

## **MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF EMERGING TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study presents a systematic literature review of recent developments in social entrepreneurship, focusing on emerging trends, structural challenges, and future opportunities. Using a title-based search on the Emerald Insight database, we identified 15 peer-reviewed articles published between 2023 and 2025 that explicitly featured “social entrepreneurship” or “social entrepreneurs.” The analysis revealed three dominant themes: ecosystem and institutional support, sectoral expansion driven by sustainability and innovation, and behavioral and educational dynamics shaping social entrepreneurial actions. Despite growing academic attention, the field continues to face fragmented governance, funding limitations, and superficial stakeholder engagement. However, the increasing role of universities and the integration of digital platforms indicate promising directions. This review contributes by consolidating contemporary insights and offering a framework to guide future inquiry and policy in social entrepreneurship.

**Keywords:** Social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurs, ecosystem support, sustainability, institutional governance

**ABSTRAK:** Studi ini menyajikan tinjauan literatur sistematis tentang perkembangan terkini dalam kewirausahaan sosial, dengan fokus pada tren yang muncul, tantangan struktural, dan peluang masa depan. Dengan menggunakan pencarian berdasarkan judul pada basis data Emerald Insight, kami mengidentifikasi 15 artikel yang telah direview oleh rekan sejawat yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2023 dan 2025 dan secara eksplisit mencakup istilah “kewirausahaan sosial” atau “wirausahawan sosial.” Analisis menunjukkan tiga tema dominan: dukungan ekosistem dan institusional, perluasan sektor yang didorong oleh keberlanjutan dan inovasi, serta dinamika perilaku dan pendidikan

yang membentuk tindakan kewirausahaan sosial. Meskipun perhatian akademis semakin meningkat, bidang ini tetap menghadapi tata kelola yang terfragmentasi, keterbatasan pendanaan, dan keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan yang superficial. Namun, peran universitas yang semakin besar dan integrasi platform digital menandakan arah yang menjanjikan. Tinjauan ini berkontribusi dengan mengkonsolidasikan wawasan kontemporer dan menawarkan kerangka kerja untuk membimbing penelitian dan kebijakan masa depan dalam kewirausahaan sosial.

**Kata Kunci:** Kewirausahaan sosial, wirausahawan sosial, dukungan ekosistem, keberlanjutan, tata kelola institusional

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Social entrepreneurship (SE) is gaining significant academic and practical traction as a promising model to address social, economic, and environmental challenges through innovative, mission-driven ventures. These enterprises operate at the intersection of public benefit and financial sustainability, offering hybrid solutions that often outperform traditional philanthropic or state interventions (Turyakira et al., 2025; Maheshwari & Schrage, 2025). As emphasized by Price et al. (2023), SE is not only a tool for social innovation but also a response to growing societal demands for inclusive development.

Institutional environments strongly influence the trajectory and effectiveness of social enterprises. Regulatory policies, support systems, and normative frameworks create either enabling or constraining conditions for SE ecosystems (Aparicio et al., 2024; Muftugil-Yalcin et al., 2025). For instance, Yi and Qiu (2025) demonstrate how governance transitions from state-led to more participatory and networked models affect the structure and evolution of social entrepreneurship, particularly in emerging economies.

Access to funding is a longstanding barrier for social enterprises, especially during early-stage development. Recent research has highlighted the growing

relevance of equity crowdfunding as an inclusive financial mechanism for impact-driven ventures (Carè et al., 2025; Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2025). These platforms not only democratize investment access but also serve as tools for community engagement and trust-building, enabling social entrepreneurs to broaden their stakeholder base (Viswanath & Kumar, 2024).

Despite its progress, the field still grapples with the challenge of measuring and articulating social impact. Traditional financial metrics fall short of capturing intangible, long-term, and context-specific outcomes of SE initiatives. Muftugil-Yalcin and Klas (2025) reveal this gap in their study on food waste enterprises, while Taferner and Leitner (2025) suggest that performance indicators must be redefined to reflect equity, inclusion, and community well-being. Iodice and Bifulco (2025) further emphasize the importance of multidimensional frameworks in evaluating value creation.

The role of local governments and municipalities in supporting SE ecosystems is receiving increasing attention. While some cities actively co-develop programs with social entrepreneurs, others adopt a passive stance that undermines SE growth (Muftugil-Yalcin et al., 2025; Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2025). In their study of higher education's contribution to SE, Ramírez-Montoya et al. (2025) argue that institutional collaboration is vital for ecosystem maturity and social impact scalability.

Cultural and tourism-based social enterprises demonstrate how SE can generate non-economic value such as heritage preservation and local identity reinforcement. Nikraftar and Farahani (2025) examine how tourism entrepreneurs act as cultural value creators, while Iodice and Bifulco (2025) show how arts and cultural sectors embrace SE to address societal fragmentation. Nadkarni et al. (2024) also highlight how narratives of "doing good" are central to positioning SE as a credible force in creative industries.

Social entrepreneurship is also deeply influenced by personal motivations and education pathways. Research by Viswanath and Reddy (2024) uncovers how intrinsic values, lived experiences, and empathy often drive opportunity recognition among social entrepreneurs. At the same time, institutions of higher learning play a strategic role in cultivating SE competencies through co-creation and predictive learning environments (Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2025; Viswanath & Kumar, 2024).

While a growing number of studies have explored individual components of SE, the field still lacks a comprehensive synthesis that consolidates emerging patterns and thematic priorities. This review addresses that gap by mapping recent contributions to SE literature, including those focused on funding, impact measurement, cultural identity, participatory governance, and institutional roles (Price et al., 2023; Maheshwari & Schrage, 2025; Atukpa et al., 2025). By consolidating evidence across global and sectoral contexts, this study offers a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape of social entrepreneurship and its future research directions.

## **A. METHODS**

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) method to explore the thematic landscape, current trends, and research gaps in the field of social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs. The review strictly includes scholarly works that contain either "social entrepreneurship" or "social entrepreneurs" in the title, ensuring that the selected articles directly and explicitly engage with the central topic of inquiry. This focused strategy strengthens the thematic alignment of the review and guarantees conceptual precision.

### **1. Search Strategy and Selection Criteria**

The literature search for this systematic review was conducted exclusively using the Emerald Insight database. To ensure thematic focus and conceptual

clarity, the keyword filters applied were “social entrepreneurship” and “social entrepreneurs” within the title field only. This approach was chosen to capture scholarly works that explicitly center on the constructs of social entrepreneurship and the role of social entrepreneurs in their analyses.

The inclusion criteria were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2023 and 2025, ensuring that the review reflects the most current academic developments in theory, policy, and practice. Articles were selected if they (1) had one of the specified keywords in the title, (2) addressed social entrepreneurship as a primary focus, and (3) were published in English. Editorials, book reviews, conference abstracts, and non-peer-reviewed articles were excluded. This search strategy yielded a focused yet diverse set of articles spanning different regions and disciplinary lenses within the Emerald database.

## **2. Data Analysis Approach**

Each selected article was analyzed through a qualitative thematic coding process, focusing on recurring constructs such as institutional support, impact measurement, funding mechanisms, policy frameworks, and community engagement. A narrative synthesis approach was used to identify conceptual linkages between studies and to uncover contrasting or complementary perspectives. Given the diverse geographic origins of the selected papers from Southeast Asia (Maheshwari & Schrage, 2025) to East Africa (Turyakira et al., 2025) and Europe (Muftugil-Yalcin & Klas, 2025), a cross-regional comparison was also incorporated to contextualize the findings within broader global trends in social entrepreneurship development.

## **3. Validity and Limitations**

By limiting article selection to those that feature social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs in the title, the review ensures conceptual clarity and

focus. However, this narrow scope may exclude relevant studies that address the topic substantively but label it differently. Furthermore, the reliance on English-language journals may bias the regional representation of research, particularly underrepresenting work published in non-English-speaking contexts. Nevertheless, this methodological rigor offers a highly targeted review, suitable for identifying both theoretical consistencies and emerging debates specifically within the evolving discourse of social entrepreneurship and the role of social entrepreneurs.

## **B. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This systematic literature review identifies and categorizes the most prominent developments, obstacles, and potential within the evolving field of social entrepreneurship. By analyzing 15 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2023 and 2025, this study maps the emerging trends, structural barriers, and innovation opportunities that define the contemporary landscape of social entrepreneurship.

### **1. Ecosystem and Institutional Support**

A supportive ecosystem is essential for the scalability and sustainability of social entrepreneurship. Several studies (Muftugil-Yalcin et al., 2025; Turyakira et al., 2025) underscore the pivotal role of municipalities and government agencies in creating enabling environments for social entrepreneurs. However, public institutions often fail to provide integrated policies or infrastructure, resulting in fragmented support systems.

Institutional barriers further constrain the development of the field. Aparicio et al. (2024) emphasize that institutional quality directly affects individual well-being and entrepreneurial outcomes. Muftugil-Yalcin, Verver, and Theeuwes (2025) add that local governments frequently lack coordination

and strategic commitment to nurturing the social entrepreneurship ecosystem, revealing governance gaps that hinder effective implementation.

#### Innovation, Sectoral Expansion, and Sustainability

Social entrepreneurship is expanding its influence beyond traditional domains. Iodice and Bifulco (2025) demonstrate how social entrepreneurs are transforming the cultural sector by combining heritage preservation with inclusive value creation. In tourism, Nikraftar and Farahani (2025) explore how social entrepreneurs generate shared economic and social value through localized, community-oriented experiences.

At the core of this evolution is a growing emphasis on sustainability. Maheshwari and Schrage (2025) highlight how social entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia address climate and inequality challenges. In Europe, Muftugil-Yalcin and Klas (2025) detail food waste interventions, while Carè et al. (2025) point to the use of equity crowdfunding as an eco-conscious financing mechanism. Nonetheless, Nadkarni et al. (2024) caution that chasing financial returns may compromise social missions, illustrating the delicate balance between purpose and growth.

## **2. Behavioral Drivers and Educational Foundations**

The internal motivations and cognitive strategies of social entrepreneurs are central to the field's advancement. Price et al. (2023) reveal that social entrepreneurs employ strategic sensemaking under conditions of uncertainty, while Viswanath and Reddy (2024) highlight key psychological drivers such as empathy and responsiveness.

Education systems are emerging as catalysts for fostering social entrepreneurial mindsets. Ramírez-Montoya et al. (2025) propose co-creation learning models and predictive approaches in higher education to promote student engagement in social ventures. Similarly, Viswanath and Kumar (2024) validate an instrument for assessing students' intentions to

pursue careers in social entrepreneurship. These findings emphasize the transformative role of education in embedding social innovation values and building the next generation of changemakers.

This systematic review reveals how the field of social entrepreneurship is undergoing a significant transformation, marked by dynamic trends, persistent structural challenges, and emerging opportunities. The findings contribute to a growing body of literature that frames social entrepreneurship not only as a vehicle for addressing social and environmental issues but also as an evolving institutional and economic force shaped by multi-level actors and systems.

One of the most prominent emerging trends is the growing institutionalization of social entrepreneurship across sectors. Studies by Iodice and Bifulco (2025) and Nikraftar and Farahani (2025) show that social entrepreneurs are increasingly penetrating areas such as culture and tourism, sectors traditionally underexplored in entrepreneurial research. This expansion underscores the flexibility and adaptability of social entrepreneurship models, aligning with Price et al. (2023), who highlight the strategic sensemaking capabilities of social entrepreneurs navigating complex social realities. Furthermore, Maheshwari and Schrage (2025) and Muftugil-Yalcin and Klas (2025) document a strong shift toward sustainability-driven missions, reflecting broader global movements toward environmental responsibility. These trends collectively indicate a redefinition of value creation that transcends profit maximization.

However, these advancements are not without challenges. A recurring theme across the literature is the fragmented nature of institutional support. Although municipalities and public agencies recognize the relevance of social entrepreneurship (Muftugil-Yalcin et al., 2025; Turyakira et al., 2025), they often fall short in delivering coordinated and strategic policy backing. This

aligns with Aparicio et al. (2024), who emphasize the role of institutional quality in determining entrepreneurial success. Moreover, access to sustainable funding continues to hinder long-term scalability, as raised by Carè et al. (2025), despite the innovative use of mechanisms like equity crowdfunding. These obstacles suggest that without stronger institutional coherence and financing pathways, the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship may remain underutilized.

Opportunities lie in strengthening the ecosystem through education and collaborative governance. As shown by Ramírez-Montoya et al. (2025) and Viswanath and Kumar (2024), higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets and embed social innovation values at formative stages. This complements findings by Viswanath and Reddy (2024), who identify empathy and opportunity recognition as behavioral enablers of social entrepreneurship. These insights support calls for integrating social entrepreneurship curricula into education systems, thereby laying the foundation for future impact leaders.

Another important implication involves measurement and accountability. Despite the increasing role of social entrepreneurship in addressing grand societal challenges, Muftugil-Yalcin and Klas (2025) and Carè et al. (2025) note that consistent frameworks for evaluating impact remain underdeveloped. Without standardized metrics or effective governance mechanisms, it becomes difficult to assess performance or attract long-term investment. This gap reinforces the need for new institutional collaborations that establish coherent standards for social value measurement and reporting.

Moreover, social entrepreneurship is increasingly shaped by digital tools and platform-based strategies. Ramírez-Montoya et al. (2025) introduce predictive analytics in the educational context, showing how technology can

enhance entrepreneurial learning and co-creation processes. Carè et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of technology in democratizing access to capital via crowdfunding. These developments highlight the transformative capacity of digitalization in expanding both reach and inclusivity of social entrepreneurial efforts, especially in under-resourced communities.

Finally, this review underscores that future scholarship should not only document success stories but also critically interrogate the structural constraints within which social entrepreneurship operates. While innovation, commitment, and mission orientation are central to social entrepreneurs, they cannot substitute for system-level alignment. Policymakers, funders, and educators must co-create enabling environments that reduce fragmentation and amplify impact. In doing so, social entrepreneurship can become a robust mechanism for inclusive development and institutional transformation across regions.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

This systematic review has mapped the current landscape of social entrepreneurship by synthesizing recent scholarly work published between 2023 and 2025. It reveals that while social entrepreneurship is expanding in scope and influence, spanning diverse sectors such as education, tourism, environment, and cultural heritage, it continues to face persistent structural and institutional challenges. These include fragmented public support systems, limited funding access, and a lack of cohesive policies and standardized impact measurement tools. The review also underscores the importance of embedding sustainability and digital innovation within social entrepreneurship models and highlights the emerging role of higher education institutions in shaping future social entrepreneurs.

The findings suggest that a multi-stakeholder approach is essential for advancing the field, where governments, academia, investors, and communities collaborate to strengthen ecosystems, enhance institutional alignment, and promote more meaningful citizen engagement. While the reviewed literature provides valuable insights into emerging trends and opportunities, it also highlights the need for deeper empirical work, particularly in underrepresented regions and marginalized communities.

However, this review is limited by its reliance on a narrow set of databases, specifically Emerald Insight, and a title-based search strategy using predefined keywords, which may have excluded relevant studies that address social entrepreneurship more implicitly. Future research could benefit from broader search criteria, inclusion of grey literature, and cross-regional comparisons to further enrich the understanding of the field. Despite these limitations, the study offers a timely synthesis that can guide researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of social entrepreneurship globally.

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