



CULTURAL EVOLUTION AND THE AWARENESS OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES: A MEMETIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The central contribution of the paper consists in exploring the implications of a memetic perspective on social entrepreneurship. The line of argument can basically be divided into four aspects. First, it is argued that memes – especially their mental representations – can be conceptualized in the context of (cultural) schemata that have an impact on the perception, awareness, and recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities. Second, a memetic view of creativity also suggests that opportunity recognition strongly depends on memes. Third, viewing social entrepreneurship as a meme(plex) allows not only to compare it with related concepts but also to get to the core of the social entrepreneurial process by focusing on social entrepreneurial opportunities. A social entrepreneurial opportunity can then be understood as the cut set between the solution to a societal problem and a profitable business model. Fourth, in order to facilitate the propagation of the social entrepreneurship meme within (for-profit) organizations, a systematic analysis of the firm's social network as well as its memeplex is proposed.

Keywords: Memes, Social Entrepreneurship, Opportunities

Cultural Evolution and the Awareness of Social Entrepreneurial Opportunities: A Memetic Approach

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Keywords: Creativity, Memes, Opportunity Recognition, Schemata, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurial Opportunities, Social Innovation

Abstract

The central contribution of the paper consists in exploring the implications of a memetic perspective on social entrepreneurship. The line of argument can basically be divided into four aspects. First, it is argued that memes – especially their mental representations – can be conceptualized in the context of (cultural) schemata that have an impact on the perception, awareness, and recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities. Second, a memetic view of creativity also suggests that opportunity recognition strongly depends on memes. Third, viewing social entrepreneurship as a meme(plex) allows not only to compare it with related concepts but also to get to the core of the social entrepreneurial process by focusing on social entrepreneurial opportunities. A social entrepreneurial opportunity can then be understood as the cut set between the solution to a societal problem and a profitable business model. Fourth, in order to facilitate the propagation of the social entrepreneurship meme within (for-profit) organizations, a systematic analysis of the firm's social network as well as its memeplex is proposed.

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Introduction

This conceptual paper aims to fathom the theoretical and application-oriented potential of a memetic perspective for social entrepreneurship. The overall goal of the paper can therefore be seen in the development of a fruitful conceptual synthesis that ultimately yields a research framework, which in turn facilitates developing reasonable research questions, testable hypotheses, or viable starting points for further work. As Richard Barrett has recently stated, “every year, almost without exception, every sector of business becomes more complex. Along with this increase in complexity, we are also experiencing an increase in uncertainty” (Barrett, 2014, p. xvii). Although one of the factors that contribute towards this rise in complexity and uncertainty in an increasingly globalized (business) world can be found in cultural evolution, the business literature commonly does not seem to realize the benefits of integrating insights from literature on cultural evolution. The elements that drive cultural evolution have often been called memes (for an overview see Heylighen/Chielens, 2009).³ It is thus plausible to assume that a focus on memes may help to shed light on some of the issues concerning complexity and uncertainty in a business context. One vivid example of a complex phenomenon in the business world can be seen in entrepreneurship in general and in social entrepreneurship in particular. Hence, in the course of our paper, we also want to illustrate that social entrepreneurship (SES) can be conceived as a meme(plex) that contains more than just a prolific buzzword. Consequently, in order to capture the full potential of SES as a catalyst for solving pressing societal problems, we have to reduce terminological uncertainty and move beyond SES as an umbrella term for various, often contradictory, notions. Therefore, in this contribution, we primarily focus on a special type of SES that

³ At this juncture, it should be sufficient to point to the definition of a meme in the *Oxford Dictionaries*: “An element of a culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means.” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/meme>; last accessed 01/12/15).

draws upon the social innovation school of thought (e.g. Dees/Anderson, 2006; Defourny/Nyssens, 2014) as well as the social business (e.g. Yunus, 2007) approach. Despite the fact that social innovation (for an overview e.g. see Rüede/Lurtz, 2012) is often contrasted with business innovation (e.g. Pol/Ville, 2009), the two spheres frequently overlap and intertwine (e.g. see Fuglsang, 2008, p. 7). Hence, in the context of (social) entrepreneurship, a strictly isolated treatment of social innovation would not be feasible in any case.

The theses or lines of argument we will put forth are, thus, arranged as follows. At the outset, we will argue that memes – especially their mental representations – can be conceptualized in the context of (cultural) schemata that have an impact on the perception, awareness, and recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities. Based on a short review of the memetic aspects of creativity, we will also establish a link to opportunity recognition. We will then present a process view on SES that is also supported with case examples. In this concept, a social entrepreneurial opportunity (SEO) represents a way to solve societal problems by means of a profitable business model. Within such business models, the ‘social case’ and the ‘business case’ are integrated and facilitate the simultaneous generation of social and economic value. Under the assumption that SES in the sense presented here does indeed represent a highly attractive field of operation for traditional for-profit organizations, we will additionally present managerial implications that may help raise awareness for SEOs in order to contribute towards the solution of a social problem on the one hand, and on the other hand improve the competitiveness of the organization itself. Our concluding remarks will then be presented and supplemented with a summarizing illustration.

Memes and (Cultural) Schemata

Since their first introduction by Richard Dawkins (1976), memes have drawn a lot of attention and found their way into publications from a variety of fields (e.g. Aunger, 2000; 2002;

Blackmore, 1999a; 1999b; 2001; Blute, 2010; Breitenstein, 2002; Brodie, 1996; Dennett, 1991; 1995; 2001; 2002; Distin, 2005; Lynch, 1996; Patzelt, 2015a; 2015b; Shennan, 2002; Shifman, 2013; to name but a few). The idea that there is a second replicator – aside from genes – that drives cultural evolution, by means of a process which may be called imitation (e.g. Blackmore 1999a; 1999b; 2001; Dawkins, 1976; 1999), has important implications for example with respect to human agency and the identification of (ultimate) beneficiaries. The so-called *meme's-eye view* on human and cultural evolution has been explicated – on the basis of Dawkins (1976) – by Blackmore (1999a; 2000; 2010), Dennett (1995, chapter 12), Shennan (2012, pp. 235 ff.) and many others. According to this perspective, when looking at a specific cultural trait, habit, or tradition, the question of purpose or utility *for humans* is subordinate to the question of what helps *the meme* survive and propagate successfully in that context. At this point, it is important to note that the idea of culture as some kind of independent entity has neither been introduced by memeticists nor is it a new concept. The German ethnologist Leo Frobenius has already written, for example, that his basic tenet was to “understand culture as an organism independent from its human carriers [and] every cultural form as a living entity on its own [...] First of all: cultures are not brought forth by human will, culture rather lives ‘on’ humans” (Frobenius, 1921, p. 3f., own translation). Similar phrasing can also be found in Oswald Spengler’s works: “*Cultures are organisms*, and world-history is their collective biography” (Spengler, 1926, p. 104; italics in original). It is evident that although this relationship between humans and culture may often be a symbiotic one, we can also find many cases of ‘parasitic’ memes (see also Csikszentmihalyi, 1994, p. 162), which may give rise to the notion of “viruses of the mind” (Brodie, 1996; Dawkins, 1993), or a cultural “programming of the mind” (e.g. Hofstede, 2001, p. 1; or Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 6). Moreover, there can be aspects of culture that are neither beneficial nor detrimental to their human carriers, which has, for example, been framed by

Freeman Dyson (2004) in the following way: “Junk DNA is DNA that does us no good and no harm, merely taking a free ride in our cells and taking advantage of our efficient replicative apparatus. [...] It is easy to find in human culture the analogue of junk DNA. Junk culture is replicated together with memes, just as junk DNA is replicated together with genes” (Dyson, 2004, p. 90). However, we should be careful not to take the meme-gene-analogies too seriously and it can, therefore, be summarized in the words of Lee Cronk: “Memes are in some ways similar to genes, but they are also sometimes similar to viruses. Like viruses and other pathogens, memes are passed from person to person and may not necessarily be helpful to the people who catch them” (Cronk, 1999, p. xii).

It is important to note that there have already been several attempts to utilize memetics in other disciplines, for example in order to explain the (cultural) evolution of firms (Weeks/Galunic, 2003), or with respect to marketing (e.g. Marsden, 1998; 2002; or Williams, 2000; 2002; 2004) or in organizational contexts (e.g. Kappelhoff, 2012; Price, 1995; 2012; or Shepherd/McKelvey, 2009). Others have applied memes to innovation strategy (e.g. Pech, 2003; or Voelpel et al., 2005) or mergers and acquisitions (Vos/Kelleher, 2001). Nevertheless, it is still valid what Richard Pech has stated more than a decade ago, namely that “[...] the business literature has only scratched the surface of memetic theory’s potential [...]” (Pech, 2003, p. 113). One of the reasons for the reluctance to make use of memetics in a business context may be the ambiguity with respect to the ‘locus’ of the meme. In other words, while some authors focus on cognitive aspects, others concentrate on (imitable) behavior or other elements of culture and this may create the impression that, according to Jameson Gill, “on each occasion memes are couched in terms which suit the message of the thesis rather than a consensus of what might constitute a putatively real entity” (Gill, 2012, p. 326). However, not just for terminological reasons, memetics has struggled to survive as an academic field of

research from the beginning. Discussions and critical arguments pro and contra memes can, for example, be found in Aunger (2000), the debate between Blackmore (2010) and Wimsatt (2010), or more recently in Gill (2012), Lord (2012), and references therein. It is neither the goal nor within the scope of our paper to repeat or even resolve those ongoing issues, but we acknowledge that we have to clarify the positioning of our approach carefully.

The age-old debate between dualism and monism is also (to some extent) reflected in the memetic literature. Some authors would like to engage in a strictly materialistic view of memes and argue for an ‘intracranial’ location of memes as some kind of neural substrate (e.g. Delius, 1991; Wickler, 2006; see also the suggestion by Tyler, 2011, for a related terminological differentiation between *intracranial* and *intercranial* memetics). Others argue for a differentiation similar to the genotype-phenotype juxtaposition in genetics which may then be reflected in the distinction between “copying-the-instructions” and “copying-the-product” (Blackmore, 1999a), “i-culture” and “m-culture” (Cloak, 1975), “i-memes” and “e-memes” (McNamara, 2011), and, even more general, between replicators and vehicles or interactors (e.g. Hull, 1982; 1988a; 1988b; see also Speel, 1998, on a related note). It would be presumptuous to argue that we can find a solution for this philosophical problem here, therefore we will just build upon an existing categorization that seems useful and logically consistent within the context of our approach. First of all, we are in opposition of a strictly ‘neurological’ view of memes and follow Daniel Dennett, who, in the course of his TED talk on *Dangerous memes*, explained: “What’s a meme made of? What are bits made of [...]? Not silicon. They’re made of information, and can be carried in any physical medium” (Dennett 2002/2007). In our opinion, this *substrate neutrality* does in turn *not* imply that (tacit) cultural ideas and (material) artifacts are to be treated as the exact same thing, although material culture may still be regarded as the “reification of human ideas in a solid medium”

(D'Andrade, 1986, p. 22, as cited in Cole/Packer, 2011, p. 135). Hence, although the dichotomy mentioned above might rather be seen as two poles of a continuum (also see Fuchs, 2001, in this regard), we will even go one step further and make a case for a trichotomy, or three-dimensional view on memes (see figure 1). Note that a similar division has already been proposed by Franz Wegener (2009), who likewise distinguished between three types of memes. To a certain extent, these aspects can also be found in Edgar Schein's three levels of organizational culture (e.g. Schein, 2004), and another distinctive overlap evidently exists with respect to Karl Popper's *three worlds* (e.g. Popper, 1972).

[Figure 1 approximately here]

Here, we can see that the first category is *p-memes* or primal memes. Those are basically the objects of Popper's world 3, i.e. genuine information. The second type is *i-memes*. These are *mental representations* of a meme. We will elaborate on this dimension further below as it will be of particular importance in the remaining part of the paper. However, for the sake of completeness, the third dimension has to be explained as well. The dimension of *e-memes* is rather straightforward as it depicts the environmental or physical representation, i.e. the material appearance, of a meme in terms of an observable (imitable) product, process, behavior, codified knowledge and the like (also cf. the concept of an e-meme in McNamara, 2011, or the related notion of gMeme in Wegener, 2009). With the help of e-memes (e.g. tools or books), there may then also arise the possibility of discovering other, previously unknown ('new') p-memes.

As stated above, we will hereafter primarily concentrate on i-memes, i.e. mental representations of a meme. This should, however, not imply that p-memes and e-memes are considered to be less important dimensions. First of all, mental representations can in general be described as (individual) mental concepts that may, for example, comprise beliefs,

attitudes, impressions, stereotypes, and the like (e.g. cf. Smith/Queller, 2003; or Flechsig, 2006, chapter 4). While several types of mental representations can be found in the literature, Elliot Smith and Sarah Queller (2003) have concentrated on reviewing four of them, namely *associative networks*, *exemplars*, *distributed representations*, and *schemata*. With respect to the topic of our paper, we are convinced that the most fruitful insights can be gained from focusing on the latter. This will immediately be apparent as soon as we take a look at the respective definition and see the striking overlaps with central memetic aspects: According to Smith/Queller (2003, p. 114), a *schema* can be defined as a “structured unit of knowledge about some object or concept.” Furthermore, schemata are considered to be “independent entities [...] [and they] affect the interpretation of perceptual stimuli” (ibid.). According to Karl-Heinz Flechsig, “schemata serve not only the selection, filtering, and interpretation of incoming information but also the retention and organization of knowledge in the human brain” (Flechsig, 2006, p. 24, own translation). In this respect, a central aspect has been enunciated by Paul DiMaggio as follows: “*People are more likely to perceive information that is germane to existing schemata*” (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 269; italics in original). Moreover, Flechsig states that “schemata evolve, adapt, change, and communicate with each other” (Flechsig, 2006, p. 24, own translation). It can now be summarized with reference to Flechsig (1998; 2006) as well as Quinn and Holland (1987) that, firstly, schemata help transform information into knowledge (or p-memes into i-memes) and facilitate the systematic search for ‘suitable’ information (as models *of* the world) and, secondly, they can serve as behavioral instructions and / or heuristics (in terms of models *for* the world). At this point, it is important to note that not every i-meme may be (part of) a schema and, vice versa, not every schema is the mental representation of a meme. This may especially be the case when the personal schemata in question have been acquired through *individual learning* (e.g. operant conditioning or trial and error). However, we can clearly assert that the construction and

confirmation of *cultural schemata*, i.e. schemata that are shared by a certain group of people and, thus, have been acquired through *social learning*, will be heavily influenced by the memes that are already present within that group's culture. In Flechsig's terms: "the acquisition of new and previously unfamiliar schemata always occurs on the basis of already existing schemata that have been formed in the course of one's own enculturation" (Flechsig, 2006, p. 35, own translation). These cultural schemata can then serve as culture-dependent models *of* the world as well as culture-dependent models *for* the world as a result of shared i-memes. The processes involved in propagating these schema-relevant i-memes may then in turn be linked to Dan Sperber's "*epidemiology of representations*" (Sperber, 1996, pp. 25 ff.).⁴

Having the overall topic of our paper in mind, we can now use these insights to conclude that – by means of (cultural) schemata – the awareness, perception, and recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities will be highly dependent on memes. To be more specific, we can infer that if an objective entrepreneurial opportunity may or may not be discovered or identified depends on whether or not the information concerning this opportunity is compatible with the (potential) entrepreneur's i-memes.

Memes and Creativity

The role of creativity in entrepreneurship has often been considered to be a central one, especially when it comes to the link between creativity and opportunity recognition (e.g. Endres/Woods, 2007; Hansen et al., 2011; Hills et al., 1999; Lumpkin et al., 2004; and references herein). According to David Hansen and colleagues, "a number of authors have

⁴ In this way, we can also argue that cultural schemata may be one of the reasons for *homophily* in social networks.

described the opportunity recognition process either as being influenced by creativity or more specifically as a creative process in-and-of itself” (Hansen et al., 2011, p. 517). Despite the fact that several contributions (e.g. Endres/Woods, 2007; Hansen et al., 2011; Hills et al., 1999; Lumpkin et al., 2004; Lumpkin/Lichtenstein, 2005) explicitly draw upon the works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996), none of them seems to take into consideration what that author has written on memes (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 1994) or the memetic aspects of creativity. For example, with respect to the role of culture and domains in the creative process, Csikszentmihalyi (1988) has stated that “we might conclude that creativity is one of the aspects of evolution [...] [and] we could say that a domain is a system of related memes that change through time, and what changes them is the process of creativity” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p. 333 with reference to Csikszentmihalyi/Massimini, 1985). In Csikszentmihalyi (1996) we can also find several references to memes (e.g. already on page 7), and even more detailed elaborations (e.g. on the role of memes in storing and accessing information) can be found in Csikszentmihalyi (1999). There, it is also stated that “how available memes are also bears on the rate of creativity” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 317). While these statements are also supported by Darwinian accounts of creativity (e.g. Simonton, 1999), other scholars have questioned the explanatory value of Darwinism and memetics for the study of creativity (e.g. Kronfeldner, 2011, esp. chapter 3). However, for the purpose of our paper, we tend to follow Susan Blackmore (2007), who claimed that “the true creative power behind human imagination is memetic evolution” (Blackmore, 2007, p. 76) and that basically “human creativity emerges from the human capacity to store, vary, and select memes” (Blackmore, 2010, p. 269, with reference to Blackmore, 2007). We can now clearly discern the implications of this view on creativity with respect to opportunity recognition in entrepreneurship: In addition to the inferences we have already drawn at the

end of the previous section (with respect to schemata), it can be argued that opportunity recognition may be influenced by memes in an additional way, namely via creativity.

The Meme(plex) of Social Entrepreneurship

A memeplex, also called (coadapted) meme complex, can be defined as a group or network of (usually) reciprocally supportive memes that can replicate more successfully when they are aggregated than on their own (see also Speel, 1999). Examples of memeplexes include chain letters, languages, religions, scientific theories, political ideologies, etc. (e.g. Blackmore, 1999b). The goal of this section is to apply memetic reasoning at a rather metatheoretical level in order to delineate a social entrepreneurship memeplex by comparison with conceptually related ones.

For several decades *social entrepreneurship* (SES) and related topics like *social innovation* and *social enterprise* have been gaining in importance in the political, societal and academic discussion (e.g. cf. Dacin et al., 2011; Lundström et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Volkmann et al., 2012). Even though in the meantime different schools of thought (or memeplexes) have emerged, the definitional issues around the topic have not been solved, yet (e.g. Certo/Miller, 2008; Choi/Majumdar, 2014; Dacin et al., 2011; Mair/Marti, 2006; Martin/Osberg, 2007; Nicholls, 2010; Petrella/Richez-Battesti, 2014; Short et al., 2009). As Martin and Osberg have stated, SES is “an immense tent into which all manners of socially beneficial activities fit” (Martin/Osberg, 2007, p. 30). There are fundamental differences between the schools of thought concerning the form (e.g. legal structure, financing structure, policies and procedures for the allocation of profits) and the process (e.g. the relevance of innovation, of management and of earned income strategies) of SES which lead to the fact that the entire field lacks clear boundaries (cf. Hoogendoorn et al., 2010; Mair/Marti, 2006; Newbert/Hill, 2014).

Against this background, the following section explains the understanding of SES underlying our paper and aims to develop its central planks. With the focus lying on the process of SES, the relevance of social innovation and its disruptive impact, the theoretical conception is mainly based on the social innovation school of thought (cf. Dees/Anderson, 2006; Defourny/Nyssens, 2014; Hoogendoorn, et al. 2010). Concerning the organizational and financing structure as well as the relevance of rentable business models, it also shows reference points to the *social business* approach (c.f. Yunus, 2007; 2011).

SES is defined as an entrepreneurial process that contains the identification, evaluation and exploitation of specific entrepreneurial opportunities (cf. Zahra et al., 2009; for the entrepreneurial process in general see Shane/Venkataraman, 2000). Henceforth, we will refer to these specific opportunities as *social entrepreneurial opportunities* (SEO) and define them as the possibility to solve societal problems with an economically and socially legitimized business model. Following this understanding, a specific criterion of SES and a distinction from classical entrepreneurship is the context targeted by the entrepreneurial process: the focus lies on pressing societal problems that are neglected by existing institutions (market failure, public sector failure, third sector failure) and have positive external effects (cf. Santos, 2012). The UN-Millennium Goals⁵ are exemplary for this kind of societal problems. It is important to note, however, that not all kinds of societal problems may be solved via SES, as understood in our contribution. In many cases (e.g. environmental catastrophes) other methods like philanthropic donations or publicly subsidized programs are more adequate solutions (cf. Yunus, 2011).

With reference to the social innovation approach (cf. Dees/Anderson, 2006; Defourny/Nyssens, 2014; Hoogendoorn et al., 2010), SES is based on a business model that

⁵ cf. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> [last accessed 01/05/2015]

contains a social innovation (for an overview see Rüede/Lurtz, 2012; and also Osburg/Schmidpeter, 2013). A social innovation is defined as “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals” (Phills et al., 2008, p. 36). In the sense of *creative destruction* (cf. Schumpeter, 1942/1994), a social innovation leads to disruptive change of existing institutions and resource allocation. At this point, it is also important to note that, according to a study by KEA (2009) for the European Commission, “[c]ulture-based creativity plays a key role in generating social innovation” (KEA, 2009, p. 6). With an eye toward the previous section, we can clearly see that, thereby, social innovation will also be influenced by memes – via culture-based creativity – as they are the constituent entities of culture and have also been found to have an important relationship with creativity in general. Put differently, when looking at the definition of a social innovation cited above (Phills et al., 2008), it is also plausible to assume that what is considered to be a social problem as well as how the problem will be solved (e.g. what is conceived as *justice*) varies depending on culture and creativity and, thus, on memes.

With reference to the social business approach (cf. Yunus, 2007; 2011), we are focusing on economic organizations (for-profit organizations) as agents of the social entrepreneurial process. In accordance with Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory (cf. Luhmann, 1995; 2012; 2013), economic organizations follow the *guiding difference* “revenue/expense” which in the long run needs to be positive in order to ensure the going concern. Accordingly, one financial objective of a social entrepreneurial organization is to at least cover its cost. This objective finds its correspondence in the construction of the business model (cf. Yunus et al., 2010). Philanthropic donations or public subsidies are not favored because the organization aims to protect its financial and operative independence to ensure its sustainability (cf. Yunus, 2007; 2011). In this sense, SES focusses on societal problems that

represent – to a certain extent – a business opportunity. Profitability is mandatory for a financially sustainable business model, but profit is not an end in itself. Instead, it is seen as a means to an end. Consequently, a SEO can be pictured as the *cut set* between a social case (solution to a societal problem) and a business case (profitable business model) as depicted in figure 2. Here, we can also see that within this cut set there can be found entrepreneurial opportunities that contribute more to the solution of a societal problem but are only on the verge of profitability (X'), and others that will be more (economically) profitable but contribute less to the solution of a societal problem (X^*).

[Figure 2 approximately here]

The Grameen Bank (financial service), Arogya Parivar (health care), and Hindustan Unilever Limited (nourishments and hygiene products) serve as vivid examples for this type of SES: The Grameen Bank runs an innovative business model that offers micro credits to the poorest of the poor (cf. Yunus, 2003). With an average repayment rate above commercial banks (cf. Hudon/Sandberg, 2013, p. 573), this social innovation confounds the assumption of the traditional banking industry, namely that only people with material collateral are regarded as creditworthy. Until 2011 more than 200 million poor people worldwide, mostly poor women, had received a micro credit from micro credit institutions (cf. Hudon/Ashta 2013, p. 277) that offered them a foundation for their own entrepreneurial activities and provided a proactive way out of poverty. By assuming that on average each borrower is part of a five-person household, one could estimate its effect on global poverty reduction. This social innovation has spread widely: After an annual global growth rate of approximately 30%, the micro finance sector encompassed more than 10,000 institutions in 2011 (Hudon/Ashta, 2013, p. 277). According to the largest data set available, the average interest rates charged by microfinance institutes range from 32% to 35% per annum (cf. Hudon/Ashta, 2013, p. 279).

These relatively high interest rates are deemed necessary in order to cover the high transaction costs of the business model. Following the principles of social business, the profit is used to pay back the investment amount and to reinvest into the organization (Yunus 2007; 2011). With Arogya Parivar and the Hindustan Unilever Limited two multinational corporations (Novartis and Unilever) demonstrate that poor people who live on less than 11 U.S. \$ per day can be reached by innovative products and business models and represent an attractive business field. Both companies have accessed profitable new markets (business case) by offering affordable products and services as well as jobs to people that were excluded before (social case). Novartis' Arogya Parivar offers medicine and medical services to the poorest of the poor in India. The initiative broke even after 31 months and covered 42 million poor people in 33.000 villages across 10 states in India (cf. Fürst, 2014, p. 18). In addition to that, Arogya Parivar has developed education and qualification programs for medical employees and physicians that improved the local health care (cf. Novartis, 2013). Arogya Parivar is expanding to other countries like Kenya, Indonesia and Vietnam and represents an enormous growth market for Novartis. Hindustan Unilever Limited reached more than 57 million Indians with nourishments and hygiene products in 2013 (cf. Unilever, 2013). With the connected "Project Shakti", Unilever also developed a local distribution network which offers jobs to 110.000 poor people (2013), mostly women (cf. Unilever, 2013).

The business models of these examples illustrate how a social case and a business case can be integrated. From the perspective of value creation, this interrelation could be described as a simultaneous creation of social value and economic value (e.g. Porter/Kramer, 2011). On the one hand, society benefits, because a neglected societal problem is solved, positive external effects are generated, and the common good is enhanced (i.e. social case or social value). On the other hand, the business organization benefits as it generates profitable product, service, and business model innovations, gains access to new markets, and increases

its competitiveness (i.e. business case or economic value) (e.g. cf. Osburg, 2014, p. 113). Those two aspects (social case and business case or social value and economic value) are not to be understood as dichotomous opponents, i.e. there is no trade-off in their interrelation (cf. Porter/Kramer, 2011). From a social entrepreneurial perspective, a societal problem is seen as a special opportunity for an economic organization. It is exactly this social entrepreneurial mindset – i.e. the awareness that specific societal problems are social entrepreneurial opportunities – that represents the meme we are focusing on in our contribution.

At this point, it is important to note that this meme cannot exclusively be found in SES. The meme has, for example, (more or less modified) equivalents within the *bottom of the pyramid* approach (cf. Prahalad, 2004; Prahalad/Hammond, 2002), the *creating shared value* approach (cf. Porter/Kramer, 2011), the *strategic CSR* approach (cf. Jamali, 2007; Porter/Kramer, 2006), the *responsible (research and) innovation* approach (cf. von Schomberg, 2013; also see Stilgoe et al., 2013), the *sustainable entrepreneurship* approach (cf. Weidinger et al., 2014), and others. One core aspect of all these concepts is the idea that there is an opportunity to solve societal problems by using a financially sustainable business model and thereby simultaneously creating social value and financial value (see table 1). Hence, they can all be located within the cut set between business case and social case.

[Table 1 approximately here]

Developing and processing a viable business model that works in the respective cut set is a difficult (social) entrepreneurial and managerial challenge. Potential consequences for a company that leaves this cut set by changing its social entrepreneurial business model towards more of a business case orientation can be studied in the case of a Mexican micro finance institute. The Banco Compartamos was under massive public pressure because its stakeholders recognized a mission drift towards the business case. In 2007 the Banco

Compartamos implemented a secondary offering that led to a tremendously profitable transaction for existing shareholders⁶ (cf. Ashta/Hudon, 2012). Due to the fact that the institution had charged relatively high interest rates from its customers (cf. Hudon/Ashta, 2013), the stakeholders blamed the bank for rich investors profiting at the back of the poor (cf. Ashta/Hudon, 2012; Hudon/Ashta, 2013). The whole case has then led to an enormous loss of trust in the concept of micro credit as a whole.

Managerial Implications

One of the central insights from our prior deliberations has been that the social entrepreneurial process strongly depends on memes. As we consider the SES meme itself to be a primarily symbiotic meme that can be useful for us as humans, we argue for supporting the propagation of that specific meme within (traditional) for-profit organizations in order to create an intraorganizational awareness for SEOs in terms of *social intrapreneurship* (cf. Kistruck/Beamish, 2010; Light, 2008). First of all, we have to note that ignoring the increasingly widely spread SES meme may even be detrimental for business organizations as this could jeopardize their *social license* (e.g. cf. Yates/Horvath, 2013) or, as Richard Pech has stated it, “ignoring the power and influence of memes can lead to the failure of even the most stable and seemingly prosperous of firms” (Pech, 2003, p. 113). In this regard, Pech (ibid.) has also stated that “entrepreneurs and managers have the power to conceive and shape appropriate memes for their markets, their products, and their work milieu.” We do not share this ‘top-down optimism’ completely, as we are also aware that – with respect to the meme’s-eye view presented above – memes may evolve in a direction that is unforeseeable or uncontrollable for entrepreneurs and managers. However, knowing the memetic ‘ecosystem’

⁶ „They received \$470 million (12 times the book value and a multiple of 261 times their paid-in capital!). This puts them in the top 1.7% of venture capital investments, earning returns of more than 100 times the paid-in capital.” (Ashta/Hudon, 2012, p. 335).

of a firm (e.g. its corporate culture or memeplex) should definitely be useful when it comes to identifying memes that may help or hinder the spread of the respective meme (in our case the SES meme). Examples of factors that should help spread the SES meme include the intraorganizational presence of related meme(plex)es (e.g. the ones depicted in table 1), whereas a widespread prevalence of rival memes (e.g. in the traditional schema that there always is a trade-off between social and economic benefits) can be expected to be disadvantageous.

One systematic managerial approach may then look as follows. To start with, two levels of analysis should first be differentiated: (1) Social network analysis of the corporation, and (2) analysis of the memeplex of the firm. The social network analysis should then, for example, help to identify hubs, opinion leaders, or intraorganizational clusters that have a positive effect on the spread of the respective meme (e.g. cf. Heylighen/Chielens, 2009, p. 3214, on the role of hubs). Due to the fact that memetic transmission (in terms of (informal) information flow) may not necessarily coincide with the formal organization chart, network analyses may help reveal those agents that exhibit the potential for being opinion leaders and, in our case, facilitating social intrapreneurship. The second level of analysis (i.e. the memeplex analysis) may then be conducted in order to identify helpful (or symbiotic) memes, rival (or toxic) memes, or ambiguous memes (e.g. what Dyson, 2004, has called “junk culture”). The analysis should also be supplemented with computer simulations (e.g. modeling the epidemiology of a meme within the firm network captured in step (1)), and related approaches such as “meme mapping” (e.g. Karafiath, 2014, p. 20; Karafiath/Brewer, n.d., p. 11; for a different meme mapping approach cf. Paull, 2009), “memetic engineering” (Pech/Slade, 2004), the “management of meme evolution” (Taillard/Giscoppa, 2013, p. 65), or the so-called “innovation meme” process suggested by Voelpel et al. (2005).

Moreover, an important aspect that should not be neglected with respect to memetics in an organizational context is that constraints on the transmission of the meme may accrue from boundaries in social network size as a result of the limited information processing capability of the human brain (e.g. Dunbar, 2011; see also Schlaile, 2012, pp. 94 ff., with reference to Dunbar, 1993; 1998).

Conclusion and Outlook

The approach we have decided to take in the course of our conceptual paper can be summarized in the following way. First, we have proposed a three-dimensional (“p-i-e”) view on memes. By focusing on i-memes and cultural schemata, we could then infer from the respective literature that the perception of information with respect to entrepreneurial opportunities seems to depend on compatibility with memes that are already present. Moreover, by reviewing memetic aspects of creativity, we have deduced that opportunity recognition also depends on memes via creativity. Second, we have proposed a process view of SES that could in sum be understood as depicted in figure 3.

[Figure 3 approximately here]

Here, we can also see that social innovation, which in turn is further influenced by (culture-based) creativity, plays a key role in our understanding of SES. Note that in figure 3 opportunity recognition and social innovation overlap as it clearly depends on the individual case if we can delineate the boundaries between both processes more clearly. At the center of our understanding lies what we have called the SES meme which, as we have claimed, can also be found in other approaches (e.g. the ones presented in table 1). This SES meme reflects the core idea that there are specific opportunities – which we have termed SEO – that are represented by the cut set between the solution to a social problem and a profitable business

model. However, it is also important to remember that not all societal problems can be solved by means of SES and, therefore, the limitations of this specific type of entrepreneurship should also be taken into consideration. Several societal problems that may not be solvable (or can even be made worse) by means of a business approach have, for example, been elucidated by Michael Sandel (2012).

As a last step, we have considered managerial implications in order to spread the SES meme in (for-profit) organizations and, thereby, increasing the potential for social intrapreneurship. In this respect, two layers of analysis have been suggested, namely a social network analysis and an analysis of the memplex of the firm. These suggestions also represent a starting point for further application-oriented empirical work in this direction, especially with respect to the second level of analysis.

Due to the fact that our inferences and deductions are thus far primarily based on conflating memetic literature with (social) entrepreneurship literature, further scientific inquiries building upon the aspects presented within the course of our paper are advised. In this regard, a number of approaches are conceivable, ranging from ('traditional') qualitative, quantitative, and experimental studies to ('more unorthodox') simulation models or configurational (comparative) methods. Examples of research questions and hypotheses for future work may include: *What is the (exact) relationship between memes, schemata and the awareness, perception, and recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities? Or: Do cultural schemata sufficiently explain the relationship between i-memes and entrepreneurial opportunity recognition (e.g. controlling for the effects of associative networks)? Or: Does a higher fecundity (or longevity or copying-fidelity) of memes lead to more social innovation? Or in terms of hypotheses: Null hypothesis H_0 : Memes have no significant influence on opportunity recognition; H_1 : (Only those) i-memes corresponding to cultural schemata that*

are compatible with the opportunity-related information have a positive influence on opportunity recognition; and the like. Apart from this, the conception of SEO as cut set (between ‘solution to societal problem’ and ‘profitable business model’) should facilitate further analyses of (social) entrepreneurial opportunities by means of established set-theoretic methods such as (fuzzy-set) qualitative comparative analysis and related approaches (e.g. Ragin, 2000; Ragin, 2008; Ragin 1987/2014; Schneider/Wagemann, 2012).

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Figures and Tables

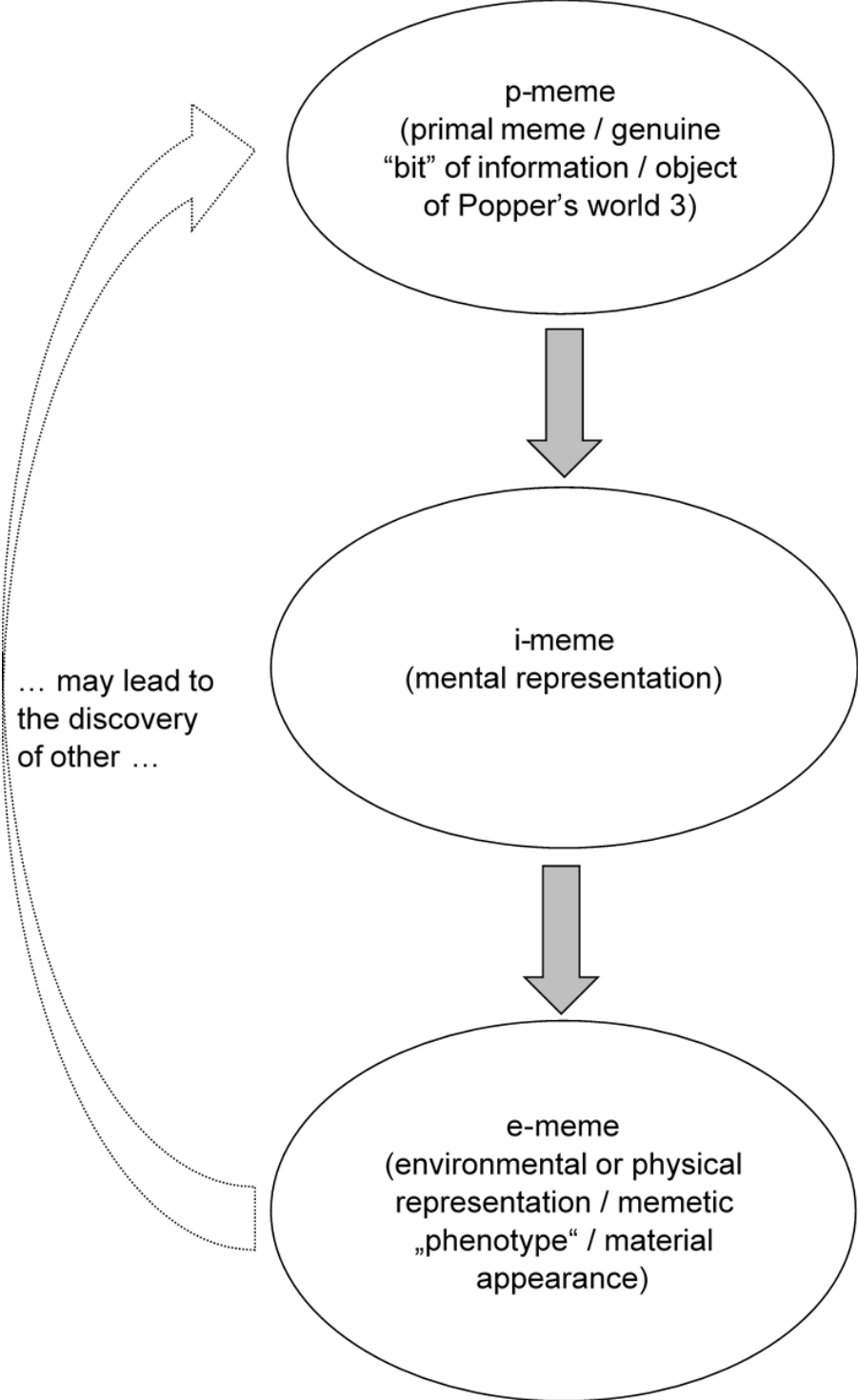


Figure 1: P-I-E dimensions of memes

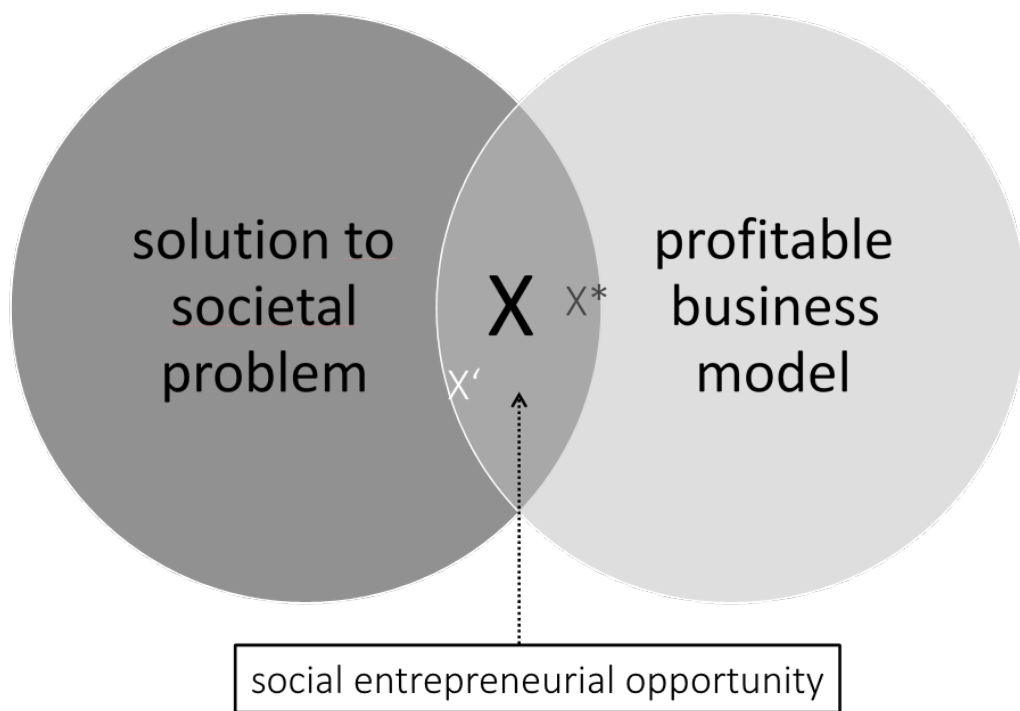


Figure 2: Social entrepreneurial opportunities as a cut set between social case and business case

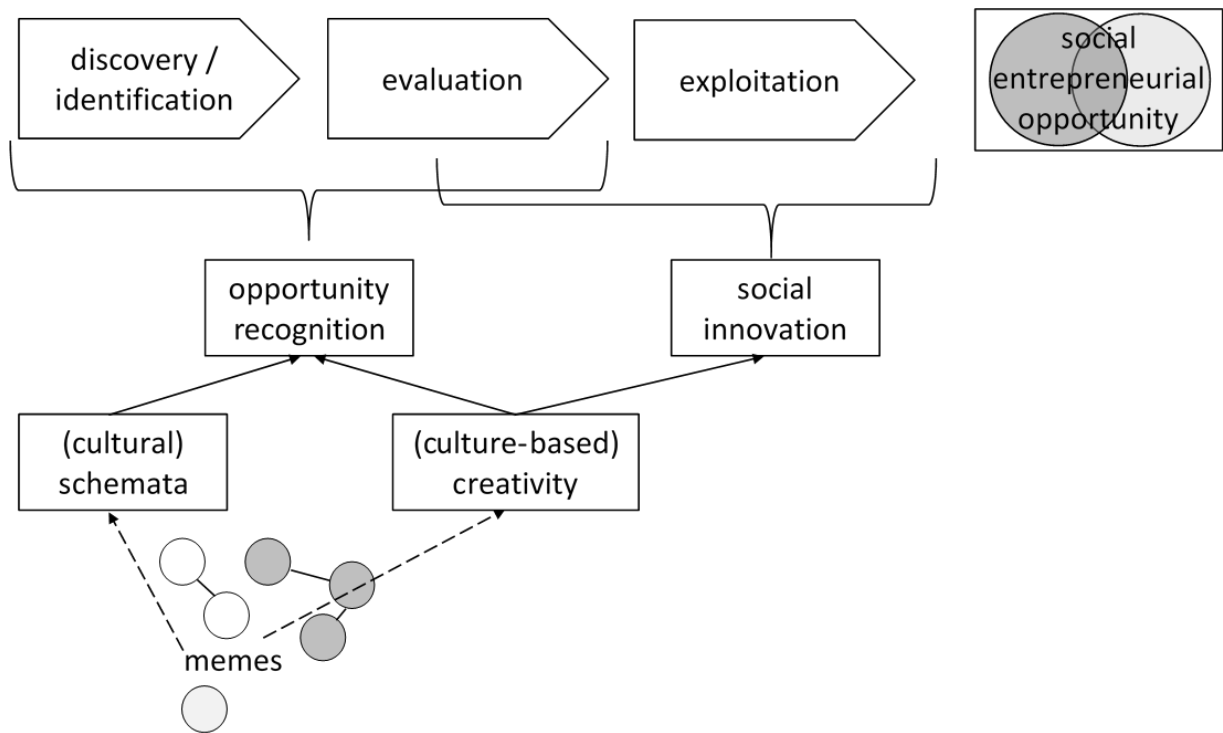


Figure 3: Depiction of the social entrepreneurial process

Table 1: Examples of variants of the “social entrepreneurship meme”

Concept/Approach	Verbalization (‘e-meme’) of SES Meme
Bottom of the Pyramid	<p>“By stimulating commerce and development at the bottom of the economic pyramid, MNCs could radically improve the lives of billions of people and help bring into being a more stable, less dangerous world. [...] In fact, many innovative companies – entrepreneurial outfits and large, established enterprises alike – are already serving the world’s poor in ways that generate strong revenues, lead to greater operating efficiencies, and uncover new sources of innovation.” (Prahalad/Hammond, 2002, p. 4)</p>
Creating Shared Value	<p>“The concept of shared value can be defined as policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social condition in the communities in which it operates.” (Porter/Kramer, 2011, p. 66)</p> <p>“Businesses create shared value when they can make a profit—create economic value—while simultaneously meeting important social needs or important social goals like improving environmental performance, reducing problems of health, improving nutrition, reducing disability, improving safety, and helping people save for retirement. The basic idea of shared value is that there are many opportunities in meeting these societal needs to actually create economic value in the process.” (Porter/Driver, 2012, p. 423)</p>
Strategic CSR	<p>“Each company can identify the particular set of societal problems that it is best equipped to help resolve and from which it can gain the greatest competitive benefit.” (Porter/Kramer, 2006, p. 92)</p> <p>“It is through strategic CSR that the company will make the most significant social impact and reap the greatest business benefits.” (Porter/Kramer 2006, p. 85)</p> <p>“Strategic CSR [...] is strategic philanthropy aimed at achieving strategic business goals while also promoting societal welfare. The company strives in this respect to identify activities and deeds that are believed to be good for business as well as for society.” (Jamali, 2007, p. 7)</p>
Responsible (Research and) Innovation	<p>“Responsible Research and Innovation is a transparent, interactive process by which societal actors and innovators become mutually responsive to each other with view to the (ethical) acceptability, sustainability and societal desirability of the innovation process and its marketable products (in order to allow a proper embedding of scientific and technological advances in our society).” (von Schomberg, 2013, p. 63)</p>
Sustainable Entrepreneurship	<p>“[S]ustainable Entrepreneurship will not only be a key driver for our common sustainable future but also for business success. Sustainable Entrepreneurship is a progressive management approach to generate new products and services, management systems, markets and organisational processes that increase the social as well as the environmental value of business activities.” (Schmidpeter/Weidinger, 2014, p. 2)</p>
Drucker’s “New Meaning of Corporate Social Responsibility”	<p>“[T]he proper ‘social responsibility’ of business is to tame the dragon, that is to turn a social problem into economic opportunity and economic benefit, into productive capacity, into human competence, into well-paid jobs, and into wealth.” (Drucker, 1984, p. 62)</p>