City University of Hong Kong

Department of Public Policy

Research Student Seminar

Anti-Oppression Practices in Social Enterprises

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by

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<td>Time:</td>
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<td>Venue:</td>
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Social enterprise (SE) is an organizational innovation that hybridizes social welfare and commercial logics to address complex social problems, among others to serve oppressed people (e.g., disabled, minority, deviant youths, etc.) to attain equality and justice. Despite a decade of progress in SE research (Doherty et al., 2014), we still know little about social value creation (Santos, 2012); that is the practices and strategies that SE uses to improve the lives of oppressed individuals the society.

In recent years, SE has gained traction among the community of social workers (SW) worldwide (Gray, Healy & Crofts, 2003). Due to a reduction in funding for social services, strict accountability requirements and growing demands for social service provision, many social workers were driven to embrace SE models and practices (Germak & Singh, 2009) as a way of improving the quality and efficiency of social service provision (Berzin, 2012). Likewise, there are SW practices, values, and theories that could enhance our understanding of social value creation in SE, but to date, little research has cross-fertilized the SE and SW to deepen our understanding of social value creation.

In this paper, we argue that SE scholars can learn from social workers and SW practices to advance SE theory and practices and to create value for the oppressed population. The conceptual fusion of SE and SW is logical because both seek to address societal problems and to improve the living conditions of oppressed individuals (Crofts & Gray, 2001). This presents an opportunity to integrate the two research streams to advance SE scholarship.

Drawing upon the social work literature, particularly the anti-oppressive practices (AOPs) framework, this paper aims to examine how SE creates social value for the oppressed population. Oppression is a multi-level phenomenon that has gained attention in the SW literature; and it focuses on ‘client-worker’ relationships, among others. AOP as a part of social work practice addresses social divisions and structural inequalities with a purpose to promote equity, transformation and social justice and to eliminate the multiple manifestations of oppression (Barnoff & Coleman, 2007; Strier & Binyamin, 2010). But we know little about AOP as it is practiced in SE.

To investigate the different strategies used by SEs to eliminate oppression, we asked the following question: “How do social enterprises create equality for oppressed individuals? How do they employ anti-oppressive practices?” By investigating the client-SE relationship, a critical component in AOPs framework, the paper examines the ways that SEs develop creative strategies and build alliances with oppressed clients based on equality and mutual respect, and thus contributes to our understanding of emancipation and liberation of the clients. We employed a grounded theory approach and inductively code and abstract narrative data collected via in-depth interviews and publicly secondary data of 10 social enterprises and their clients using the Gioia’s methodology (Gioia et al. 2012; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and content analysis. This study contributes to the SE theory by extending and enriching SE using the AOP lens and offer practical and policy implications for SE as a mechanism to deal with oppression.
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*All are welcome!*