

Social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility in Tunisia

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship (SE) has attracted increasing interest among researchers and policy makers, particularly in Tunisia, where it is seen as a strategic lever to promote inclusive growth. Unlike corporate social responsibility (CSR), SE places the social mission at the heart of economic activity, transforming commercial revenues into tools to achieve this goal (Zahra & Wright, 2016). Although research on SE has progressed, questions remain about its social and economic impact, and definitions of SE often lack consensus, making it difficult to identify social entrepreneurs (Stevens et al., 2015). This research context is enriched by a partnership with the National Agency for Employment and Independent Work (NAEIW), which supports entrepreneurs by offering training and mentoring services. The study aims to explore the dynamics of SE in Tunisia, taking into account the perceptions of entrepreneurs and the role of NAEIW. Through a mixed methodological approach, combining in situ observations, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, the study collects data from 45 social entrepreneurs. The results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses will allow us to better understand the expectations and challenges encountered by this community, as well as the legitimacy of the different logics underlying social entrepreneurship in the changing Tunisian context.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, Tunisia

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1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship (SE) is an emerging concept that is attracting increasing interest among researchers, policy makers, and private and public sector stakeholders. This field has become a recurring topic of debate, amplified by media coverage and discussions in the press, particularly in recent years. The interest in SE is reflected not only in the proliferation of professional and academic studies, but also in the organization of conferences and seminars, often initiated by academic institutions as well as by public and private sector stakeholders (Layadi et al., 2019; OECD, 2001). This movement is accompanied by the integration of social entrepreneurship into public policies in many countries, which perceive it as a strategic lever to promote inclusive growth and to address contemporary socio-economic challenges (Stevens et al., 2015). In this context, it constitutes a privileged vector for providing innovative solutions to social problems, both in emerging economies and in developed countries. Recent statistics show that one in five businesses created in developed countries is a social enterprise, and that they generate more than 10% of the wealth produced in these economies (Layadi et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2015). Given this observation, strengthening national efforts to develop and support this sector is becoming increasingly crucial to ensure sustainable growth and economic resilience. Social entrepreneurship is thus seen as a driver of inclusive growth, promoting both social innovation and the economic integration of marginalized populations (Janssen et al., 2018). As an entrepreneurial dynamic, social entrepreneurship has a complex and multidimensional nature, covering social, economic, and anthropological aspects (Uygur & Marcoux, 2013). Its rise is attributable to several factors, including the increase in complex social needs, the gradual disengagement of the State in certain sectors, and the rise of ecological and sustainable development issues (Roy, 2015).

What some call "capitalism 3.0" opens up new research perspectives at the crossroads of social innovation and corporate social responsibility (CSR), emphasizing the creation of social value before profit maximization (Janssen et al., 2018; Brouard et al., 2010). Social entrepreneurship is distinguished from CSR practices by the primacy of its social mission. Where CSR integrates social considerations into a classic economic framework, SE reverses this dynamic by placing the social mission at the heart of economic activity, and by using commercial revenues as a means to accomplish this mission (Zahra & Wright, 2016). Despite similarities, particularly in the juxtaposition of economic and social logics, SE prioritizes social impact and sees profit as a tool, rather than an end in itself (Van Der Yeught & Bergery, 2012; Capron, 2009).

Although research on social entrepreneurship has progressed considerably, particularly in recent years, much remains to be explored, particularly regarding its social and economic impact. Several empirical studies are still needed to better understand how social enterprises create value and influence local and global economic dynamics (Stevens et al., 2015; Doherty et al., 2016). Much of the current literature remains theoretical, and there is a lack of consensus on precise definitions of social entrepreneurship, making it difficult to identify social entrepreneurs in various contexts (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). This article proposes, first, to clarify the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and to revisit the different definitions of social entrepreneurship. Then, it will present an empirical research methodology aimed at analyzing the representations of social entrepreneurship among a sample of entrepreneurs. Finally, it will discuss the issues that arise from these results, based on recent studies, and will highlight the importance of better understanding the potential of SE to promote sustainable and inclusive development (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Zahra & Wright, 2016).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social entrepreneurship

Before delving into the discourse on social entrepreneurship, it is imperative to elucidate the construct of the entrepreneur, who represents a pivotal component of this concept. The entrepreneur, functioning as both a social and economic agent, has been the focal point of extensive scholarly inquiry, particularly following the seminal contributions of Birch in the late 1970s. Since that period, a plethora of definitions has emerged to characterize this essential figure. Boutillier & Uzunidis (2012) delineate three prominent economists whose contributions have significantly shaped these definitions: Cantillon, who underscored the importance of risk-taking within the realm of uncertainty; Say, who accentuated the significance of innovation; and Joseph Schumpeter, who articulated the entrepreneur's identity through his or her capacity for innovation and the facilitation of economic transformation. These scholarly works, notably those of Schumpeter, underscore the conceptualization of the entrepreneur as an agent who disrupts the status quo by introducing novel economic paradigms (Gislain, 2012). Among the most compelling definitions proffered by Schumpeter (1934) characterizes the entrepreneur as an innovator, whose primary impetus is "the joy of creating a new economic form" Consequently, innovation is positioned at the core of entrepreneurial endeavors, with the entrepreneur distinguished by his or her competence in transmuting concepts into feasible initiatives. This perspective has been adopted and further developed by various scholars, including Audretsch (2007), who accentuate the critical role of innovation within the entrepreneurial framework.

Beyond the dimension of innovation, additional scholars, such as Shane & Venkataraman (2000), conceptualize the entrepreneur as an individual proficient in recognizing and capitalizing on opportunities. They articulate entrepreneurship as "a process by which opportunities for creating new products and services are discovered, evaluated and exploited" (as cited in Brossard, 2010). The identification of opportunities and the capacity to leverage them are fundamental constituents of contemporary entrepreneurial theories (Renko, 2020).

Furthermore, risk-taking constitutes a fundamental aspect frequently associated with the entrepreneur. Shapero (1982) posited that the entrepreneur is an individual who is unreserved in undertaking risks linked to market unpredictability. Miller (2015) elucidates that this risk-taking is often calculated and constitutes an intrinsic element of entrepreneurial dynamics.

Despite the heterogeneity of theoretical frameworks, several common dimensions manifest within entrepreneurship theories: the capacity for innovation, the identification of opportunities, and the willingness to assume risks. These components are frequently linked to an idealized portrayal of the entrepreneur, which is also reflected in the narratives surrounding social entrepreneurship. Within this context, the social entrepreneur is envisioned as an agent who, transcending mere profit motives, endeavors to generate social value by addressing collective challenges through innovative methodologies (Dacin et al., 2019; Santos, 2012). This conceptualization reinforces the notion that entrepreneurship, irrespective of whether it is economic or social, is predicated on a dynamic interplay of innovation and risk-taking, with the overarching goal of proffering solutions to emergent social exigencies (Zahra & Wright, 2016).

In prevalent discourse, the designation "entrepreneur" is frequently equated with the establishment of a commercial enterprise. Nonetheless, this perception is imbued with a considerably more expansive historical and conceptual significance. The term "entrepreneur" traces its origins to French economic thought dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Initially, within the French lexicon, this term denoted any individual embarking on a substantial project or undertaking. Over time, it evolved to encompass a more precise economic connotation, identifying those who, through their boldness and creativity, facilitated the metamorphosis of the economic environment by innovating and enhancing the utilization of resources. The construct of entrepreneurship was notably articulated in the scholarship of Jean-Baptiste

Say in the early 19th century. According to Say, the entrepreneur is characterized as an individual who reallocates resources from lower-productivity sectors to those of higher productivity, thereby engendering value. This conceptualization established the groundwork for contemporary interpretations of entrepreneurship. Say contended that the entrepreneur's function was pivotal in catalyzing economic expansion, as it enabled a more effective utilization of available resources (Say, 1803 cited in Foss & Klein, 2018).

With the emergence of the 20th century, Joseph Schumpeter, a distinguished Austrian economist, advanced this notion by accentuating the entrepreneur's role as an innovator. Schumpeter articulated the concept of "creative destruction," a mechanism whereby entrepreneurs, through their innovative endeavors, disrupt pre-existing economic frameworks in order to supplant them with novel, more efficient systems. This duality of entrepreneurs as both destroyers and creators has enhanced the comprehension of how the capitalist economy perpetually reinvents itself. For Schumpeter, the entrepreneur is the individual who transforms the production paradigm, whether by introducing novel products, innovating production methodologies, or venturing into uncharted markets (Schumpeter, 1942 cited in Backhaus, 2021). Building upon these theoretical underpinnings, Peter Drucker, a quintessential figure in 20th-century management thought, augmented the discourse by integrating the concept of opportunity into the entrepreneurial definition. Drucker perceived the entrepreneur as an individual who, in the face of change, possesses the acumen to identify and capitalize on opportunities for innovation and differentiation. He posited that while innovation is central to entrepreneurship, the act of establishing a business is neither a requisite nor a sufficient criterion for being classified as an entrepreneur. The quintessence of entrepreneurship resides in one's perspective towards and exploitation of change, viewing it not as a limitation but as a reservoir of potential (Drucker, 1985 cited in Kor et al., 2021). Howard Stevenson, another prominent theorist, furthered this discourse by underscoring that the entrepreneur does not permit themselves to be constrained by their initial resource endowment. He differentiates himself from the conventional manager by actively seeking opportunities without being confined to the resources presently at their disposal. In this manner, Stevenson introduces a more dynamic and proactive paradigm of entrepreneurship, wherein the capacity to mobilize external resources and swiftly adjust to evolving constraints emerges as a critical competency (Stevenson, 2000).

In common usage, the term "entrepreneur" is often seen as synonymous with the creation of a business. However, this notion has a much broader historical and conceptual depth. The word "entrepreneur" has its roots in French economics as early as the 17th and 18th centuries. Originally, in French, this term referred to any person undertaking a large-scale project or activity. Gradually, it acquired a more specific economic dimension, serving to designate those who, through their audacity and ingenuity, contributed to the transformation of the economic landscape by innovating and optimizing the use of resources. The concept of entrepreneurship crystallized in the work of Jean-Baptiste Say in the early 19th century. According to Say, the entrepreneur is someone who moves resources from a low-productivity area to a more productive area, thereby creating value. This idea laid the foundations for the modern understanding of entrepreneurship. Say argued that the role of the entrepreneur was essential to stimulate economic growth because it allowed for better exploitation of available resources (Say, 1803 cited in Foss & Klein, 2018).

With the advent of the 20th century, Joseph Schumpeter, a renowned Austrian economist, further evolved this notion by emphasizing the role of the entrepreneur as an innovator. Schumpeter introduced the concept of "creative destruction", a process by which entrepreneurs, through their innovations, disrupt existing economic structures to replace them with new, more efficient systems. This idea that entrepreneurs are both destroyers and creators has provided a better understanding of how the capitalist economy was constantly renewing itself. For Schumpeter, the entrepreneur is the one who revolutionizes the production model, either by introducing new products, new production methods, or by exploring new markets (Schumpeter, 1942 cited in Backhaus, 2021).

From these theoretical foundations, Peter Drucker, an emblematic figure of management in the 20th century, enriched the thinking by introducing the notion of opportunity into the definition of entrepreneurship. Drucker saw the entrepreneur as someone who, faced with change, knows how to identify and exploit opportunities to innovate and stand out. For him, innovation is at the heart of entrepreneurship, but creating a business is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to be considered an entrepreneur. The very essence of entrepreneurship lies in the way of seeing and exploiting change, not as a constraint, but as a source of possibilities (Drucker, 1985 cited in Kor et al., 2021). Howard Stevenson, another major thinker, continued this reflection by emphasizing that the entrepreneur does not allow himself to be restricted by the resources he initially has. He distinguishes himself from the traditional manager by pursuing opportunities without limiting himself to the resources currently under his control. Stevenson thus introduces a more dynamic and proactive vision of entrepreneurship, where the ability to mobilize external resources and adapt quickly to changing constraints becomes an essential skill (Stevenson, 2000).

At the same time, the emergence of social entrepreneurship has brought a new dimension to this classic definition. Inspired by traditional entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship focuses on creating social value, rather than just economic value. Unlike traditional entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs set themselves the goal of solving pressing social problems, such as access to education, health, or poverty reduction. Their goal is therefore not to maximize profit, but rather to maximize positive social impact.

The example of Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank is emblematic of this new form of entrepreneurship. Founded in 1976, this bank has enabled millions of poor people, especially women, to access microcredit and create their own economic activities, thus stimulating the economic and social development of rural areas in Bangladesh (Yunus, 1999). Social entrepreneurship has gained momentum since the 1990s and continues to grow today. Peter Drucker had

anticipated this rise in power, stating that social entrepreneurship could eventually surpass traditional entrepreneurship in importance, thanks to its potential to meet the major challenges of our time (Drucker, 1999 cited in Gendron, 2018). However, despite this enthusiasm, the concept of social entrepreneurship remains difficult to define, as there are a multitude of definitions and points of view on what exactly it covers.

Contemporary scholarship on social entrepreneurship indicates the absence of a universally acknowledged definition of the term. Brouard (2007) posits that a fundamental initial step in comprehending a concept is its precise definition, which, in the context of social entrepreneurship, proves to be intricate. Indeed, the definitions diverge based on various disciplines, contextual frameworks, and the specific objectives of researchers. Some scholars perceive social entrepreneurship merely as an extension of traditional entrepreneurship, albeit with a social rather than a profit-oriented objective. Conversely, others underscore the significance of social innovation and novel methodologies for addressing global challenges (Brouard & Larivet, 2016). The evolution of social entrepreneurship has manifested in diverse forms across different geographical regions. In the United States, for instance, social entrepreneurship initially emerged as an integral component of social change initiatives during the 1970s, subsequently expanding into the management domain in the 1980s (Battilana & Lee, 2014). In contrast, Europe has predominantly concentrated on social enterprises, which are frequently organized as cooperatives or associations. This divergence in perspective not only mirrors various cultural and economic paradigms but also accentuates the multifaceted and rich nature of the concept. It is noteworthy that social entrepreneurship is not an entirely novel phenomenon, despite its language and formulation being relatively contemporary. The contributions of researchers such as Dees & Anderson (2022) have illustrated that initiatives aimed at addressing social issues through entrepreneurial strategies have existed for an extensive period, even if they were not explicitly designated as social entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, with the advent of this concept, both research and initiatives within this domain have proliferated in North America and Europe, thereby facilitating new collaborative frameworks among the public, private, and nonprofit sectors (Short et al., 2009). While entrepreneurship has traditionally been associated with business creation, it is evident that its scope has significantly broadened over time. From Say's perspective, which emphasizes resource optimization, to Schumpeter's focus on innovation, and including Drucker and Stevenson who highlight the importance of opportunities, entrepreneurship has transitioned to become a pivotal concept in the analysis of modern economic dynamism. The emergence of social entrepreneurship has introduced a new dimension, directed towards achieving social impact. Social entrepreneurs, through their innovative capacities aimed at addressing global challenges, represent a new generation of change agents, adeptly responding to the demands of an ever-evolving world.

The investigation into the origins and progression of social entrepreneurship reveals significant cases that have profoundly influenced this domain. Among these trailblazers, the Grameen Bank, established by Muhammad Yunus in 1976, is notable for its transformative effects on the lives of millions. Through the provision of financial services to marginalized communities, especially women, the Grameen Bank illustrated the capacity of microcredit to instigate social transformation. By the year 2003, it had disbursed nearly four billion dollars to 2.8 million individuals in Bangladesh, with 95% being women, thereby enabling these beneficiaries to enhance their living standards by fulfilling fundamental needs such as nutrition, education for children, and financial stability (Mair & Marti, 2006; Ndour, 2017). This initiative has not only augmented the profitability of women's enterprises but has also significantly contributed to poverty alleviation efforts (Yunus, 2011). Another pivotal entity in the development of social entrepreneurship is Ashoka, which was founded in 1980 by Bill Drayton. Ashoka is recognized as one of the pioneering organizations dedicated specifically to the financial backing of social entrepreneurs, equipping them not only with monetary support but also with a collaborative network to promote their innovative concepts. As noted by Mair & Marti (2006), this foundation has been instrumental in empowering visionary entrepreneurs who aspire to deliver sustainable solutions to social, humanitarian, and environmental challenges (Guzmán & Trujillo, 2008). To comprehend the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship, it is imperative to elucidate the foundational concepts. Brouard (2007) underscores that the articulation of a concept constitutes the initial step toward a comprehensive understanding of its essence. The escalating interest in social entrepreneurship, shared by both practitioners and scholars, is substantially warranted by its potential to stimulate social and economic advancement. Initiatives in social entrepreneurship tackle issues such as microfinance and social crises, situated within an increasingly rich and diverse academic discourse (OECD, 2001).

Social entrepreneurship draws on the principles of classical entrepreneurship, while proposing innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges (Liu et al., 2021). However, since the 1980s, a multitude of definitions have emerged, reflecting the complexity and diversity of this field of study (Chauffaut et al., 2013). The lack of a uniform terminology has led to some confusion, both in academic language and in practice (OECD/European Union, 2013). Terms such as "social entrepreneurship", "social entrepreneur", and "social entrepreneurial organization" are often used interchangeably, despite nuances that deserve to be clarified (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Brouard & Larivet, 2010; Janssen et al., 2012). This proliferation of definitions is explained by the absence of a unifying paradigm, as indicated by several authors (Janssen et al., 2012). In this perspective, it is essential to recognize that social entrepreneurship is a rapidly expanding field, arousing increased interest from researchers and practitioners (Short et al., 2009). At the theoretical level, many attempts have been made to define this concept. According to Zahra & Wright (2016), social entrepreneurship involves activities and processes aimed at discovering, defining and exploiting opportunities to generate social wealth through the creation of new businesses or the innovative management of existing organizations. Thus, social entrepreneurship enterprises seek to combine social mission and entrepreneurial action, which distinguishes them from traditional businesses that are

primarily profit-oriented (Tracey & Stott, 2017). Social entrepreneurship also represents a response to the increasing professionalization of social and solidarity economy organizations, which adopt entrepreneurial practices and formal management tools to effectively meet social needs (Dardour, 2012). In this regard, it is important to emphasize that social entrepreneurship differs from traditional entrepreneurship in its priority given to its social mission. Social enterprises aim to meet social needs, often in the form of general interest, that neither the private nor the public sector can satisfy. In contrast, classical entrepreneurship focuses primarily on the pursuit of financial profit while taking into account the needs of customers, shareholders and producers (Zahra & Wright, 2016).

Conceptually, there are divergences related to approaches to SE. While the European model is focused on social enterprise and is distinguished by a collective approach close to the perspective of social and solidarity economy (Fayolle & Matlay, 2010; Bacq & Janssen, 2011), the American vision rather highlights the innovative social entrepreneur who develops commercial activities in the service of a social mission (Dees & Anderson, 2022; Short et al., 2009).

Furthermore, SE enterprises in developing countries are often assimilated to agents of change that “*enable poor populations... to integrate into the process of economic and social development*” (Mair & Marti, 2007, p. 493).

As for researchers’ efforts, there have been many attempts to model and conceptualize SE. Some studies have been based on the community perspective (Cornwall, 1998), while others have been based on institutional theory (Dart, 2004), structuration and social capital theory (Mair & Marti, 2006), and social network theory (Peredo & McLean, 2016). However, it is important to note the small number of studies using strategic management theories, such as resource-based theory or leadership theory (Short et al., 2009).

Furthermore, on a methodological level, the majority of studies on SE have used qualitative approaches or case studies on the successes of “social entrepreneurs” (Sharir & Lerner 2006; Van Slyke & Newman 2006). This observation has prompted authors such as Short et al. (2009) to encourage the use of quantitative approaches in future research on SE. Therefore, while there is growing interest in the field, SE remains an emerging topic and a disciplinary field in search of institutional legitimacy (Short et al., 2010). It is also worth noting that despite the abundance of work on SE, empirical research on its social and economic impact remains insufficient (Pärenson, 2011; Jiao, 2011). Among the research targeting the impact of SE, there is that of Salamon et al. (2004), as well as Kerlin (2009). Although she provided the first quantitative assessment of civil society organizations through the Johns Hopkins Project, Salamon and her associates have focused primarily on nonprofit organizations, whose activities do not fully correspond to those of SE firms. Despite these fragmented initiatives (Kerlin 2009; Salamon et al., 2004), existing quantitative research does not use data that allow for a detailed empirical analysis of the drivers and impacts of SE (Lepoutre et al., 2013). Thus, there is a pressing need for research on the drivers and impacts of SE, as advocated by the literature review established by Short et al. (2009).

In delving deeper into the subject, it is essential to recognize that social entrepreneurship is based on the combination of several factors, such as passion for a social mission, corporate discipline, innovation, and determination. Large social sector institutions are often perceived as ineffective, inefficient, and unresponsive. In this context, social entrepreneurs are proving indispensable in establishing a new development model. Although the language of social entrepreneurship is relatively recent, the phenomenon itself is not. Social entrepreneurs have always existed, even if we didn’t call them that. However, the concept is gaining momentum because of its ability to span multiple sectors. In addition to innovative nonprofit businesses, social entrepreneurship can encompass social enterprises, such as for-profit community development banks, as well as hybrid organizations that combine for-profit and nonprofit elements. This new terminology helps broaden the scope of social action. Social entrepreneurs are looking for the most effective methods to serve their social missions.

While the concept of social entrepreneurship is gaining popularity, it doesn’t mean the same thing to everyone, which can be confusing. Some people associate social entrepreneurship exclusively with nonprofit organizations that launch for-profit projects. Others use it to refer to anyone who creates a nonprofit organization, while still others use it to refer to business owners who integrate social responsibility into their operations.

From this perspective, social enterprise and social entrepreneurship offer a distinct perspective on the classical notions of enterprise and entrepreneurship. Indeed, the private sector is largely dominated by for-profit companies, whose primary objective is to maximize profit and value for owners. A large part of the proponents of corporate social responsibility (CSR) do not question this primary motivation, but advocate that managers of for-profit companies also consider the interest of other stakeholders affected by their activities (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Moreover, some studies go so far as to suggest that CSR policies and practices improve the performance of for-profit companies (Bayoud et al., 2012; Hillenbrand et al., 2013; Michelon et al., 2013). In other words, CSR can be considered as a factor of profitability.

In this regard, Dees & Anderson (2022), in his article “The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship,” emphasizes that any definition of social entrepreneurship must take into account the market discipline that characterizes commercial entrepreneurs. His definition emphasizes discipline and responsibility, while integrating Say’s notions of value creation, Schumpeter’s innovation and change agents, as well as Drucker’s opportunities and Stevenson’s ingenuity. In this perspective, Dees & Anderson (2022) describes social entrepreneurs as agents of change in the social sector who:

- Adopt a mission to create and maintain social value (and not just private value),
- Continually recognize and seek new opportunities to serve this mission,
- Engage in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning,
- Act boldly without being limited by the resources at their disposal,
- Demonstrate increased responsibility to beneficiaries.

This definition can be considered idealized. Social sector leaders will embody these characteristics in varying ways and to varying degrees. The closer a person comes to meeting all of these conditions, the more they fit the model of the social entrepreneur.

2.2. Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerged in the 1950s, initiated by Bowen (1953), who began a reflection on the role of the company beyond its purely economic objectives and the legal obligations that govern it. He postulated that the economic interests of a company can be aligned with those of society in the long term, thus opening the way to a broader reflection on the integration of societal values into business practices (Bowen, 1953). These reflections have influenced modern approaches, where CSR is perceived as an essential tool for the sustainability and social legitimacy of the company (Rasche et al., 2017; Bice, 2017). Along these lines, Carroll (2021) expanded the study of CSR by identifying three essential components: the level of social responsibility, the company's commitment to socially beneficial solutions, and the underlying values that drive this approach. These elements are now confirmed by research highlighting the importance of these components in strengthening stakeholder engagement (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Carroll, 2021). In the 1980s, the work of Wartick & Cochran (1985) deepened this vision by integrating social responsibility into a formal structure of principles, processes, and policies. This framework offers a systematic approach to examining how companies integrate social responsibility into their operations and generate management policies focused on responding to social issues. Recent studies confirm that integrating CSR into strategic governance helps increase organizational resilience and strengthens stakeholder trust, particularly in times of crisis (Freeman et al., 2021; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2023). Later, Wood (2017) introduced a dynamic model describing the interactions between the principles of legitimacy, responsibility and managerial discretion, allowing the company to assess its social and environmental impacts. This approach is still supported today, particularly in the context of sustainable development initiatives (Schaltegger & Burritt, 2018; Jamali & Karam, 2018). However, CSR has continued to evolve and adapt to new social, environmental and economic expectations. Owen et al. (2000) point out that the first social audit approaches appeared in the 1970s, in response to growing expectations for transparency and accountability. In the United States, social auditing initially focused on accounting performance, while in the United Kingdom it was promoted by initiatives such as Social Audit Limited, which published in its journal *Social Audit Quarterly* a vision of auditing focused on transparency and corporate accountability to the civil community (Owen et al., 2000). These early auditing practices already highlighted the tensions between profit maximization and the trust that society places in the company, a topic of ongoing debate (Young et al., 2021; Sheehy, 2021).

However, over time, CSR has taken on a more strategic and managerial dimension. Today, it is often seen as a lever for risk management, quality assurance, and ethical responsibility, allowing companies to strengthen their competitiveness while meeting stakeholder expectations (Crane et al., 2019). Contemporary research shows that in most sectors, the social dimension of CSR sometimes tends to be relegated to the background, while environmental responsibility takes center stage due to regulatory pressures and consumer expectations (Brammer et al., 2023; Hahn et al., 2018). For example, many studies, such as those of Kolk (2016), show that the effort to meet expectations for environmental sustainability has led to higher standards of transparency and accountability. This historical divide between the social and environmental dimensions of CSR is largely explained by differences in cultural approaches between the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and other European countries (Capelle-Blancard & Petit, 2017). In the United States, corporate social responsibility is often viewed in terms of freedom of enterprise and self-regulation, while Europe has favoured an approach where the state, institutions and regulation play a more central role (Scherer & Palazzo, 2020). This opposition between a North American vision focused on corporate voluntarism and a European vision centered on public intervention highlights the diversity of practices and perceptions of CSR on a global scale (Matten & Moon, 2020; Brammer et al., 2023).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been a growing field since the 1990s, highlighting the role of business in society (Labelle et al., 2013). This concept, which affects all of the company's functions, is often defined as "*the set of obligations, legal or voluntary, that a company must assume in order to be seen as an imitable model of good citizenship in a given environment*" (Pasquero, 2005, p. 80). Indeed, CSR commits companies to adopt ethical behaviors that respect the economic, social, and environmental expectations of stakeholders. CSR is understood differently depending on the regional context. From a North American perspective, it focuses on the voluntary aspect of the company's actions and on the individual responsibility of commercial entities, the result of a trajectory spanning a hundred years. In Europe, however, the approach is more regulated by state and institutional regulations, emphasizing the importance of public intervention in the conduct of businesses (Pasquero, 2013). A third model is also emerging, promoted by the Montreal School, which proposes a CSR of global scope. This universal approach invites companies to engage in global governance issues, aiming to align local practices with global issues such as climate change and social justice (Gendron, 2013). This CSR approach, although it varies according to the context, confronts companies with difficult choices, forcing them to reconcile economic objectives with often contradictory social and environmental expectations.

Within companies that engage in CSR, practices are divided into three main concepts identified by Capron (2009). The first, of an ethical nature, is based on voluntary actions such as patronage or philanthropy, and does not necessarily aim for a direct financial return. The second is a utilitarian strategic conception that links social responsibility to the economic performance of the company. In this perspective, brand image and profitability are key indicators that justify social

commitment. Finally, the political conception of CSR advocates a deeper integration of the company into society, emphasizing its contribution to the common good through sustainable practices and shared governance (Capron, 2009). The objective for committed companies is often to achieve a balance between maximizing profit and minimizing negative impacts, taking into account society's expectations. However, none of these conceptions considers a social mission as a priority over the economic mission of the company. In other words, even if CSR aims to integrate social concerns into business activities, the search for profit remains the company's main objective, and CSR becomes only a means of moderating potential harmful impacts. This dynamic differentiates CSR from social entrepreneurship, which places the social mission at the heart of its approach. Social entrepreneurship is indeed motivated by a desire to create a positive social impact; profit is seen as a means to support the mission rather than an end in itself (Fontan, 2008; Brouard et al., 2010; Hervieux, 2013). The notion of CSR is closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which encourage companies to promote responsible practices in terms of environmental protection, social equity, and sustainable economic growth. Recent studies have demonstrated that engagement in CSR can strengthen business resilience, particularly in emerging economies, where environmental and social concerns are becoming increasingly pressing (Sharma et al., 2020; Christofi et al., 2021). Thus, the company, whether established in America, Europe or elsewhere, must take into account these imperatives of sustainable development to remain competitive and maintain the confidence of consumers and investors (Capelle-Blancard & Petit, 2019). However, CSR practices continue to pose challenges, as they often involve a complex trade-off between economic objectives and social responsibilities. This tension is particularly visible in multinational companies, which face different requirements depending on the legal and cultural frameworks of the countries where they operate (Matten & Moon, 2020). In addition, the rise of investors concerned about environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues is increasing this pressure, prompting companies to review their strategies to meet these new expectations (Eccles et al., 2020).

Furthermore, integrating CSR into corporate culture remains a challenge, as it requires a paradigm shift where the values of responsibility and sustainability become priorities at all levels of the organization. This cultural transformation takes time, and it requires strong commitment from leaders and continuous involvement of employees. Research shows that companies that succeed in establishing a culture of CSR often achieve better long-term results, whether in terms of profitability, reputation, or talent retention (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Kim & Thapa, 2018).

In conclusion, CSR represents an essential approach to address contemporary social and environmental challenges. Although it is sometimes perceived as a marketing or strategic tool, it is increasingly important in the global business landscape. Companies, faced with increasingly high expectations from consumers and investors, must assume an active role in society. The tension between the pursuit of profit and social responsibility remains palpable, however, and the company must find a balance that satisfies its various stakeholders. Conversely, social entrepreneurship is distinguished by its priority social mission and the use of profit as a means to achieve social welfare objectives, demonstrating that sustainability can be at the heart of alternative economic models.

Table 1: social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility

	Social entrepreneurship	Corporate social responsibility
Features	Business response to a social problem.	Taking into account the impacts of the company's activities on society.
Social component	Priority social mission.	Part of the CSR approach.
Logics	Civic centered on the collective good, social conscience, democracy and the renunciation of individualism.	Business focused on competition, self-interest and opportunism.
Approaches	Market: self-financing by market resources. Social innovation: systemic nature of innovation and scale of social impact. Democratic: social specificity based on management Democratic.	Ethics: philanthropy and patronage. Utilitarian: link between social performance and economic performance. Sustainability: contribution to the common good.

Source: Four et al. (2016)

In recent decades, however, new perspectives have emerged, seeking to overcome this opposition between entrepreneurial voluntarism and institutional regulation. The Montreal School, for example, advocates for a universal social responsibility where companies are invited to participate in the challenges of global governance by integrating common principles and collaborating with other stakeholders to address global issues (Gendron, 2013; Bice et al., 2020). This vision represents a significant evolution towards a more inclusive CSR connected to global challenges, particularly in terms of sustainability (Kolk, 2016; Gond & Igalens, 2018). Although companies can adopt responsible behaviors and generate positive effects for society, the economic purpose remains at the heart of their activity. The primary mission of maximizing profit remains, even if companies increasingly recognize the need to take into account the impacts of their activities on the environment and society (McWilliams & Siegel, 2021). Social entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is distinguished by its focus on the social mission, using profits to strengthen its social impact. Although sharing some values with CSR, social entrepreneurship has collective well-being as its main objective (Hervieux et al., 2017).

Indeed, CSR is a constantly evolving field, influenced by diverse cultural perspectives and international dynamics. This

historical journey, from Bowen's early reflections to modern approaches integrating global governance principles, shows that CSR is not just a series of practices but a concept in motion, reflecting society's changing expectations of businesses (Wood, 2017; Gond et al., 2018). The future of CSR could look towards more universal accountability, allowing companies to assume a more integrated role in sustainable development and solving global challenges (Young et al., 2021; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2023).

3. Research Methodology

This research, conducted in partnership with the National Agency for Employment and Independent Work (NAEIW), aims to explore the dynamics of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia. NAEIW, a major player in supporting entrepreneurs, offers various training, mentoring and networking services to those with social impact projects. This type of research is part of the trend of partnership research, aimed at linking "the world of thought and that of action" (Bussi eres & Fontan, 2011), by reducing the gap between "science and society" through an approach that promotes permeability between these two spheres, while recognizing the legitimacy of other sectors of society to produce scientific knowledge (Bussi eres & Fontan, 2011). This collaboration, extended over several months with NAEIW, aimed to clarify the specific needs of Tunisian social entrepreneurs, their perception of their own status and their vision of the role of NAEIW in their journey. With this in mind, NAEIW took an inclusive stance, selecting resident social entrepreneurs based on values shared with the agency. This partnership aimed to understand the expectations of this community and to observe the diverse conceptions of social entrepreneurship in a rapidly changing Tunisian context, in a country where CSR and corporate social engagement have become crucial issues. In order to meet NAEIW's needs and ensure knowledge transfer, a monitoring committee bringing together representatives from NAEIW and members of the research team was set up. This committee made it possible to adapt the research questions and data collection tools, thus ensuring alignment between the research objectives and the needs of the partner (Buunk et al., 2016).

Methodologically, the research is based on a mixed approach, allowing different collection and analysis methods to be combined to strengthen the validity of the results (Corbi ere & Larivi ere, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Three main data collection techniques were chosen: (1) in situ observations conducted by a researcher in residence at NAEIW; (2) semi-directed interviews conducted with NAEIW staff and social entrepreneurs; and (3) a questionnaire distributed to all social entrepreneurs present. This methodological combination promotes triangulation that allows perspectives to be combined and strengthens the robustness of the data collected (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015).

The field observations, carried out over a period of three months with an active presence of 30 days within NAEIW, provided an in-depth overview of the context. They made it possible to document the interactions between social entrepreneurs and staff, the layout of the premises as well as the atmosphere and relational dynamics that characterize the agency's daily life. In addition, sixteen semi-directed interviews were conducted, including three with NAEIW staff members and thirteen with social entrepreneurs. Finally, a sociodemographic questionnaire was sent to 60 active residents, recording a response rate of 75%, representing a significant participation.

Data analyses were conducted from two perspectives. The questionnaire data were subject to descriptive quantitative processing to identify the sociodemographic characteristics of this population of social entrepreneurs. On the other hand, the interviews and observations were analyzed qualitatively via NVivo software, using a thematic approach to bring out representations and perceptions of social entrepreneurship (Paill e & Mucchielli, 2016). This qualitative analysis highlighted recurring themes, including the need for increased support, the perception of NAEIW as a pillar of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia, as well as the values and ambitions shared by social entrepreneurs.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Profile of entrepreneurs

The questionnaire highlighted several socio-economic characteristics specific to social entrepreneurs. These key elements, which reveal important aspects of their profile, are summarized in the table below for a better understanding of the particularities of this category of entrepreneurs.

Table 2: Sample characteristics

Average age	37 years			
Place of birth	40% Tunis	35% Sfax		25% other
Gender	60% man		40% woman	
Schooling	33, 33% university	44,44% secondary	11,11% vocational training	20% others

Social entrepreneurs share similar trajectories, marked by a search for meaning and dissatisfaction with their previous professional experiences. Many of them cite an incompatibility between their values and those of their past jobs, thus justifying their decision to leave salaried employment to embark on projects with a social or environmental vocation. These paths reveal a deep desire to contribute to change and to propose alternatives to conventional economic models. Many of these entrepreneurs broadened their perspective through stays abroad where they rubbed shoulders with

vulnerable or marginalized communities. These experiences were often decisive in their commitment, confronting them directly with the inequalities and challenges faced by certain populations. Contact with local actors and organizations working to alleviate these difficulties raised awareness that encouraged them to initiate their own projects. According to a study by Smith et al. (2018), these interactions expose individuals to diverse perspectives, reinforcing their desire to be actively involved in social change. However, despite this community of values, conceptions of social entrepreneurship vary among the entrepreneurs interviewed. The diversity of approaches and strategies used highlights the complexity of this phenomenon and reveals different profiles of social entrepreneurs. According to Mason & Wicks (2019), social entrepreneurship is often interpreted and applied in a personalized manner, based on the individual backgrounds and sensitivities specific to each entrepreneur. This variety of perceptions has made it possible to distinguish four typical profiles of social entrepreneurs:

The bold citizen: is characterized by his civic engagement and his desire to act in the service of the common good. This type of entrepreneur is motivated by an ideal of social justice and by the defense of the rights of vulnerable populations. His action is based on principles of equity and respect for human rights, seeking to positively influence public policies or to compensate for their failures. For example, a study by Renko (2020) shows that this type of entrepreneur favours local initiatives, geared towards social inclusion and reducing inequalities. The bold citizen does not simply identify social problems; he engages directly with the communities concerned and mobilises his network to bring about lasting change.

The Business catalyst: for his part, approaches social entrepreneurship with a strategic approach that integrates concepts from the traditional business world. His goal is to reconcile economic performance and social impact, by setting up profitable and self-sufficient business models. Inspired by the impact investing model, this profile seeks to attract investors to finance projects with added social value. As Hackett & Dilts (2019) point out, this type of entrepreneur sees social entrepreneurship as a way to reinvent capitalism, by integrating sustainability and social responsibility objectives. Their approach aims to maximize impact by creating scalable and reproducible solutions that can reach a wide audience.

The project leader: is driven by a passion for a specific cause and a desire to bring an innovative idea to life. Their commitment is based above all on personal motivations and a clear vision of the changes they wish to achieve. Unlike the business catalyst, this profile is less concerned with economic profitability and more focused on the immediate impact of their project. An article by Stevenson & Jarillo (2021) describes this type of entrepreneur as a "change artisan", whose initiatives are often part of associative or community structures, allowing flexibility and proximity to the field. Their approach is deeply marked by their emotional involvement, which can be a strength but also a challenge in terms of the sustainability and sustainability of projects.

The academic in action: represents a profile of social entrepreneur who combines theory and practice. Often from academia or research, this entrepreneur applies scientific knowledge to develop innovative solutions to social problems. He considers social entrepreneurship as a testing ground, where theoretical ideas can be applied and tested. According to Thompson et al. (2023), this profile is essential for the development of evidence-based practices, contributing to the continuous improvement of social intervention strategies. The academic in action favors a methodical approach and relies on data to evaluate the effectiveness of his initiatives, thus seeking to provide sustainable and scientifically validated solutions.

In short, these four profiles illustrate the diversity of approaches within social entrepreneurship and demonstrate that, despite common values, each entrepreneur shapes his or her path according to his or her experiences, aspirations, and skills. As Dees & Anderson (2022) point out, social entrepreneurship is a rapidly expanding field, in which personal motivations and professional skills come together to address contemporary issues. These profiles are not strictly distinct; an entrepreneur can fall into several categories, depending on the stages of his or her journey and the challenges encountered. This variety of profiles clearly shows that social entrepreneurship is a multidimensional discipline, evolving at the crossroads of social responsibility, innovation and the quest for sustainable impact.

Coming from varied professional backgrounds, these social entrepreneur profiles reveal not only their specific skills, but also their needs in terms of support, guidance and skills development. By exploring these skills, two distinct axes of social entrepreneurship emerge: that of the social mission and that of economic activities.

Some entrepreneurs, such as the business catalyst, rely on skills closely linked to the world of business and traditional entrepreneurship, integrating economic strategies to maximize their social impact. Based on studies such as that of Wry & Zhao (2018), it is clear that these profiles aim to converge financial performance and social mission, which allows them to attract resources to strengthen the viability of their initiatives.

On the other hand, the other profiles, notably the bold citizen and the project leader, focus more on the social and humanitarian aspects of their missions, often possessing skills focused on community work and the management of projects oriented towards social well-being. According to Santos & Eisenhardt (2018), these entrepreneurs are generally motivated by altruistic values and have expertise in managing community projects and engaging with vulnerable populations.

Identifying these skills and needs highlights the need for personalized support for each type of social entrepreneur. Whether through mentoring programs focused on management skills or training in community mobilization, it is crucial to provide them with resources adapted to their specific objectives (Dacin et al., 2019). A detailed understanding of these profiles thus makes it possible to better direct support mechanisms, ensuring a balanced development of both their social and economic capacities.

4.2. The various perspectives of social entrepreneurship

The interviews provided a better understanding of the link between skills and conceptions of social entrepreneurship, by asking participants about their vision of this type of commitment. It appears that the business catalyst is more able to balance economic requirements and the social mission, while the academician in action experiences more difficulty in the face of this tension.

Furthermore, two other profiles, the bold citizen and the project leader, share a conception close to social entrepreneurship: for them, the social mission takes precedence over economic objectives. This priority given to social impact is an essential criterion of their entrepreneurial approach, without which social commitment would lose its legitimacy, making it difficult to identify as a social entrepreneur. According to Jones & Ratten (2019), this orientation reinforces the coherence between the values of entrepreneurs and their actions.

These profiles reveal a conception of social entrepreneurship that establishes a clear hierarchy between ends and means. By placing the social mission at the forefront, project leaders, in particular, use economic activities as tools to achieve their altruistic goals, according to the perspective of Wry & Zhao (2018), where economic means are only a support to achieve a broader goal of social transformation.

"A social entrepreneur is above all a person driven by an idea that aims to improve the quality or lifestyle of individuals. His goal is clear: to create a positive social impact. Unlike traditional entrepreneurs, he does not primarily seek to maximize financial gains, but to generate a benefit for the community." (Entrepreneur 23)

The profile of the engaged citizen highlights a vision of social entrepreneurship that almost exclusively privileges the social mission, relegating the economic question to the background, or even completely dismissing it. For this type of entrepreneur, commitment is based on a deep awareness of human needs, both at the individual and collective levels. Thus, the social mission becomes the foundation of the business, surpassing any consideration of profit. As one participant points out:

"A social entrepreneur is someone who is aware of both the needs of his humanity and of humanity in general." (Entrepreneur 12)

This perspective reflects an ideal centered on societal impact, where community well-being is the cornerstone of entrepreneurial commitment. Conversely, the business catalyst perceives social entrepreneurship from an angle that naturally integrates economic aspects, considering them compatible with social objectives. For this profile, social entrepreneurship is close to corporate social responsibility, where growth and profitability are not in contradiction with the social mission, but contribute to its sustainability. This type of entrepreneur believes that economic benefits and social impact can coexist harmoniously. As another participant states:

"The social entrepreneur will make a difference in society, while doing so in a model that is economically viable, in which he can live and even enrich himself." (Entrepreneur 15).

For him, financial success and social contribution are not opposing objectives, but rather complementary, contributing together to a sustainable and socially beneficial business. He also states that the movement around social entrepreneurship should, one day, contribute to transforming traditional businesses and thus eliminating the boundary between businesses claiming to be CSR and those identifying more with social entrepreneurship, both having integrated the notion of social impact into their activities:

"Once relegated to a small department with a modest budget, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) now extends well beyond its initial boundaries. It now permeates many aspects of the organization, from communication to the aspirations and daily reflexes of employees, particularly in large companies. Similarly, the notion of impact, still relatively new in the economic world, is gradually becoming integrated into employees' thinking. It is likely that, in a few years, this question will no longer be explicitly asked, because it will naturally become part of the corporate culture." (Entrepreneur 40)

A final vision of social entrepreneurship, put forward by the academic in action, presents this approach as a strategic adaptation of tools and mechanisms from the business world, applied with the intention of transforming social structures. This conception aims to reorient power relations and reshape established hierarchies, using the economy as a lever for social change. In this sense, social entrepreneurship becomes a means of instrumentalizing economic dynamics to serve objectives of social justice and equity (Tracey & Stott, 2017):

"It is therefore a question of diverting and readapting the tools, mechanisms and methods of the business and finance domain to respond to the issues often neglected in these environments. The idea is to reinvest the economy by integrating it into social relations and politics, so that it responds to the priorities defined by citizens. This model seeks to reverse the dominant hierarchy, where social relations are subordinate to the economy, by redefining priorities in the service of the common good." (Entrepreneur 2)

The relationship between academia and the business world is not without tensions for the committed academic. Indeed, the many definitions of social entrepreneurship raise concerns, with academics fearing that this vagueness will allow the instrumentalization of the social to the benefit of the economy, and not the other way around. Thus, one participant points out that certain funds dedicated to impact investments, which social entrepreneurs sometimes use, risk justifying practices whose social repercussions can be particularly harmful (Barin Cruz & Alves, 2015). Furthermore, this ambiguity can lead to abuses where economic motivations take precedence over social objectives, thus transforming projects into instruments of economic valorization rather than public interest initiatives. One participant thus points out the risk that certain investment funds, supposedly dedicated to social impact, are used to legitimize practices with negative social consequences (Barin Cruz, 2015; Defourny & Nyssens, 2017).

"These are funds for the construction of roads, infrastructure, and other similar projects. This type of project is often considered

social, because the construction of a road, for example, can have a significant impact on the development of a country. However, some also argue that oil installations could be seen as social initiatives, because of the jobs they generate and the income they bring to the country." (Entrepreneur 9)

The committed academic also questions the mission of the social enterprise, wondering whether it is legitimate for it to make profits or whether it should instead focus exclusively on maximizing its social impacts.

"There are two distinct approaches. The first concerns a person wishing to lead a project or initiative with a social impact, without necessarily aiming for a commercial or profit-making structure. The second approach is more oriented towards the entrepreneurial model, where the company generates profits while being attentive to the social and environmental impacts of its activities." (Entrepreneur 32)

4.3. Social entrepreneurship and its complex quest for legitimacy

The confusion surrounding the very definition of social entrepreneurship and the perceptions that different actors have of it complicates the quest for legitimacy for social entrepreneurs. Indeed, regardless of the definition of social entrepreneurship with which the study participants identify, recognition and legitimacy remain major challenges. Whether in the context of their relations with the business world, cooperatives, associations and NGOs, or with other actors in social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs believe that one of their main challenges is to promote their business project and justify its added value to external actors. One participant points out that the label of social entrepreneur is problematic in itself, because it lacks visibility, making the simple task of introducing oneself or creating a professional card difficult (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017).

"I think the term 'social entrepreneur' lacks clarity and impact. When I registered with the Chamber of Commerce, I had to choose a catchy title. If I simply introduce myself as a social entrepreneur, it doesn't necessarily spark people's interest, and they don't bother to learn more. That's why I opted for the title of social responsibility consultant." (Entrepreneur 36)

Relationships with the business sector are not always easy, because it is essential that this environment understands the mission and objectives of social enterprises, which are different from traditional businesses. As one participant expressed it:

"When we approached the first companies, they looked at us without understanding who we were, how we operated, or what our mission was." (Entrepreneur 45)

Thus, for the social entrepreneur, it is crucial to learn to value oneself and legitimize one's project. Another participant stressed the importance of credibility, notoriety and reliability:

"These aspects are essential for us. In addition, the business sector sometimes has difficulty understanding how a company can combine a social mission with financial objectives." (Entrepreneur 5)

As one participant pointed out:

"There is this idea that, if you are a social entrepreneur, it means that you cannot make money, that you dedicate your life to a cause. This is a perception that persists, unfortunately, in more traditional environments." (Entrepreneur 12)

The social entrepreneur must learn the codes of the traditional business environment, particularly those related to marketing and sales, as one participant states:

"It's a whole world when you're not used to it, it's really a whole world. And then I understand that you have to sell yourself, you have to learn to pitch." (Entrepreneur 28)

Paradoxically, it often seems necessary to have a first contract, activities to have a credible business card, which then allows you to sell yourself more easily:

"In fact, the business service, so that hasn't been launched yet since we're going to have to have a few activities to be a little recognized and [then] sell this type of service." (Entrepreneur 10)

Finally, it is necessary to raise awareness among business stakeholders about the specific nature of CSR, CSR which is often at the heart of the services offered by social entrepreneurs to traditional businesses:

"I am in an environment where there are preconceived ideas about social responsibility. We think a lot about socially responsible philanthropy or investing in the community, it will be the company that will give a big check to a foundation for example. That's it, there are a lot of companies that think that social responsibility." (Entrepreneur 14)

Despite the considerable efforts made to promote themselves, establish contacts and especially obtain financing from the business sector, several participants believe that these relationships remain fragile and uncertain:

"There are elements that are constantly changing; nothing is ever acquired. A budget dedicated to marketing or social responsibility can always be reduced for various reasons beyond our control." (Entrepreneur 33)

The quest for legitimacy in the business sector is also reflected in the relationships that social entrepreneurs try to establish with actors aligned with their social mission, whether they come from the cooperative, associative or non-profit sector. These entrepreneurs are sometimes perceived by these actors as capitalists, a label that carries a negative connotation and can harm their legitimacy. As one participant mentioned:

"When we approached NGOs, we were told: what? You're more of a capitalist." (Entrepreneur 19)

Finally, some see social enterprises as potential competitors, which contributes to a certain confusion around their mission.

"When my colleague met with associations and institutions, she noted a certain amount of withdrawal, even a form of mistrust towards our organisation. Although we tried to explain our approach and show that we are taking a different approach, there

remains a lack of trust. These associations and institutions have not made it easy to access information, which can be explained by their concern to protect the vulnerable people they support." (Entrepreneur 26)

Many of the entrepreneurs interviewed argue that social entrepreneurship, because of its positioning at the interface of these different actors, is able to establish connections between these often-compartmentalized worlds. However, this requires a sustained effort over the long term (Smith, 2020).

"Our strength today lies in our neutrality and independence, which allows us to collaborate with a variety of stakeholders, whether corporates, NGOs, institutions or the research community. We have acquired recognition and credibility with all these stakeholders, even those who did not know each other or who did not collaborate before. I think that, during our early years, we played a key role in breaking down the barriers between the two worlds, namely that of businesses and that of NGOs, which now interact much more frequently." (Entrepreneur 39)

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Finally, this text attempts to shed light on social entrepreneurship (SE) and its links with corporate social responsibility (CSR), but it also raises new questions, thus proposing potential avenues of research. As Ricoeur points out, "we arrive (...) in the middle of a conversation that has already begun and in which we are trying to orient ourselves so that we can in turn make our contribution" (Ricoeur, 1986: 48). By questioning the actors in this field, a problem of definition emerges, just as present in theoretical writings as in the perceptions of social entrepreneurs concerning their practices and projects. This uncertainty around the definition raises the question of inclusion and exclusion for the organizations that support this form of entrepreneurship: who is really the social entrepreneur that we wish to support and finance? Is it the one who innovates, as several researchers mention (Peredo & McLean, 2016), the one whose economic activities are subordinated to a social mission, or the one whose business is managed collectively (Doherty et al., 2016)? These tensions are not insignificant. By mobilizing the model of economies of magnitude by Boltanski and Thévenot (1991), it becomes possible to highlight the logic and principles on which these actors rely. Within this study, three of the four profiles of social entrepreneurs identified (the bold citizen, the project leader and the academic in action) seem to rely on civic legitimacy, based on the collective good and democracy, while the fourth profile, the business catalyst, is based rather on commercial legitimacy, anchored in competition and opportunism. Although this model may seem hermetic at first glance, it appears, in practice and in the context of social entrepreneurship, that these logics intersect, thus causing tensions. Indeed, even if the social entrepreneurs interviewed aspire to be part of a specific logic, they cannot escape the demands of the other logic, omnipresent and structuring.

This reflection echoes the analyses of Boltanski and Thévenot, who reject a purely economic or sociological interpretation of a phenomenon. Social entrepreneurship constitutes, in many ways, a privileged terrain to study this tension and this double reading. Nevertheless, for the social entrepreneur, the dilemma remains: some fear being recuperated by the capitalist economy if they comply with the profitability demands of the financial sector, while others fear that their social mission will be subordinated to economic imperatives, particularly academics in action. At the same time, others fear being associated with the cooperative environment and the prejudice that they are not efficient and profitable economic actors. How can these positions be reconciled, and are they, consequently, reconcilable? This perilous exercise seems, for the social entrepreneur, to be at the heart of his quest for legitimacy, a legitimacy that, moreover, takes multiple forms.

The phenomena of CSR and social entrepreneurship are part of a broader dynamic of transformation of various social actors, which will continue to evolve and thus contribute to the redefinition of the boundaries between actors with varied mandates and missions (Genard, 2003). This dynamic, both in theory and in practice, nevertheless raises many questions in terms of both social entrepreneurship and CSR. In the field of social entrepreneurship, these questions seem to crystallize, both among the social entrepreneurs we met and among the actors of the social economy in Quebec, around the legal form and financing issues.

These concerns raise fundamental questions about the sustainability and impact of social entrepreneurship models. The need to explore this phenomenon in more depth is indisputable, because the debate sparked by these questions is far from over. Indeed, social entrepreneurship, which merges social and economic dimensions, invites a reconsideration of the way in which businesses are defined and evaluated. This implies not only a redefinition of the criteria for success beyond financial profitability, but also a better understanding of the social and environmental impacts of businesses.

In exploring these dynamics, it becomes crucial to consider the diversity of social entrepreneurship models. These models are not limited to a simple dichotomy between profit and nonprofit. Rather, they encompass a multitude of approaches, ranging from hybrid social enterprises to for-profit initiatives that prioritize social missions. Such diversity raises the question of how different actors can collaborate effectively while preserving their integrity and mission.

Recent research highlights the need for a more systemic approach to assess the effects of social entrepreneurship on economic and social development. Based on empirical case studies, authors such as Rangan & Zbox (2019) emphasize that the success of social entrepreneurship lies in its ability to adapt to local contexts while maintaining a global vision. This adaptation requires a deep understanding of the specific issues faced by communities, as well as flexibility in business models to meet the changing needs of these communities.

In addition, financing challenges remain a major obstacle for many social enterprises. Traditional financing models do

not always meet the specificities of these organizations, which calls for innovation in financing mechanisms. Finding adequate financing becomes a central concern for social entrepreneurs, who must navigate between different sources of financing, whether public or private. The question then arises of how to create financing structures that support not only the economic viability of social enterprises, but also their social mission.

Finally, it is worth considering how public policies can foster an enabling environment for social entrepreneurship. Legislative and regulatory initiatives can play a key role in recognizing and supporting this emerging sector. Promoting social entrepreneurship in public policies could not only stimulate social innovation, but also strengthen the capacities of communities to empower themselves and develop sustainably.

Overall, it is imperative to continue exploring the nuances of social entrepreneurship and CSR, taking into account the changing dynamics and complex issues surrounding them. This evolving field requires careful attention to understand how these two phenomena can enrich each other and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicting interests

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Data Availability statement

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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