

OVERALL PRESENTATION OF THE  
“INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MODELS”  
(ICSEM) PROJECT

A broad research project funded by the Belgian Science Policy Office  
to be extended to a large international research community  
in partnership with the EMES International Research Network



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## I. INTRODUCTION: FROM "IAP-SOCENT" TO THE "ICSEM" PROJECT

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### 1. The "IAP-SOCENT"

Funding "*Interuniversity Attraction Poles*" (IAP) has been the major type of support provided by the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO) for the last 25 years. Proposals for IAP are submitted every five years by networks formed by several research teams from various Belgian universities across all disciplines to foster interuniversity and interdisciplinary collaboration at both national and international levels.

In 2012, a IAP proposal entitled "*If not for Profit, for What? And How?*" was submitted by four Belgian universities and selected to be funded from October 2012 through September 2017. It is formed by:

- the "Centre d'Economie Sociale" (**CES**, University of Liege), as a coordinating centre;
- the "Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherche Travail, Etat et Société" (**CIRTES**, Catholic University of Louvain);
- the "Centre Européen de Recherche en Microfinance" (**CERMi**, Université Libre de Bruxelles);
- the "Department of Applied Economics" (**APEC**, Vrije Universiteit Brussel).

Around **45 faculty members and researchers** in economics, management, sociology and psychology from Belgian Universities and around 10 international research partners are involved in this IAP (although only some of them are directly financed by the IAP). They focus on one overall objective, which is defined in the subtitle of the research program, i.e. "**Building interdisciplinary and integrated knowledge on social entrepreneurship and social enterprise**" – a subtitle from which the acronym of the network, namely "**IAP-SOCENT**", is derived. This whole research program covers various thematic lines, among which a major project of social enterprise models comparative analysis: the ICSEM project.

### 2. The "ICSEM" Project

Although it is part of the IAP-SOCENT research program, the **International Comparative Social Enterprise Models (ICSEM) Project** can be considered as a major research project on its own.

The main specific feature of the ICSEM Project is its geographic coverage: it aims to compare social enterprise models and their respective institutionalisation processes *across the world*. Therefore it will rely on the **participation of a large number of researchers from all regions**, who will contribute country-specific or field-specific analysis of social enterprise models. Of course, contributions comparing social enterprise models in two or more countries will be welcome as well.

The ICSEM Project is jointly coordinated by **Jacques Defourny** (CES, HEC-University of Liege) and **Marthe Nyssens** (CIRTES, Catholic University of Louvain). Other coordinators will be associated to them for some regions, fields or sub-themes.

### 3. Involvement of international partners

**Participation of interested researchers from all countries is welcome** and should be discussed on a case-by-case basis with the coordinators of the ICSEM project.

As a means to sustain such participation, the project will rely mainly on participants' own efforts to secure financial support, if needed with the coordinators' support to submit applications to local, national or international funding institutions. As such, the ICSEM budget will only provide financial support, when necessary, to allow participants to take part in major meetings of the ICSEM Project. In addition, it will provide small allowances to some PhD students or post-doctoral researchers willing to link their doctoral or post-doctoral work to the ICSEM Project and to make a contribution during or after their PhD research.

**Becoming a research partner of the ICSEM Project** does not necessarily mean covering all social enterprise models in a country. A partner may focus on one or several geographical parts of the country or on some specific fields of activity. In such cases, collaboration among partners of a same country or at least discussions to make contributions as complementary as possible to each other will be encouraged.

Experienced or young researchers as well as PhD students who are interested in taking part in the ICSEM Project should proceed as explained in Section IV.

On the basis of personal contacts and presentations of preliminary versions of the ICSEM Project to small audiences, by April 2013, researchers from more than 25 countries across the world had already expressed their willingness to participate.

**The official kick-off meeting of the ICSEM Project took place on July 5, 2013 at the University of Liege**, right after the 4<sup>th</sup> EMES International Research Conference on Social Enterprise (July 1-4, 2013). It gathered close to 100 persons from 40 countries.

The whole ICSEM Project was presented in details by the Scientific Coordinators and all participants were requested to confirm their commitment to contribute. In addition, during the months following the meeting, information about the Project was spread by participants who attracted new scholars interested in the Project.

By June 2014, **over 200 researchers from close to 50 countries** across all world regions had confirmed their willingness to be involved as **ICSEM Project's Partners** and committed to carry out the outlined research program in their own country or in one or two other countries according to their expertise.

It already appears clearly the ICSEM Project will be the largest research project even undertaken on social enterprise and social entrepreneurship. This of course entails high expectations from all observers and all categories of stakeholders.

## II. BACKGROUND: THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

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### 1. Introduction

Despite commonplace depictions, our market economies are made of a much broader organizational diversity than the sole “for-profit” business model. Economic activities are undertaken by a broad range of organizations, which each have specific assets in the production of certain types of goods (Hansmann 1996).

In the context of such diversity, social enterprise is increasingly mentioned and experienced as a promising tool to deal with some of the current economic, social and environmental challenges. Social entrepreneurship has received growing attention from practitioners, academics and governments, who view it as a possible answer to a series of challenges and aspirations of our age: the transformation of social protection and solidarity systems, the need for more ethics and transparency in the economic system, the aspiration for sense and motivation on the workplace, etc.

Even if the term “social enterprise” does not have exactly the same meaning for the different schools of thought (see below), we delineate our field of analysis as made of organizations that combine an entrepreneurial dynamics to provide services or goods with the primacy of their social aims.

Social enterprise and social entrepreneurship can be observed in various types of organizations (mainly cooperatives, NGOs and non-profit organizations) and in various economic sectors (health care, recycling, renewable energies, fair trade, microfinance, personal services, integration of low-skilled workers, etc.). While observing that most of these organizations actually belong to what has been called the “third sector” (neither for-profit, nor state), recent works should be kept in mind that underline the blurring frontiers between sectors and the existence of opportunities for social entrepreneurship within the private for-profit sector and the public sphere as well (Austin 2006, Dacin *et al.* 2010; Nicholls 2010).

In fact, social enterprises have existed since well before the mid-1990s, when the term began to be increasingly used in both Western Europe and the United States. Indeed, the third sector in which most of them are found, be it called the non-profit sector, the voluntary sector or the social economy (Defourny & Monzón Campos 1992; Evers & Laville 2004) has long witnessed entrepreneurial dynamics which resulted in innovative solutions for providing services or goods to persons or communities whose needs were neither met by private companies nor by public providers (Defourny 2001). However, for reasons that vary according to specificities of national or regional contexts, the concept of social enterprise is now gaining a fast growing interest across the world, along with two closely related terms, namely “social entrepreneur” and “social entrepreneurship” (Mair & Marti 2006; Nicholls 2010; Bacq & Janssen, 2011).

## 2. Concepts and schools of thought

Academic research first focused on “non-profit” organizations, seeking to understand their role and their *raison d’être* within market economies (Weisbrod 1975, Gidron *et al.* 1992, Hansmann 1980 and 1996, Salamon 1987). From the end of the 1990s, both in Europe and in the United States, partly due to the growing professionalization of non-profit organizations and their growing use of market resources (Dart 2004), there has been a gradual shift towards the broader notions of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship (Dees 1998 and 2001, Nicholls 2006, Fayolle & Matlay 2010).

Diverse concepts<sup>1</sup> have been used since the early 1980s to describe entrepreneurial behaviours with social aims, mainly—although not exclusively—within the non-profit sector. To classify the different conceptions of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship, Defourny and Nyssens (2010) rely on Dees and Anderson (2006) and somehow reinterpret their typology as follows.

The first school of thought set the grounds for conceptions of social enterprise mainly defined by earned-income strategies (Weisbrod 1998). The bulk of its publications is based on non-profits’ interest to become more commercial in order to diversify their funding base in support of their social mission. In such a perspective, it is straightforward to name that first school the “earned income” school of thought. Within the latter, however, Defourny and Nyssens (2010) suggest a distinction between an earlier version, focusing on non-profits, that they call the “commercial non-profit approach”, on the one hand, and a broader version, embracing all forms of business initiatives, that may be named the “mission-driven business approach”, on the other hand. This latter approach also refers to the field of social purpose venture as encompassing all organizations that trade for a social purpose, including for-profit companies (Austin *et al.* 2006).

The second school puts the emphasis on social entrepreneurs in the Schumpeterian meaning of the term, in a perspective similar to that adopted earlier by the pioneering work of Young (1986). Along such lines, entrepreneurs in the non-profit sector are change makers, as they carry out “new combinations” in at least one of the following areas: new services, new quality of services, new methods of production, new production factors, new forms of organizations or new markets. Social entrepreneurship may therefore be a question of outcomes and social impact rather than a question of incomes. Moreover, the systemic nature of innovation brought about and its impact at a broad societal level are often underlined. Dees (1998:4) has proposed the best-known definition of social entrepreneurs; he sees the latter as “playing the role of change agents in the social sector by adopting a mission to create and sustain social value, recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission, engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation and learning, acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and finally exhibiting a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created”.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. “non-profit venture”, “non-profit entrepreneurship”, “social-purpose endeavour”, “social-purpose business”, “community wealth enterprise”, “public entrepreneurship”, “social enterprise”, etc.

Finally, in Europe, as soon as 1996, the EMES European Research Network has tried to identify the specificities of social enterprises emerging at the crossroads of the market, civil society and public policy (Borzaga & Defourny 2001, Nyssens 2006, Defourny & Nyssens 2011). While stressing a social aim embedded in an economic activity as in the two previous schools, the EMES approach differs from them in that it stresses specific governance models, often found in European social enterprises, rather than the profile of social entrepreneurs. More particularly, a democratic control and/or a participatory involvement of stakeholders, including citizens, reflect a quest for more economic democracy inside the organization, in the line of the tradition of cooperatives. Combined with constraints on the distribution of profits, these specific governance features can be viewed as a way to protect and strengthen the primacy of the social mission in the organization. They are also likely to act as a "signal" allowing various institutions, including public bodies, to support social enterprises and their scaling up in various ways (legal frameworks, public subsidies, fiscal exemptions, donations, social banking, etc.).

By delineating our field of analysis as made of "organizations which combine an entrepreneurial dynamics to provide services or goods with a primacy of social aims", we do not choose *a priori* any of these three conceptualizations. At this stage, we consider that each school of thought may shed light on the whole set of organizations responding to the abovementioned general definition.

### III. CONTENT OF THE "ICSEM" PROJECT

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Three major research axes are developed within the ICSEM Project; the "**Overall Work Plan 2013-2017**" provides a detailed description of these three axes. The two first axes were launched simultaneously and can be considered as belonging to a first major phase, corresponding to research carried out at the national level, while the third axis corresponds to a second phase, building on the results of the first two axes, and aiming to carry out comparative analysis at the international level.

#### **Phase 1: Research carried out at the national level (July 2013-December 2015)**

##### *Axis 1: Country contributions: Context, concepts, models*

The first major axis includes three parts. It aims to understand SE-related context and concepts in each country (Part A), to identify SE models (Part B) and to describe their institutional trajectories (Part C). The major outputs of this first research axis are country studies, published as ICSEM Working Papers.

For Research Partners having joined the Project from the outset, this stage started in July 2013 and was completed in June 2015: the first batch of **ICSEM Working Papers** were indeed published on the occasion of the General ICSEM Meeting in Helsinki. Research Partners having joined the Project later however have the possibility to complete this stage in the first months of 2016.

##### *Axis 2: Building up an international database on social enterprise*

The second major axis corresponds to the collection of data about the SE models identified in the first axis, on the basis of a common questionnaire. These data will feed international comparative analysis within the Project's third axis, with a view to proposing—among other results—a worldwide typology of SE models.

The questionnaire was developed through an interactive process with ICSEM Research Partners. The final versions of the Questionnaire and of the Interview and Coding Guide were sent to all Research Partners in February 2015. A LimeSurvey version of the Questionnaire was also made available to all participating Research Partners for the on-line coding of the collected data. For each SE model identified, Research Partners are to collect and code data for three or four social enterprises that are representative of the model. Data collection should be completed by the end of the year 2015.



## Phase 2: Comparative analysis, carried out at the international level (January 2016-December 2017)

### *Axis 3: Comparative analysis of SE models within world regions and at the global level*

The third axis aims at the production of joint publications focusing on comparative analyses of social enterprise models among countries and world regions.

These publications will be fed by works carried out along the two previous axes, since they will be based on country-level Working Papers, the pooling and exploitation of data collected through the surveys as well as transversal analysis of some issues, such as institutionalization of SE models, among others.

The first major publications, in the form of joint books or journals' special issues, will rely on comparative works and debates among countries within each world region. In such a perspective, regional meetings to be held in 2016 will be critical places where to present and discuss comparative analyses of SE models as well as to decide which transversal issues are to be dealt with.

Comparative analyses at the global level (among regions) will also be developed. They will be shared and discussed at global meetings, to be held before or after major worldwide research conferences, like during the Project's First Phase.

These are the main common features of all publication projects but each of these projects will rely on specific dynamics of collaboration.

## IV. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE ICSEM PROJECT

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### 1. Towards a large network of senior and junior researchers

As already explained, the ICSEM Project will rely on contributions **from researchers from all over the world willing to join this project**. The ICSEM Project's network will be made of experienced scholars as well as young researchers, including PhD students who would like to make such a contribution as a part or as a side-product of their own doctoral research.

Participation to the ICSEM project will be **on a voluntary basis** and each participant will have to rely on his/her own resources or to apply for funding in his/her own country (if needed, with the support of the project's coordinators).

For participants selected as contributors from developing countries and/or under-researched areas, **fellowships** will be made available once they have shown their involvement and the quality of their first draft contributions. Such fellowships would cover the costs to take part in the Project's meetings and, in some cases, they could include a one- or two-month research allowance to produce a high-quality contribution.

### 2. The role of the EMES European Research Network

The EMES European Research Network is already involved in the whole IAP-SOCENT research programme through several of its members, but it will also play a particularly important role in the ICSEM Project. Indeed, the EMES Network has developed many formal and informal partnerships and collaborations, and all researchers who are or have been involved in the latter are particularly invited to join the ICSEM Project and to propose country-specific and/or field-specific contributions on social enterprise models. However, other researchers interested to join the ICSEM Project are also welcome; they will find in the Project opportunities to become part of a large international research community, and their participation will also allow them to get closer to the EMES Network. Moreover, events jointly organized with EMES will serve as main contact places and meeting places for the joint work sessions that will be held during the whole duration of the ICSEM Project.

General meetings of research partners will be organized before or after EMES conferences and PhD Summer Schools; the **ICSEM kick-off meeting, as already mentioned, took place in Liege, Belgium on July, 5, 2013**, just after the 4<sup>th</sup> EMES International Research Conference (July 1-4, 2013), while a second **General ICSEM Meeting was organized in Helsinki, Finland, on June 29-30, 2015**, just before the 5<sup>th</sup> EMES International Research Conference (June 30-July 3, 2015).

### 3. How to get involved?

Participation of interested researchers from all countries is welcome and should be discussed on a case-by-case basis with the Scientific Coordinators of the ICSEM project.

Experienced or young researchers as well as PhD students who are interested in learning more about the ICSEM Project and possibly in taking part in it are invited to express their interest by writing to the Project's Coordination.

#### ICSEM Scientific Coordination

**Jacques Defourny**

Centre for Social Economy, HEC Management School  
University of Liege, Sart Tilman B33, box 4  
B-4000 Liege, Belgium

**Marthe Nyssens**

CIRTES - Centre interdisciplinaire de recherches: Travail, Etat et Société  
and Department of Economics  
3, place Montesquieu  
B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

#### ICSEM Coordination and Communication

**Sophie Adam**, Centre for Social Economy, HEC Management School

**Rocío Nogales**, EMES International Research Network

Contact information: [icsem-socent@emes.net](mailto:icsem-socent@emes.net)

Website: <http://www.iap-socent.be/icsem-project>

## APPENDIX 1: THE "EMES" APPROACH OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AS A TOOL OF ANALYSIS

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In Europe, the EMES European Research Network has developed the first theoretical and empirical milestones of social enterprise analysis (Borzaga and Defourny 2001). The EMES approach derives from extensive dialogue among several disciplines (economics, sociology, political science and management) as well as among the various national traditions and sensitivities present in the European Union. Moreover, guided by a project that was both theoretical and empirical, it preferred from the outset the identification and clarification of indicators over a concise and elegant definition.

### The EMES "ideal-type" of social enterprise as a compass

Such indicators were never intended to represent the set of conditions that an organisation should meet in order to qualify as a social enterprise. Rather than constituting prescriptive criteria, they describe an "ideal-type" in Weber's terms, i.e. an abstract construction that enables researchers to position themselves within the "galaxy" of social enterprises. In other words, they constitute a tool, somewhat analogous to a compass, which helps analysts locate the position of the observed entities relative to one another and eventually identify subsets of social enterprises they want to study more deeply. Finally, let us stress that those indicators allow identifying brand new social enterprises, but they can also lead to designate as social enterprises older organisations being reshaped by new internal dynamics.

### Three sets of three indicators

Until recently, the EMES indicators had been presented in two subsets: a list of four economic indicators and a list of five social indicators (Defourny 2001: 16-18). In a comparative perspective, however, it seems more appropriate to present these nine indicators in three subsets rather than two, which allows highlighting particular forms of governance specific to the EMES ideal-type of social enterprise (Defourny and Nyssens 2012):

#### ***An economic project***

*A continuous production*  
*Some paid work*  
*An economic risk*

#### ***A social mission***

*An explicit social aim*  
*Limited profit distribution, reflecting the primacy of social aim*  
*An initiative launched by a group of citizens or a third sector organization(s)*

## ***A participatory governance***

*A high degree of autonomy*

*A participatory nature, which involves various parties affected by the activity*

*A decision-making power not based on capital ownership*

## **Questions for a field survey**

On such a basis, here are some key questions which can be raised at the level of all surveyed social enterprises (or in samples of the latter) in order to identify SE models prevailing or emerging in the country or the chosen country's area(s) and/or in the chosen fields.

## ***An economic project***

Which type of goods or services does the SE produce or provide?

What is the proportion of paid staff and volunteers in the SE labour force?

Which kind of economic risk does the SE bear? What are the main resources sustaining the production of goods and services? What are the shares of market resources, public grants and voluntary resources (giving, volunteering)? Where do these resources come from (private customers, public contracts, foundations, etc)?

## ***A social mission***

What is the explicit social aim of the SE?

Who are the users or customers of the SE?

Which kind of profit distribution is allowed, if any?

Who launched the SE?

## ***A specific governance***

Who is the main manager of the SE? Does the board have the right to take up its own position ("voice") and to terminate the activity of the SE ("exit")? Has any external body (public authorities, a for-profit company...) a word to say in such decisions?

Which types of stakeholders are involved in the activity and in the governance of the SE, especially in the general assembly, in the board or through other channels?

How is the decision-making power allocated in the general assembly and in the board?

As explained earlier, the list of dimensions provided here is not exhaustive, and other relevant dimensions, likely to differentiate SE models among them, may be analysed as well. Among the most studied features, research partners of the ICSEM Project may want to look at the following:

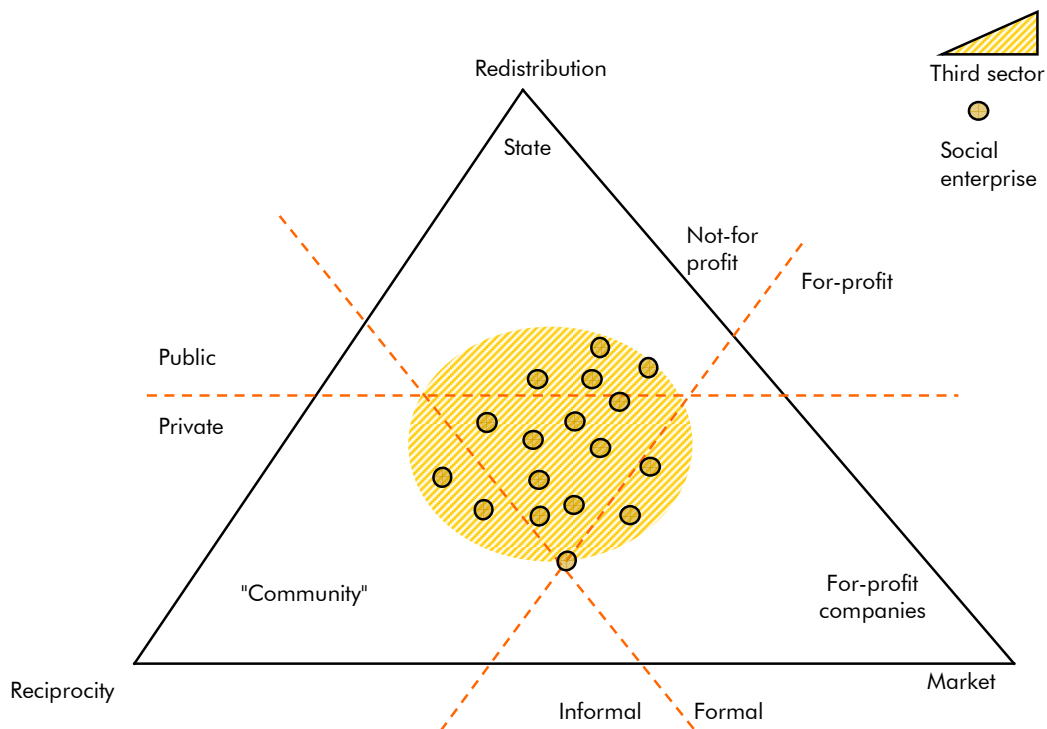
- the profile of the social entrepreneur(s);
- the extent of market resources as a distinctive feature;
- the nature and content of social innovation.

## APPENDIX 2: THE "WELFARE TRIANGLE" AS A COMMON REFERENCE

Social enterprises can be expected to have a special place in the overall economy. To apprehend their positioning, previous research stressed that it is necessary to go beyond conventional "bi-polar" representations of the economic landscape, which only stress the central place of the market and the regulatory role of the state.

In such a perspective, we follow Polanyi (1944) and a historical and anthropological approach. Without denying the importance of the profit motive characterising the capitalist economy, Polanyi also highlights other economic practices, not oriented towards the accumulation of profit: redistribution, reciprocity and household administration. In a similar vein, several European third sector scholars have discussed the "welfare mix" as made of shared responsibilities among various types of actors (Evers 1990 and 1995; Pestoff 1998 and 2005; Evers and Laville 2004) and a diversity of logics (Eme 1991; Laville 1992 and 1994). On such a basis, some have proposed a "triangle" representation, which we have slightly adapted to better understand the relations among those actors and their respective logics of action (see figure 1).

Figure 1- Social enterprise as a combination of various actors, logics of action and resources



Source: based on Pestoff (1998 & 2005).

The first typology in this triangle distinguishes different kind of actors: the state, private for-profit companies, and communities (in which we can include households).

The second typology embedded in the triangle highlights the resources and rationales on which these actors rely to develop their activities; indeed, if we follow the substantive approach of Polanyi (1944) and other converging contributions (Boulding 1973; Mauss 1923-1924; Perroux 1960; Razeto 1992), the economy must be seen as "plural" and characterised by various forms of exchange:

- the *market* principle facilitates the matching of the supply and demand for goods and services for the purpose of trade through price setting;
- *redistribution* is the principle whereby (part of) the production is handed over to a central authority - in our modern societies, generally the state - that is responsible for distributing it. This presupposes the existence of a mechanism defining the rules for raising taxes and allocating those resources. In this way, a relationship is established, for a certain time, between a central authority, imposing an obligation, and the agents subject to it;
- *reciprocity* constitutes an original principle of economic activity based on the logic of symmetry. For Polanyi (1944), actors committed in a reciprocity relationship are voluntarily complementary and interdependent. Exchanges are based on the gift as a basic social fact; it calls for a socially acceptable counter-gift, regulated by social norms rather than perfect equality (Polanyi *et al.* 1957), which takes the form of a paradoxical obligation whereby the group or individual who receives the gift has an opportunity to exercise his freedom. It only has meaning when there is a clear desire for a social bond among stakeholders. The cycle of reciprocity is opposed to market exchange because it is an integral part of human relationships that brings into play the desire for recognition and power. Yet, it is different from redistributive exchange because no central authority is imposing it. A special form of reciprocity is practiced within the basic family unit, which Polanyi calls household administration. For Polanyi, it involves the autarkic production of an institutional unit (such as the family).

Such a view of the entire economy certainly enriches the analysis of the third sector which, according to a European tradition (Evers and Laville 2004), brings together cooperatives, associations, mutual societies and public benefit foundations - or, in other words, all types of not-for-profit organisations (organisations not owned by shareholders), which are referred to as the "social economy" in various European countries. In such a perspective, the third sector can no longer be viewed as fully separated from the private for-profit and the public sectors; instead, it appears as an intermediate sector. According to Evers (1995), third sector organisations are not only in relation with redistribution and the market, but also with reciprocity embedded in the community sphere; this leads to recognise the great variety of ways in which these organisations act as hybrids, intermeshing different resources and connecting with different actors. This view emphasises the synergetic mixes of resources and rationales available to third sector organisations, rather than clear-cut frontiers between sectors. This is why, in figure 1, the borders among the different types of actors and logics are suggested through dotted lines. As most social enterprises belong to or take roots in the third sector, and as many social enterprises are moreover likely to be located in those "connecting areas", they also actually experience those tensions, resulting in what various authors - such as Emerson (2006) - call the "blurring frontiers" of the social enterprise landscape.

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