents published between 2003 and 2015
- Countries where authors have published research on social entrepreneurship
- Journals in which authors have published research on social entrepreneurship
- Authors who have published research on social entrepreneurship

#### 4.1. Language

The JCR contains indexed journals published in languages other than English. For instance, the journals *Historia y comunicación social*, *Innovar revista de ciencias administrativas y sociales*, and *Revista de economía mundial*, publish in Spanish, although the majority of the journals publish in English.

Table 1 shows the number of social entrepreneurship publications by language, according to data gathered from the WOS. As expected, the most common language is English (2728 documents). The second most common language is Spanish (37 documents). This pattern meets the expectations, because the major journals are English-language journals, which is the language that all researchers must know in the modern global academic community. A surprising finding is the higher number

**Table 1**

Languages used in research on social entrepreneurship.

Ranking	Language	N. publications
1	English	2728
2	Spanish	37
3	Slovak	30
4	Czech	17
5	Chinese	17
6	German	14
7	Croatian	12
8	Portuguese	10
9	Russian	6
10	French	6
11	Lithuanian	3
12	Italian	3
13	Dutch	3
14	Swedish	2
15	Polish	2
16	Latvian	2
17	Ukrainian	1
18	Turkish	1

of documents written in minority languages such as Slovak or Czech than in major languages such as German or French. This result may owe to the preference of scholars in Slovakia and the Czech Republic for publishing in their own language (Table 1).

#### 4.2. Research area

According to Vasquez and Davila (2008, p. 107), “entrepreneurship has been studied from the perspective of economics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Initially, only economics scholars studied entrepreneurship, seeking relationships with economic growth and addressing entrepreneurship from a purely economic point of view. Subsequently, psychology, sociology, and anthropology developed contributions in the study of entrepreneurship from a social point of view.”

Table 2 shows the number of documents published in different knowledge areas. The WOS contains 1851 documents in business

**Table 2**

Areas of knowledge within which authors have published research on social entrepreneurship.

Ranking	Research area	N. publications
1	BUSINESS ECONOMICS	1851
2	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	347
3	SOCIAL SCIENCES OTHER TOPICS	231
4	EDUCATION EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH	189
5	SOCIOLOGY	171
6	ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES ECOLOGY	145
7	ENGINEERING	129
8	PSYCHOLOGY	104
9	GEOGRAPHY	90
10	COMPUTER SCIENCE	87
11	OPERATIONS RESEARCH MANAGEMENT SCIENCE	86



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