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Social entrepreneurship as field encroachment: how a neoliberal social movement constructed a new field

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Abstract

In explaining the emergence of new strategic action fields, in which social movements' and organizations' logic, rules and strategies are forged, inter-field dynamics remain under-explored. The case of Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (SEE) shows how new fields can emerge through field encroachment, whereby shifts among overlapping fields create structural opportunities for the ascendency of new fields, which may adapt logics borrowed from adjacent fields to construct legitimacy. SEE leveraged the 1980s' shift between first-order market and state fields to encroach on the political strategies of community organizing, birthing a neoliberal social movement to create a new field addressing social problems using market-based, profit-motivated approaches. With its borrowed veneer of justice, SEE rapidly developed a high academic and public profile over just three decades, despite little evidence its approach to solving social problems works. In encroaching on proven political strategies for solving social problems, it may further undermine democratic practices.

Key words: social movements, organizational theory, nonprofit organizations, embeddedness, inequality, neoliberalism

JEL classification: Z13 economic sociology, P16 political economy, L31 nonprofit institutions, NGOs, social entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Social enterprise and entrepreneurship (hereafter, SEE) have rapidly become entrenched in the USA and around the world, operating across a broad spectrum of public policy-related fields, from economic development and urban planning, to health and education policy. Universities have created new programs and endowed chairs, enrolling passionate students in new SEE

courses. When Harvard established its 'Social Enterprise Initiative' in 1993, it was the first such formally named program. Today, nearly 100 institutions of higher learning, clustered around other elite schools such as Stanford, Yale, Penn, Columbia, Berkeley and Duke, house formally named initiatives on social enterprise, social entrepreneurship or both. Beyond the academy, this approach resonates with market-based models favored by private for profit and nonprofit firms, committed to 'do well by doing good' (Henry, 2015). Brilliant 'entrepreneurship', as opposed to effective political leadership, is hyped as the sexy career of this generation, and corporations and foundations now award prestigious prizes and major funding to start-ups bearing the SEE imprimatur. Nearly $1.6 billion in foundation funding alone has been awarded to SEE projects since 2003.

The extraordinary and recent growth of SEE presents two interrelated empirical enigmas we address in this article: how did SEE, unknown in either the academy or public domain just three decades ago, become so widespread and develop so quickly? And second, how did SEE gain legitimacy as a new field, and with what consequences? In particular, three aspects of SEE's rapid growth and legitimation make for a compelling empirical puzzle. First, it has developed currency at elite universities, which are typically slow to embrace change. Second, it has emerged as a field, despite lacking clear conceptual definitions or well-defined field boundaries. And finally, SEE has failed to produce evidence that its approach to solving social problems works, making its acceptance and legitimacy even more puzzling.

The theoretical questions that arise out of SEE's growth can help extend organizational scholars' efforts to develop a robust theoretical framework to explain the emergence of new strategic action fields[1], their relationship to adjacent fields, and processes of change that cut across them. These questions can also help expand our understanding of the relationship between fields and social movements. In this article, we present evidence to show that SEE is a social movement that created a new field. SEE's explosive growth and popularity results from a process by which skilled social actors exploited a shift between first-order fields (the market advanced and the state retreated, resulting in neoliberal entrenchment), and borrowed logics and practices from existing civil society fields (community and political organizing, nonprofits and cooperatives) to legitimize the emerging SEE field.

The emergence and 'structuration' (Giddens, 1979) of new fields are sporadic and produce intermittent data. SEE therefore provides a unique, data-rich opportunity to further our understanding of these processes and their broader consequences. Our analysis yields three critical findings and insights. First, we show how SEE was forged through a process we call *field encroachment*—a particular type of field emergence. Rather than completely displacing existing fields or occupying unorganized social space, new fields may encroach on existing, overlapping fields, by borrowing their logics to forge a 'hybrid' field. Second, the case of SEE suggests both material and ideological resources are required for a new field to emerge and cohere. A shift in material conditions (field shifts or ruptures) allows a new field to emerge, but skilled social actors must construct legitimacy for a new field in order for it to cohere and grow. One of our primary contributions is therefore to illuminate the importance of legitimation to processes of field emergence. And in the case of field encroachment, legitimation comes from appropriating the logics of preexisting fields: the original actors who

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1 Here we adopt Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) broad definition of fields as "constructed social orders that define an arena within which a set of consensually defined and mutually attuned actors vie for advantage" (p. 64).

promoted SEE borrowed the logic and practices of community organizing,[2] nonprofits and cooperatives, and leveraged the support of foundations and universities to provide SEE with financial and intellectual legitimacy. Third, in tracing SEE's origins and location within a hierarchy of overlapping fields, we build on both Fligstein and McAdam (2011, 2012), and Habermas (1984) to identify three first-order fields in which all others today are contained: state, market and civil society. Such a framework may enhance our understanding of how social change occurs.

We also examine the normative repercussions of SEE's legitimation, specifically its political consequences and implications for social change. By encroaching on established fields, SEE eclipses proven, effective strategies for solving major social problems, in particular the political approach to organizing communities of interest (Alinsky, 1971; Baker, 1972; Piven and Cloward, 1979, 1992; Skocpol *et al.*, 2000; Ganz, 2009). A political approach casts major social problems as power problems, requiring collective action by constituency-based organizations, initiated by organizers and leaders, and most often mediated by a democratic state (Tarrow, 1988; Rueschemeyer *et al.*, 1992; Olson, 1993; Foley and Edwards, 1996). SEE's implicit market-based theory of social change privileges economic and private solutions rooted in innovation, while ignoring the power relationships that actually stymie social change. It promotes individual and collective exit from the public sphere, instead of advancing the use of voice—via collective political action—to generate the power to mobilize public institutions to solve power problems, in particular problems of inequality. This, in turn, has significant implications for political leadership development and public participation. SEE deflects energy, focus, capacity and attention away from collective public action to individual private action, treating political problems as if they were knowledge problems. In this way, SEE is an avenue through which neoliberal tenets continue to 'undo the demos' (Brown, 2015) and disrupt democracy. Analyzing SEE as an encroaching field illuminates how these dynamics have been able to take root. By borrowing logics from community organizing, as well as from nonprofits and cooperatives, SEE constructs a veneer of social justice and change that undermines the capacity for collective action on which democracy is based, especially among young people at leading educational institutions, from which the next generation of public leadership might be drawn.[3]

2. Theorizing strategic action fields through SEE: encroachment, hierarchies and legitimacy

Although social movements often play a critical role in constructing new fields (the labor movement and unions, Voss and Sherman, 2000), and undermining existing fields (the abolition movement and slavery, Stewart, 1976), they are generally not analyzed using a field approach. The successful emergence and growth of SEE provides an empirical case that

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2   We use the term "community organizing" or 'community/political organizing' to refer to a set of fairly consistent and stable actions and strategies, often referred to as 'community organizing', 'political organizing', or simply 'organizing'.

3   This approach resonates with that initiated by Teach for America and comparable enterprises—with quite similar funding sources—whose trajectory is quite similar and which has fueled the ranks of market-based, anti-union school reformers.
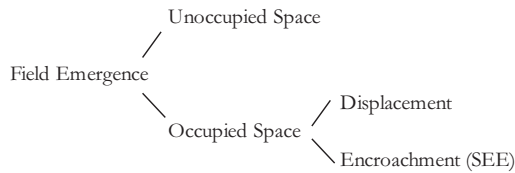
Figure 1. Processes of field emergence.

enables us to push beyond the current limits of field theory, which lack analyses of the dynamic elements of how movements construct new fields. We use the SEE case to examine how social movement actors can construct new fields in the wake of ruptures across existing fields, by borrowing their logics and strategies to construct legitimacy for the new field.

2.1 Field emergence through encroachment

Existing theory focuses on the creation of new fields out of unorganized or unoccupied social space by skilled actors, most often during a period of crisis (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). But fields can also emerge out of occupied or organized spaces. Field *displacement*, which occurs when a new field emerges whole cloth and wipes out or supplants another, is one way in which this may happen (e.g. agrarian farming settlements effectively displaced hunter–gatherer social structures). But the SEE case illuminates a second process by which a new field can emerge out of an occupied space: field *encroachment* (see Figure 1). This occurs when a new field is created out of organized space, where destabilized fields overlap.

Rather than supplant preexisting fields, the encroaching field adopts key elements of their logic and strategies, giving the new field and the organizations within it a mixed appearance, one organizational scholars might call 'hybrid' in nature (Jay, 2013). At the micro–meso scale, organizational scholars have examined how specific hybrid organizations have managed competing institutional logics and pressures (Pache and Santos 2010, 2013; Jay, 2013). We extend this work by examining the case of the emergence of an entire hybrid field, which is ultimately a *macro* scale phenomenon. Skilled social actors, operating within and across organizations in the new field to build its macro structure, function as bricoleurs, inserting novel new logics while also borrowing from existing, overlapping fields [e.g. the modern university encroached upon the field space previously occupied by monasteries and the church, cf. Durkheim, 1904 (1938)]. Critically, the new field can coexist in tension with the fields upon which it encroaches, as it does in the case of SEE. After a period of rupture, adjacent fields may jointly occupy the same social space, in a state of temporary settlement. Field coexistence serves to distinguish encroachment not only from displacement, but also from what one might call field 'co-optation'. Co-optation implies an assimilation of logics in order to subsume another field. Encroachment is a different process, whereby the extant fields from which the new field borrows remain intact. They are not co-opted. The nonprofit field continues to exist, for example—its logics are not subsumed.

These distinctions between different types of field emergence are also suggestive of the parallels between field theory as articulated by organizational scholars, and new institutionalism as applied in political science (cf. Kluttz and Fligstein, 2016). Both fields and institutions can be displaced; they can also be encroached upon. We suggest that field

encroachment may be an analog to the institutionalists' notion of *layering*, in which a new policy or institution is constructed on top of coexisting ones.[4]

2.2 Field hierarchies and first-order fields

Organizational scholars recognize that new fields usually emerge from ruptures or shifts across fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012), and that overlapping fields often provide points of leverage for social movement actors to create change (Evans and Kay, 2008; Furnari, 2016; Liu, 2017; Kay and Evans, 2018). We expand upon this work by examining the dynamics between hierarchical fields, and distinguishing between first-order and second-order fields.

Fligstein and McAdam (2012) consider how fields can be interconnected (distant and proximate, dependent and interdependent, nested and hierarchical), and where sites of stability and stasis across them might lie. In their conceptualization, fields are embedded in other fields, like nested Russian dolls. Building explicitly on Gidden's (1990)[5] concept of time–space distanciation, they also note that 'at this point in history, it is probably the case that all organized social space can be reached via connections through other social space' (p. 61). If this is true, then there are likely one or more first-order or primary fields, meaning those in which all other second and third-order fields are embedded. Although Fligstein and McAdam (2012) do not explicitly articulate this hierarchy or identify first-order fields, they provide the conceptual foundation for our formulation. They distinguish between state and nonstate fields, and note that the state 'provides opportunities for actors in the economy and society to create new social space' (p. 88), and this is a reciprocal process. A primary importance for state, economy, and society as first-order fields is implied.

Utilizing a Habermasian conceptual frame (1984, 1987), we build on Fligstein and McAdam's implicit notion of field hierarchy in our analysis of SEE to identify three first-order fields that contain all social, political and economic phenomena: the state, market and civil society[6] (see Figure 2). Each of these three fields has its own logic, structure, rules and discursive elements.[7] Social movements can therefore be conceptualized as a group of organized actors in a first-order field (usually civil society) that mobilize in relationship to one or both of the other first-order fields (the state and/or market). This includes SEE, a social movement to construct a neoliberal, market-based field.

Unpacking the relationship between hierarchical fields is critical to understanding not only how new fields emerge, but also more general processes of social change. The SEE case reveals that what happens *between* fields affects what happens *within* them. Indeed, it shows how a rupture or shift among first-order fields (the state and market) can help catalyze the emergence of new second-order and nested fields (SEE), and shape how they are constructed. Prior to SEE's emergence, at least three second-order fields existed at the interstices of the

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4   Institutionalists frame evolution and change as occurring through four processes of displacement, layering, drift and conversion of existing institutions and policies (Schickler, 1999; Hacker, 2004; Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

5   And implicitly on Harvey's (1989) concept of time-space compression.

6   Prior to the rise of modernity and the development of the modern state, there may have been other first-order fields, but in our conceptualization, these three fields contain all others, including SEE.

7   We do not fully develop a theorization of these first-order fields in this article, though we believe it may be a fruitful avenue for future research which might usefully connect meso and macro-level theorization.

A Treaty of Detroit – Field Overlap Configuration
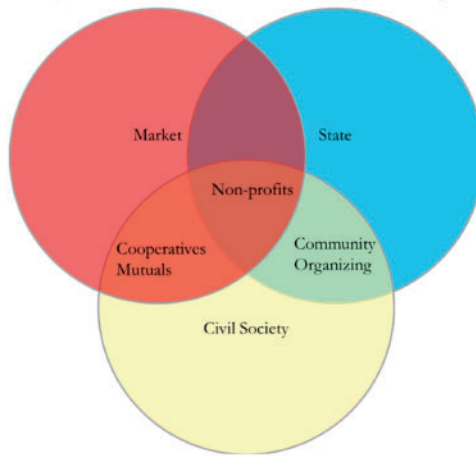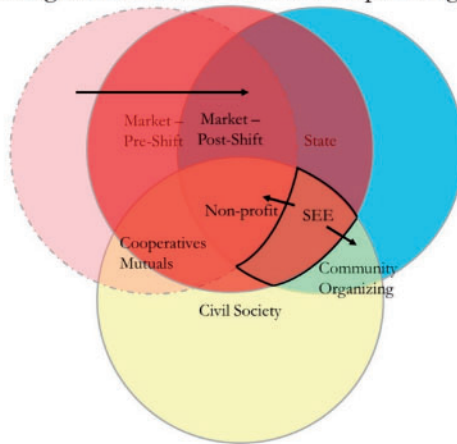

B Washington Consensus– Field Overlap Configuration

Figure 2. Field overlap configuration. (**A**) Treaty of Detroit. (**B**) Washington Consensus. (Colour online)

market, state and civil society fields: community/political organizing, nonprofits,[8] and cooperatives/mutuals[9] (see Figure 2). Each of these fields also had its own logic and strategies.[10] Social movements generally organized civil society to make claims on the state in the community organizing field, using a political approach to social change (e.g. the universal suffrage movement). Nonprofit organizations also occupied their own field, delivering public and social services, sometimes through the market, often with the state's assistance. Actors in the cooperative movement, meanwhile, also created their own field, leveraging social solidarity within civil society to organize and deliver products and services in the market through a particular organizational form, the cooperative enterprise (Schneiberg *et al.*, 2008; Spicer, 2018).

In the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, the political–economic dynamics that had prevailed after World War II and culminated in the Treaty of Detroit in 1950 began to shift. This shift, analyzed[11] extensively by other scholars (Levy and Temin, 2007; Hacker and Pierson, 2016), reflected the advance of the market and retreat of the state as the institutional arrangements associated with the Treaty of Detroit era gave way to the Washington Consensus and neoliberal entrenchment. This was characterized by the growth of market ideology, concentrations of private wealth and efforts to eviscerate government capacity through 'starve the beast' fiscal strategies (Dacin *et al.*, 2011). This shift among first-order state and market fields, which involved a 'legitimation crisis' (Habermas, 1973) for the state as it attempted to manage the economic 'steering problems' of Fordism (Bell, 1976; Aglietta, 1979), also created an institutional opening among second-order fields, which we locate between the community/political organizing and nonprofit fields. These fields had also been destabilized by the broader shift in first-order fields. During the 1980s, funding for a host of public and nonprofit anti-poverty programs, most notably revenue sharing programs with cities and the Community Development Block Grant program, were slashed dramatically (O'Connor, 1995; DeFilippis *et al.*, 2010). The federal government placed new limits on the political and organizing/advocacy activities of community and nonprofit entities receiving government and other tax-exempt funds (Paget, 1999). Meanwhile, lower tax rates led to

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8 In the USA, this includes the full range of IRS Section501(c) organizations including most philanthropic foundations.

9 By cooperatives we mean enterprises and organizations that are cooperatively and/or mutually owned. For example, the Rochdale consumer cooperative movement (Holyoake, 1900), mutual insurers, credit unions and agricultural cooperatives are all part of this sector.

10 We note that these fields also emerged during a prior moment of first-order field shifts, Polanyi's (1944) Great Transformation, in which the embeddedness between the market and social relations was inverted. The Great Transformation can be recast in terms of field theory. In Polanyi's Great Transformation, the liberal market advanced on the organized social relations in the field of civil society, during a period in which the welfare state was in its infancy as a field. Into the opening created by this first-order field shift of the market advancing on civil society, Victorian liberalism and the self-help movements of the nineteenth century birthed the modern nonprofit and cooperative fields from previously unorganized field space.

11 See Levy and Temin (2007) for analysis of the shift from 'Treaty of Detroit' arrangements, which they use to refer to the higher taxes, minimum wage, and strong unions that characterized state-market relations in the post-war era, which gave way to the neoliberal 'Washington Consensus' with Reagan-Thatcher attacks on these relations, resulting in cut welfare spending and taxes, deregulation and weakened unions.

higher private sector earnings, some of which were funneled to philanthropic foundations, whose asset levels reached new highs (Lenkowsky, 2004).

The void produced by these shifts did not go unfilled. Highly skilled social actors stepped into the breach to construct a new and hybrid field that borrowed from the community/political organizing and nonprofit fields (see Figure 2), as well as from cooperatives. Such structural opportunities are common (McAdam and Boudet, 2012). But to leverage this structural opportunity, SEE's founders had to construct a meaningful ideology with which to attract resources and adherents.

2.3 Constructing legitimacy in encroaching fields

Although a rupture[12] in first-order fields—which we might think of as reflecting a shift in material conditions—may be a necessary condition for a new field to emerge, the SEE case suggests it is not a sufficient one. Ideological shifts are also critical to the emergence of new fields. Social movement scholars have examined how legitimation processes (solidified through framing, leadership, strategies and resources) are critical to social movement mobilization and how they can impact movement success and failure (Snow and Benford, 1988; McCann, 1994; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Ganz, 2000; McAdam *et al.*, 2003; Kay, 2011). Organizational scholars have also long identified the importance of legitimacy to organizations and institutions (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Singh *et al.*, 1986; Scott and Meyer, 1991; Podolny, 2001; Deephouse and Carter, 2005), as well as to fields. As Kluttz and Fligstein (2016) note, as fields develop and undergo structuration (Giddens, 1979), 'organizations within the field tend to become isomorphic, meaning that they become more similar. They do this because the imperative of an institutionalized field is to appear legitimate (Suchman, 1995).' (Kluttz and Fligstein, 2016, p. 9).

But from where and how is legitimacy constructed in an emerging field? In tracing SEE's origins and subsequent structuration, we show how skilled social actors (Fligstein, 2001) played a critical role in constructing legitimacy for the new field by developing a social movement to promote it at universities and foundations, which allowed it to thrive and grow. The type of legitimacy required for a particular field will vary. In general, however, legitimacy is necessary for building a network of participation, attracting and maintaining financial resources, and establishing recognition and support from key actors and organizations (e.g. the state, religious institutions, universities, among many others). But in cases of field encroachment, SEE shows how skilled social actors may appropriate the logics, practices and discourses of preexisting fields in order to construct legitimacy. For the SEE case, its progenitors borrowed the logic and practices of community/political organizing, nonprofits and cooperatives, and leveraged the support of foundations and universities to provide SEE with financial and intellectual legitimacy; they adopted market logic, implemented recruitment practices at universities and utilized discourses of social change. The varieties of borrowed logics, practices and discourses will necessarily vary widely across different kinds of fields. But ultimately, shifts and ruptures among first order fields (or preexisting fields)[13] create opportunities for skilled social actors to borrow from their logics, in order to construct and legitimize emergent hybrid fields.

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12 Or 'critical juncture' as institutionalists might call it, cf. Collier and Collier, 1991; Pierson, 2004.
13 We assume this process is not exclusive to first-order fields; it could occur among any set of fields of origin, whether they be first or second-order fields.

3. Research design and methods

Reflecting its emergent and hybrid field status, SEE remains poorly defined by academics and practitioners (Nicholls, 2010). Concepts such as states, markets, public services, non-profits and cooperatives, etc. all have historically consistent meanings, based on consensus across multiple domains as to their common and shared characteristics. The concepts of social entrepreneurship and enterprise lack such consistent and clear definitions, necessitating the development of a careful identification strategy. Defourny and Borzaga (2001), attempting to provide clarity, defined social enterprise as meeting four economic and entrepreneurial criteria, and five social ones[14] (pp. 17, 18). But a textbook created for the new wave of university courses about SEE (Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2015), confirms there is no standard definition, noting that the term 'means different things to different people' (p. 47). And as some European countries have moved to legally define the content and practices of organizations using the SEE label, Kenny and Taylor (2016) have noted that the European version of social enterprise is 'not so entrenched in neoliberal thought' (p. 190), with different national definitions emergent (Kerlin, 2009 2013; Monroe-White *et al.*, 2015). Among scholars studying SEE, there is thus little consensus on what specific phenomena or activities (e.g. projects, programs) SEE encompasses and includes.

Nonetheless, many organizations self-identify and adopt the SEE label. We therefore use the SEE label as a way to identify SEE-related organizations and activities and induce their shared and common characteristics. Specifically, to induce the core characteristics of SEE, we tracked the rise, development and diffusion of the SEE terms, which we then used to identify its field structure and logic. Focusing on the relation of the SEE terms to other fields by borrowing from the logic of process tracing (Bennett and Checkel, 2014), we engage in *field tracing* to identify the historical origins and development of the field. We developed a four-part approach in which we: (a) temporally isolate the emergence and diffusion of the SEE terms; (b) identify its emergent field structure and design, that is, its institutional and organizational elements; (c) trace the process by which the field's principal actors and agents constructed the field elements; and (d) induce SEE's field logic, both internally and with respect to neighboring fields.

First, we measured references to social enterprise, social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneur(s) in three indexed media sources: the *New York Times*, in the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) WorldCat global library book and article database, and in the Google N-gram book content search engine (see Figure 3). As a fourth source, we

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14 The four former specifications include the consistent production of goods and services; a high degree of autonomy; a significant level of economic risk; and a minimum amount of paid work. The social dimensions include: an explicit aim to benefit the community; an initiative launched by a group of citizens; a decision-making power not based on capital ownership; a participatory nature, which involves those affected by the activity; and limited profit distribution. Kerlin (2013) has since argued that while the terms social enterprise and social entrepreneurship are ill defined, this is to a degree a reflection of the fact that they are uniquely understood depending on the social context in which they are embedded. Further muddying the waters, the term 'social innovation' is sometimes used to apply to the actions undertaken by SEE, but this term has a much broader and even messier definition (Mulgan, 2012).
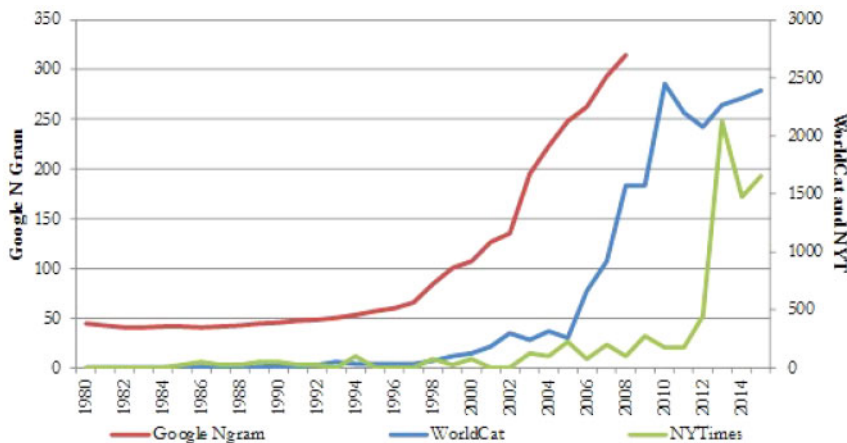
Figure 3. Media use of social enterprise and social entrepreneur(ship) Google NGram, WorldCat, New York Times, 1980–2015. Indexed, year 2000 = 100. (Colour online)

Source: Authors' Research.

analyzed the Foundation Center's directory of 5.9 million foundation grants since 2003, to identify grants which specify or include the SEE terms ($n = 8217$). We supplemented these data with a review of the social enterprise literature and with standard historical document search databases and engines to provide qualitative context and historiographical detail of the timing of the SEE terms' emergence.

Second, based on the results in the first stage of analysis, we tracked and identified organizations and institutions that actively use the terms social enterprise, social entrepreneur(s) and social entrepreneurship. We then trace the current usage backwards, over time, to isolate its institutional origins and development. To trace SEE's field origins and structuration, we used web-crawling and scraping techniques,[15] historical documents from online article archives (Web of Science, OCLC, JSTOR), and a funding database (Foundation Center), to construct data-sets which allowed us to track and identify which types of institutions and organizations incubated and developed the SEE terms into a coherent, recognizable concept and field. We sorted and categorized each web and archival reference to SEE, based on the type of institution (e.g. university, foundation, government, private corporation) found to be engaging with the SEE terms. This revealed that universities, foundations and entrepreneurial support organizations (ESOs) accounted for most of the field's major organizations. Based on this finding, we developed simple descriptive statistical time series to show SEE's rise from 1993 to 2016, including the number of university degree programs and initiatives dedicated to SEE, and the number of SEE incubators/ESOs (see Figure 4). Using the Foundation Center's directory of 5.9 million foundation grants since 2003, we also constructed a database of the top SEE grant recipients from

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15   This included advanced key word searches of select top-level domain-name searches, scrapes of online data-sets and use of historical web data search tools, such as the Internet Archive/Wayback Machine.
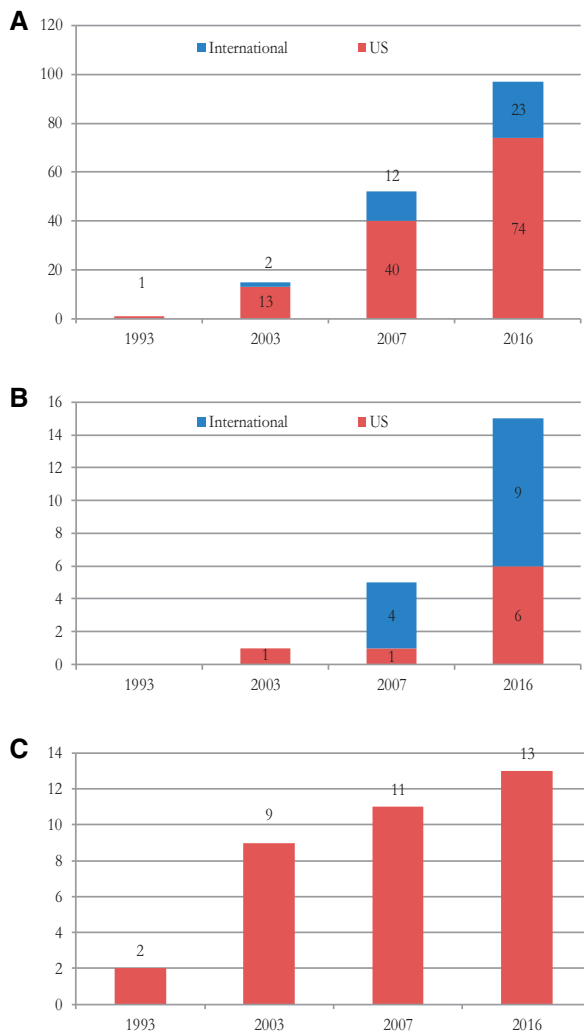
Figure 4. Growth in SEE University and organizational infrastructure, 1993–2016. (**A**) Number of Higher Education SEE initiatives or programs. (**B**) No. of SEE-named University Degree programs. (**C**) Number of SEE-focused US-based National/Global technical assistance/incubator orgs. (Colour online)
Source: Authors' Research.

foundations and total grant amounts to SEEs (see Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 5). This data enabled us to confirm the timing, source and degree of growth in financial backing of SEEs since 2003.

   Third, to locate the key social actors who constructed and legitimized SEE as a field, we used the qualitative content in the archival records in the different data-sets mentioned above to identify which foundations and ESOs supported which university programs, and in which initial years. Based on the frequency, density and timing of these relationships,

Table 1. Top SEE grant recipients from foundations.

| Top SEE grant recipients from foundations by total $, 2003–2016		Top SEE grant recipients from foundations by number of grants, 2003–2016	
Recipient	Total	Recipient	Total
DKT International	$144 946 721	Ashoka	579
TechnoServe	$128 724 922	Food Project	427
Ashoka	$104 337 259	TechnoServe	399
New Profit	$72 265 162	Echoing Green	237
The Mind Trust	$39 199 347	Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs	223
Social finance	$27 569 272	Property and Environment Research Center	215
Venture Strategies for Health and Development	$25 326 788	New Profit	196
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative	$23 964 796	Emerge Community Development	131
UnLtd	$21 652 963	Rudolf Steiner Foundation	109
Echoing Green	$21 233 308	The Mind Trust	105
MasterCard Labs Kenya Holdings, Pte.	$19 121 072	Citizen Engagement Laboratory Education Fund	101
Safe Water Network	$16 532 500	Pacific Community Ventures	96
Citizen Engagement Laboratory Education Fund	$14 571 954	Beneficent Technology	88
Beneficent Technology	$13 988 184	Boaz and Ruth	86
Food Project	$13 383 320	Libertys Kitchen	84
X Prize Foundation	$13 344 267	Full Circle Fund	79
PYXERA Global	$12 870 653	Nuru International	70
Vital Healthcare Capital	$12 500 000	DKT International	63
Acumen	$12 353 364	Safe Water Network	63
Rudolf Steiner Foundation	$12 336 752	X Prize Foundation	63

Source: Authors' analysis of Foundation Center Records.

we selected the most frequently appearing and highly connected institutions during the earliest years (1981–1999), as well as the key social actors within them, to construct a descriptive network diagram of the most significant institutional and individual actors involved in the field's structuration. Although Powell *et al.* (2005) have deployed network

Table 2. Top SEE foundations.

SEE granting foundations by total amount $, 2003–2016

Source	Total
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	$242 448 279
The Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation	$153 085 808
The Rockefeller Foundation	$116 089 669
The Skoll Foundation	$60 540 241
Ford Foundation	$56 423 376
Big Lottery Fund	$56 411 549
Silicon Valley Community Foundation	$35 348 423
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation	$32 683 857
W. K. Kellogg Foundation	$29 028 413
The Annie E. Casey Foundation	$28 912 688
Omidyar Network Fund, Inc.	$26 989 892
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation	$25 965 199
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	$22 848 009
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	$20 578 599
Lilly Endowment Inc.	$19 916 000
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation	$19 710 813
The MasterCard Foundation	$19 459 500
The Atlantic Philanthropies	$15 022 501
John Templeton Foundation	$13 288 518
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	$13 176 000
The Lemelson Foundation	$12 975 862
The Kresge Foundation	$11 684 600
The Goldman Sachs Foundation	$11 168 970
The Brin Wojcicki Foundation	$11 000 000
The Oak Foundation	$10 990 578

Source: Authors' analysis of Foundation Center Records.
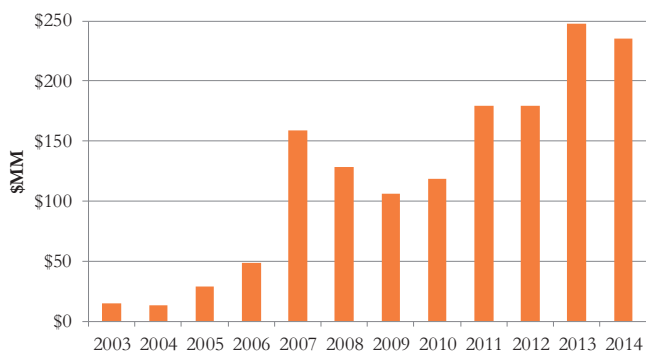
Figure 5. Foundation SEE grants, 2003–2014. (Colour online)
Source: Authors' Analysis of Foundation Center Records.

analysis to advance theory regarding internal field evolution, we do so for a different purpose: to identify SEE's relationship to other institutions and fields. These data allowed us to track the rise and spread of SEE as a foundation-funded, elite university-based social movement, which diffused from core elite institutions and ESOs, to mainstream and peripheral organizations.

Last, to induce SEE's field logic, based on the results of the first three components, we focused on the list of major US and global incubators and ESOs that explicitly state they support, engage with or seek to develop SEEs ($n = 24$) and analyzed the documents they use to describe themselves, their activities and their mission. We conducted a content analysis of key documents in which they describe their mission, goals and strategies, coding variables that reflected their views of the three first-order fields—the state, their relationship to the market and civil society—and their theories of social change, that is, their emergent field logic. We did not code our data with any preconceptions about what we might find; rather, our inductive and iterative approach allowed us to explore themes that emerged from our analyses (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The results of this process necessitated that we contrast SEE's field logic with that of neighboring fields; we based the analysis of the neighboring fields on literature reviews. The three field logic elements that emerged from this analysis included: (a) a discourse of social change with a market logic that justifies the profit motive, or what Pache and Santos (2013) describe as 'a social mission through commercial activities' (972); (b) a market approach to solving social problems that eschews the role and functions of government; and (c) adoption of the logic and discourse of social change, borrowed from the community organizing field's political approach to solving major social problems.

4. Findings and results

4.1 The timing of SEE's emergence: 1970s–1990s

The terms social enterprise and social entrepreneurship do not appear with any regularity in the historical record[16] until the end of the Treaty of Detroit era in the 1970s, with the first wave of high-profile, self-styled social entrepreneurs. The first attempt to define social entrepreneurship as a coherent *concept* was in 1972, when the term was posthumously and retroactively applied to 19th-century philanthropist Robert Owen (Banks, 1972). This is consistent with framings of this first wave of social entrepreneurs as embodying values of Victorian liberalism (Mair and Marti, 2006).[17]

After sporadic usage in the late 1970s and 1980s in the USA and UK, document references to SEE increased dramatically in the 1990s, when researchers noted its emergence as a distinct, new part of the third sector (Defourny and Borzaga, 2001) as neither

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16 The first sporadic references include Franklin Square House (1919), and Weil (1948) as well as Morris (1962). We note that these anglophone references bear little relation to what might seem to be a related concept, the francophone notion of the social economy, the development of which is credited to nineteenth century cooperative movement participant and economist, Charles Gide. Today, the social economy has developed into the French social and solidarity economy (Duverger, 2016), which includes legally defined 'social enterprises'.

17 Early examples include Muhammed Yunus' 1976 founding of Grameen Bank (the first large poverty-focused microcredit institution) and Bill Strickland's 1968 founding of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild in Pittsburgh (using the arts to provide community programs). In 1981, the term social enterprise was also used in one report to describe a range of cooperatives (Spreckley, 1981)

the public embodied by government, nor the private embodied by the market. SEE's presence in mainstream media subsequently surged in the 2000s. OCLC WorldCat's records of peer-reviewed articles and book titles using either of the SEE terms demonstrate a clear uptick beginning in the 1990s (Figure 3). Similarly, Google's N-gram, which indexes the content of published books, also shows a similarly-timed increase. Both the OCLC WorldCat and Google N-gram increases precede the rise of references in the New York Times, which dramatically increased in the wake of the financial crash in 2008 and the emergence of public austerity regimes. Based on the increased frequency in historical references to the terms, SEE appears to have become a recognizable concept by the 1990s, before capturing the popular imagination as inequality and economic crisis gripped the US consciousness post-2008.

4.2 SEE's emergent field structure: universities, foundations and ESOs

There are now nearly 100 university programs ($n = 97$) or initiatives dedicated to SEE around the globe, 74 of which are in the USA (Figure 4).[18] Today, these universities include a mix of elite secular universities (e.g. Penn, Northwestern, Harvard), public flagship and land grant universities (Purdue, Michigan) and religious institutions (Georgetown, Notre Dame). In addition, 15 universities offer entire degree programs—typically a master's in social enterprise or social entrepreneurship—in the SEE field (Figure 4); these degree programs are mostly offered by international and nonelite US universities. They are supported, in turn, by a network of 13 US-based incubators or ESOs (see Spigel, 2017 for broader market-based usage of term) which engage in fund-raising, technical assistance and general SEE movement incubation and research and development (R&D) in the USA and around the globe (Figure 4).

The funding sources for these university initiatives, and the movement-related ESOs associated with them, demonstrate that SEE's rise in tandem with neoliberal, Washington Consensus institutional arrangements is not coincidental, as noted earlier. They are funded by philanthropic foundations, whose capital asset growth has resulted from their being 'strongly favored in tax preferences' (Porter and Kramer, 1999): indeed, foundations and 'philanthrocapitalism' (Bishop and Green, 2006) grew in direct response to declining tax rates and starve the beast fiscal strategies of neoliberalism. These funders include both the traditional major foundations (e.g. Ford), new foundations set up by tech entrepreneurs and the foundation arms of corporations and banks.[19]

Because SEE is unregulated in the USA and still poorly defined, funding streams flowing to SEE are not always disclosed, clearly identified or labeled, making it difficult to precisely estimate the sector's size. Nonetheless, the Foundation Directory yields over 8200 records of grants containing the words 'social enterprise', 'social entrepreneurship', 'social entrepreneur', or 'social entrepreneurs' made by nearly 1500 foundations since 2003. These SEE-related grants total nearly $1.6 billion from 2003 through 2016. While data for 2015 and

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18 This data-set was constructed by crawling and scraping the web, as well as article databases and archives, for records of educational institutions making any references to the internal development of a social enterprise or social entrepreneurship program. Specifically, we have included any university initiative, center or program that uses the terms 'social enterprise', 'social entrepreneur' or 'social entrepreneurship', in its name or in its self-description, in this figure.

19 This is not an isolated case of foundations engaging in field building and construction among social movements and related organizations. See Bartley (2007).

Table 3. Top university SEE grant recipients from foundations

Recipient	Total
University of Michigan	$8 274 972
Rice University	$7 288 700
Oxford University	$6 780 253
Duke University	$4 527 500
Harvard University	$2 934 028
Columbia University	$2 789 479
Aston University	$2 556 869
University of California	$2 478 905
Stanford University	$2 395 892
Santa Clara University	$2 046 000
University of Leeds	$2 018 643
University of Cape Town	$1 796 789
Johns Hopkins University	$1 284 050
University of Washington	$1 219 337
University of Plymouth	$837 658
New York University	$777 000
University of Waterloo	$772 000
Pitzer College	$750 000
Colorado State University	$700 000
University of Pennsylvania	$615 820

Source: Authors' analysis, Foundation Center Records.

2016 are still incomplete due to delayed reporting, the general trend up through 2014 has been a dramatic increase in funding levels, increasing from $10 to $20 million per year in the early 2000s, to more than $200 million per year today (Figure 5).

Since 2003, nearly 1500 foundations have made at least one grant labeled with the SEE terms, involving roughly 1700 recipients. This activity is highly concentrated: of the 1500 foundations making at least one SEE grant, just 25 account for two-thirds (approximately $1 billion) and the top 50 account for nearly 80% of the total funding tracked, led by the Gates, Buffett, Rockefeller, Ford and Skoll foundations (Table 2). Similarly, the top 50 awardees account for over $1 billion of grants in that time period. The top foundations and recipients are detailed in Table 1. The Washington DC-based Ashoka ranks first in the number of grants, with over 500 SEE-labeled awards from nearly 200 foundations since 2003, and it ranks third in total grant volume, exceeding $100 million. Also of note, over 100 of the more than 1700 SEE grant recipients from foundations since 2003 are universities (Table 3) led by Michigan, Rice, Oxford, Duke, Harvard, Columbia, Aston University (UK), the University of California and Stanford.

Reflecting SEE's elite-driven nature, and its construction in the financial, political, technology and intellectual centers of New York, Washington DC, Silicon Valley and Cambridge, Massachusetts, the geographic sources and destinations of these funds is also highly concentrated (Figure 6). Of the nearly $1.6 billion tracked, nearly $1.3 billion was granted to domestic recipients. Of this total, nearly 70% (approximately 900 million) flowed to recipients in just five states: Washington DC, California, Massachusetts, New York and
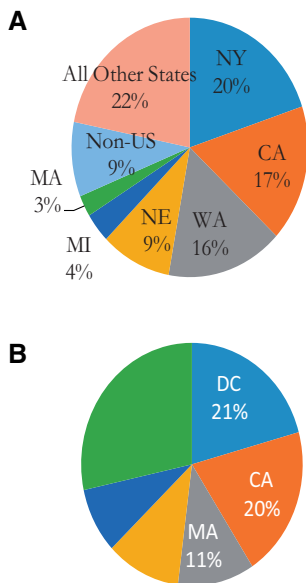
A

B

Figure 6. Global SEE grants by (**A**) foundation's headquarters, 2003–2016, $1.59 billion and (**B**) domestic recipient by state, 2003–2016, $1.29 billion. (Colour online)

Source: Authors' Analysis of Foundation Center Records.

Virginia. Similarly, more than $1.1 billion of the global total came from grant-making foundations in six states: New York, California, Washington (State), Nebraska (Buffett), Michigan and Massachusetts.

SEE has attracted these sums despite a lack of empirical proof of success, or evidence of the production of meaningful social change. Unlike public sector organizations, whose interventions and actions are often identified and tracked, SEE organizations in the USA are not subject to stringent regulations and transparency disclosures. We found little evidence that they engage in rigorous assessments of their own impact, as many nonprofits do, nor do they seem to track failures and failure rates (Nee, 2015), making systematic evaluation difficult. The popular impact reporting and investment standards and social return on investment tools promoted by SEEs (Cooney and Lynch-Cerullo, 2014) are not based on rigorous social science research methods (e.g. pre and post-testing, randomized controlled trials). Affiliates of EMES International Research Network have attempted to address some of these concerns, particularly outside the USA, but this lack of testing and proof directly raises questions of legitimacy. How did SEE attract such capital and gain such traction, particularly given little empirical evidence that its approach to creating social change is effective?

4.3 Constructing and structuring field legitimacy: SEE's network of skilled social actors

Given the historical increase in SEE term usage and activity in the 1980s and 1990s, as documented in the preceding sections, we conducted a network analysis of this critical period in SEE's incubation to identify key actors and institutions involved in its emergence as a field
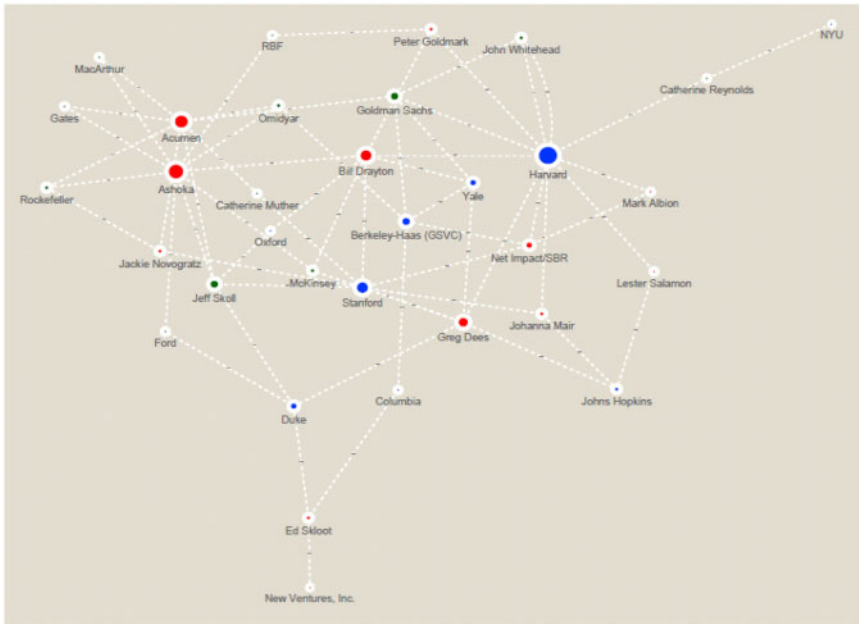
Figure 7. Social network diagram: key figures and institutions in the development of the SEE movement. Node placement is organic, i.e. based on each node's network centrality. Average distance between nodes = 2.6. Universities in blue, diffuser agents in red, funders in green. size of circle reflects number of degrees of connection. (Colour online)

Source: Authors' Research.

(see Figure 7). During this period, a group of highly skilled social actors constructed and structured the field's legitimacy, leveraging their relationships across related and adjacent fields to marshal both material and ideological resources. These actors, affiliated with Harvard, McKinsey, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Goldman Sachs and Stanford, built on existing institutional interest in the non-profit sector in the 1970s and 1980s to create the SEE infrastructure in the 1980s and 1990s. From these elite institutions, the concept then spread: in a case of homophilic network diffusion (Powell *et al.*, 2005) and institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), SEE was adopted by peer institutions and those emulating them. The funding, educational and R&D infrastructure for SEE in the USA was therefore largely created over three decades. Given the typically slow rate of change in academic institutions, this is an astonishing rate of growth and development.

We identify three skilled social actors as pivotal in SEE's field emergence, who act as leaders and field-building entrepreneurs: Ashoka founder William Astor Drayton, Jr. (Bill Drayton), Harvard Social Enterprise Initiative founder J. Gregory Dees, and Acumen founder Jacqueline Novogratz. Each leveraged distinct resources with which to build SEE into a coherent, legitimate field: Drayton initially developed the SEE ideology and its legitimacy. He leveraged his experience in—and direct network access to—key state, market and

civil society actors and institutions, to procure corporate and traditional foundation funding for the first organizations to incubate actual social enterprises. Dees' academic research and initiatives at multiple elite universities not only helped diffuse SEE as an intellectual project, providing academic legitimacy, but also procured ideological recruits to execute the SEE strategy: young university students. Finally, Novogratz leveraged this burgeoning legitimacy with universities and foundations to broker additional financial resources: she capitalized on the desires of a new wave of tech entrepreneurs to produce social change and leave a lasting legacy, by incorporating them as a critical source of funding for both practice and research.

Bill Drayton was the critical, first highly skilled social actor to systematically attempt to construct SEE. A graduate of Phillips Andover, Harvard, Oxford and Yale, then faculty at Stanford and Harvard who had also been a part-time employee at for-profit consultants McKinsey & Company, and a US Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Drayton conceived of Ashoka in 1978, and by 1980–1981 had begun to fund and develop social enterprise (Bornstein, 2007). The shifting relationship between first-order market and state fields at this time had directly affected Drayton and explicitly informed the creation of SEE: as an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator, he had become increasingly frustrated and distressed by the Reagan administration's attempts to destroy the EPA, and he founded a leading and traditional nonprofit to work against the administration (Bornstein, 2007).

But he also sought new ways to advance the causes he cared about that would work in the new reality, that is, the emerging field between market and state. Drayton leveraged his social networks, rich with ties to elite actors through the educational and economic institutions he had been affiliated with, to build legitimacy for his ideas, which included novel narrative framing and substantive elements. Instead of grants, 'changemakers' would receive 'stipends' (Bornstein, 2007), as might a University fellowship winner. Reflecting these ideas' newness, when pitching Ashoka to foundations, he also spoke of a venture capital approach to social change, which was met with puzzlement by prospective funders (Bornstein, 2007). The puzzled reaction, cast in the light of a hierarchical field analysis, can be understood as the then-illegibility (Scott, 2000) of using the logic and narrative of the market to address social problems, which had been the domain of the state and civil society.

Finally, a contact of Drayton's from Harvard introduced him to an investment banker who nominated him for a MacArthur Fellowship, which he won in 1984, and which he used to further incubate Ashoka, which then gained its first serious institutional funding from Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF),[20] where Drayton's contact, an undergraduate contemporary from Harvard, Peter Goldmark, was developing its strategic plan. RBF's funding finally legitimized the idea for foundations, making it 'safe'[21] for other major foundations to fund SEE projects. Goldmark became President of and led the Rockefeller Foundation from 1988 to 1997, and was a major supporter of SEE. In 2007, he explained how nongovernmental organizations emerged in the 1980s to deal with social problems

> It's got to strike you that a quarter of a century ago, outside the United States there were very few NGOs and now there are millions of them all over the globe. Nobody could make that happen at the same time. Why did they grow? They grew because the seed was there and the soil was right. You have restless people seeking to deal with problems that were not being successfully

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20   The early Ashoka Entrepreneur Fellowships are named after Drayton's mother (under her maiden name) and her relatives, and are of unknown funding origin.

21   Bornstein (2007).

coped with by existing institutions. *They escaped the old formats and were driven to invent new forms of organizations.* They found more freedom, more effectiveness, and more productive engagement. That is a key terrain. (Bornstein, 2007, p. 4, emphasis added)

By 1996, Ashoka had partnered to form the Ashoka–McKinsey Center for Social Entrepreneurship, based in São Paolo, Brazil. By 2008, Ashoka had created its Changemaker Campus program. Commencing with four partners—Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Maryland and George Mason—it now has over 40 university partners, and works with these and other potential prospective Changemaker Campus universities to develop their SEE offerings. In 2012, Ashoka launched the Ashoka Changemaker School network with 54 schools, bringing SEE to primary and secondary education in the USA and globally. By procuring corporate and foundation funding and support, Drayton had incorporated support from the market (corporate funding and partners) and civil society (through foundations) for SEE.

Drayton's colleague at McKinsey in the early 1980s, J. Gregory Dees, was the second skilled actor in SEE's emergence marshalling his academic resources and networks to create ideological legitimacy in universities. Dees had degrees from Yale and Johns Hopkins; both universities had major academic initiatives on the nonprofit field. Dees left McKinsey, the for-profit consulting firm, in 1985 to become a lecturer at Yale's School of Management (SOM), then heavily focused on nonprofits. In 1989, he joined the faculty of Harvard Business School, where a nonprofit student club had been founded between 1980 and 1982. Dees oversaw the creation of Harvard's first courses in SEE. These efforts culminated in creating Harvard's Social Enterprise Initiative in 1993, the first formally named university SEE initiative. It was founded with seed money from John Whitehead, former Goldman Sachs Chairman, who publicly stated that nonprofits should supplant government, driving his interest in the project: 'I'm always looking for opportunities to expand the nonprofit sector of our economy to have nonprofits take over functions that are now performed by the government…in the work of public schools, charter schools are an example of how the private sector can do it better, or nonprofits can do it better, in health care, there are many similar opportunities…'[22]

Dees left Harvard for Stanford in 1997, where he helped build an initiative comparable to Harvard's. In 1998, he published 'The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship' while also an 'Entrepreneur in Residence' at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, which has become a significant funder of SEE initiatives. Dees' article (Dees, 1998), now cited approximately 2100 times in Google Scholar, became a critical popular piece in disseminating and promoting the SEE concept. Dees left Stanford for Duke's Fuqua School of Business as a co-founder in its newly established Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, which he helped to build into a significant academic center and where he remained until his death in 2013.

Dees' academic leadership and access to elite networks had ideologically legitimized SEE for universities in the 1990s. As Harvard formalized its Whitehead-funded SEE initiative in 1993, 13 Harvard Business School students founded Students for Responsible Business (SRB). Advised by Mark Albion of Harvard and the Social Venture Network (whose leaders included Anita Roddick of the Body Shop and Ben Cohen of Ben and Jerry's), SRB held its

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22   Accessed at http://institutionalmemory.hbs.edu/leadership/establishing_the_social_enterprise_ini tiative.html on April 7, 2015.

first conference at Georgetown's Business School, and received early funding support from the Ford Foundation. Local chapters were quickly founded at Stanford, Northwestern, Berkeley and Harvard. The national organization, based in San Francisco, eventually changed its name to Net Impact. In 1995, SBR sponsored the first annual New Enterprise Competition, which awarded the best socially responsible business plan by an MBA student. In 2000, a watershed year in SEE's growth, Yale SOM launched its Program on Social Enterprise, and shortly thereafter founded the Yale SOM—Goldman Sachs Foundation Partnership on Nonprofit Ventures. In 2000, Harvard launched its annual Social Enterprise Conference, and Berkeley-Haas launched its Global Social Venture Student Competition. This grew into a significant student competition: by 2007, the Berkeley competition had expanded to partner with the Yale SOM, after adding Columbia Business School and the Goldman Sachs Foundation as a financial sponsor in 2001, the London Business School and the Indiana School of Business in 2003, and the Omidyar Network (funded by Peter Omidyar from eBay) as a financial sponsor in 2006.

Also in the year 2000, at the peak of the dotcom boom, Virginia and Stanford (MBA) alumna Jacqueline Novogratz founded Acumen, a social enterprise funding/development venture, similar to Ashoka, which exports US-style philanthropy around the world. She became the third highly skilled social actor to build SEE. Acting as a bridge from its US incubation period in the 1990s, she pushed the field to maturity in the 2000s, by leveraging and brokering other networks, resources and ideas. Acumen added a second major stream of funding to supplement the traditional foundation money that Ashoka had brought to SEE. Novogratz attracted Silicon Valley's new dotcom wealthy elite and tech entrepreneurs. This was a philanthropic trend well documented at the time (Brown, 1999), as young, retiring tech entrepreneurs turned their efforts to focus on social problems. It commenced with initial funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, W.W. Kellogg Foundation, Cisco Foundation, with the Gates Foundation, Nike Foundation and other major foundations later signing on. Acumen's original and early funders also included Catherine Muther (of Cisco, then Three Guineas Fund, educated at Sarah Lawrence, Cambridge, Stanford MBA), Stuart Davidson (venture capitalist educated at Harvard College, Harvard MBA), Roberta Katz (IT executive, later Stanford executive, educated at Columbia, Stanford, University of Washington) and Jeff Skoll (eBay, Stanford MBA). Skoll additionally funded and named Oxford's SEE initiative.

Together, three of SEE's key founders—Drayton, Dees and Novogratz—took advantage of this rupture between the state and market fields to construct SEE in the interstices between them. They built legitimacy for the new SEE field by developing a social movement, the elements of which included a network of participation, attracting and maintaining financial resources and establishing recognition and support from key actors and organizations, including elite universities, foundations and donors. Their efforts helped birth a new institutional infrastructure for the nascent field.

4.4 How SEE borrowed logics: a market approach to social change

Our data show that the process of building legitimacy for the SEE field involved not only accumulating material resources, but also ideological ones. In this section, we analyze how and from where SEE's skilled social actors borrowed logics to construct a meaningful ideological foundation from which to attract resources and adherents to the field. Although there is a documented imprecision on what kinds of activities and programs constitute SEE

([Nicholls, 2010](#)), the data reveal that across organizations, there is consistency in the values and beliefs SEEs espouse and the solutions they proffer: that is, they have a distinctive field logic, with an emergent set of field rules.

4.4.1 SEE's field logic and relationship to the political approach of community organizing

Based on content analysis of materials produced by the leading organizations identified in the preceding section, we identify three critical elements of SEE organizations' field logic: (a) it marries a discourse of social change with a market logic that justifies the profit motive; (b) it adopts a market approach to solving social problems, eschewing the role and functions of government; and (c) it adopts the logic and discourse of social change primarily from the community/political organizing field's political approach to solving major social problems.

Regarding the first element, SEEs claim to create broad social change. Ashoka's assertions are representative in this regard:

> Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems. They are ambitious and persistent, tackling major social issues and offering new ideas for wide-scale change….Just as entrepreneurs change the face of business, social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss to improve systems, invent new approaches, and create solutions to change society for the better. While a business entrepreneur might create entirely new industries, a social entrepreneur develops innovative solutions to social problems and then implements them on a large scale.[23]

Acumen also identifies driving social change as a primary goal: 'Our year-long Global and Regional Fellows Programs develop extraordinary individuals with the knowledge, support system and practical wisdom to unlock their full potential to drive positive social change.'[24]

But how do SEEs envision creating social change? They turn the means for achieving social change on its head by constructing a new market logic—transforming social problems into profit-making opportunities. Under this new logic, SEE allows participants to 'do well by doing good'. Acumen describes its use of *patient capital*:

> For Acumen, patient capital is understood as a debt or equity investment in an early-stage enterprise providing low-income consumers with access to healthcare, water, housing, alternative energy, or agricultural inputs. Our typical commitments of patient capital for an enterprise range from $300 000 to $2 500 000 in equity or debt with payback or exit in roughly seven to ten years. The patient capital Acumen provides is accompanied by a wide range of management support services nurturing the company to scale. In the long-run we aim to see a return of our capital. We do not expect high financial returns to come from investing in businesses that serve the poor.[25]

Acumen distinguishes its goal from philanthropy: 'Rather than giving philanthropy away, we invest it in companies and change makers',[26] emphasizing that its goal is to make profits by providing services to disadvantaged communities.

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23   Previously on Ashoka's main website, this still appears at http://southernafrica.ashoka.org/social-en trepreneurship on August 3, 2016.
24   Accessed at https://acumen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/About-Acumen-One-Pager-Q2-2017. pdf on May 6, 2018.
25   Accessed at https://acumen.org/about/patient-capital/ on May 6, 2018.
26   Accessed at https://acumen.org/about/ on May 6, 2018.

At the core of the SEE logic is the idea that social problems can best be addressed using a *market approach* and the logic of the entrepreneurial firm, driven by the innovative, top-down efforts of a key founder (Dacin *et al.*, 2011) and that their approach is sustainable, scalable and profitable. Again borrowing from the market, this ideology is diffused through key ESOs such as Ashoka and Acumen. In the traditional market, ESOs typically incubate and develop new businesses, providing access to capital, training and networks (Spigel, 2017). But with SEE, they also diffuse logics and ideology.

As Acumen explains: 'We seek out the world's most innovative entrepreneurs whose game-changing innovations are disrupting poverty. We invest patient capital in them, providing the flexibility and security to grow their businesses and reach as many poor customers as possible.'[27] SEEs claim to offer something new by bringing private market benefits of increased organizational flexibility, efficient service delivery and consumer choice to public and social missions. Their ability to capture the entrepreneurial spirit purportedly comes from exposure to quasi-markets, as they compete for matching private sector funds to satisfy needs of end users, who 'choose' the best service provider.

Reflecting this market logic, SEEs have also attempted to normalize enterprise failures (Nee, 2015). In the market field, such failure is acceptable, as part of the processes embedded within the logic of entrepreneurial start-ups and venture capitalism. At the macro level, the logic of entrepreneurial capitalism suggests that market success is linked to enterprise growth as less efficient competitors are driven out. For SEEs, the absence of a true market mechanism means even successful small initiatives rarely scale up. But efforts to solve social problems through community organizing and social movements have historically embodied another logic, subject to different field rules: they are expected to do what is required to succeed (Kleiman and Rosenbaum, 2007).

The second element of SEE's logic is to lessen or eliminate the role and functions of government. John Whitehead, a former Goldman Sachs Chairman who funded the first formal academic social enterprise initiative in the USA at Harvard University, was explicit in his aversion to the government's role in providing public goods, as noted earlier. Consistent with this, Ashoka offers this perspective on the role of government: 'Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by *changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to move in different directions*'[28] (emphasis added). Acumen echoes these principles: "Acumen Fund was created based on the belief that the public sector alone won't solve large-scale problems of poverty. We have always been big believers in the power of markets, and in the early years of Acumen we and our investees steered clear of major government partnerships...We will often be disappointed if we expect governments to create new solutions."[29] Ironically, in subsequent years, Acumen leaders realized that governments can become customers for their companies, and can help them scale up.[30] SEE thus seeks to

27 Accessed at https://acumen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/About-Acumen-One-Pager-Q2-2017. pdf on May 6, 2018.
28 Previously on Ashoka's main website, this still appears at https://india.ashoka.org/who-social-entre preneur on April 25, 2018.
29 Accessed at https://acumen.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/10-Things-Weve-Learned-About-Tackling-Global-Poverty.pdf on May 6, 2018.
30 Accessed at https://acumen.org/blog/10-things-weve-learned-8-governments-rarely-invent-solu tions-but-they-can-scale-what-works/ on May 6, 2018.

replace and diminish, not supplement, the public sector's developed capabilities, by creating and supplying private entrepreneurial alternatives.

Finally, SEEs borrow from the logic of community organizing, and its political approach to social change. SEEs, as the data from Acumen above shows, construct community members as customers. The political model, in contrast, constructs them as citizens. This is not a small distinction: citizens are capable of associating to assert a form of enlightened self-interest to secure public action to assert noneconomic values such a health, education, justice and the arts. Customers can simply exit the market. The political model assumes most social problems—and particularly inequalities across race, class, gender and sexual orientation, among others—are power problems associated with stratified access, enclaves of privilege, unequal voice and diffused common interests, that require political solutions.

Indeed, the SEE approach to social change not only borrows from community organizing, but stands in direct and stark contrast to it. Community and political organizing, utilized in the USA at various historical moments such as the civil rights movement (Morris, 1984) and further developed by Alinsky (1971) and others (Ganz 2000, 2009), deploys a different approach than SEE. A comparison of this political approach and SEE's market approach to social change highlights the points of divergence between them (see Table 4). Community/political organizing prioritizes the mobilization of economic, normative and legal resources—public power—for collective, usually indivisible, public goods. Government is the institutional foundation that holds the nation together, and is therefore the critical target of mobilization and claims-making. Government is the only entity that represents the collectivity, and through which citizens can articulate common interests.

SEE borrowed community/political organizing rhetorical framing of 'achieving social change', but shifted the focus of its direction, from state to market, and from voice to exit (Hirschman, 1970). Rather than organizing communities of interest to make claims on the state to solve a wide range of socioeconomic problems, it recruits individuals to use the language, tools and methods of the market, not the state. More precisely, rather than organizing to assert voice in public institutions to solve public problems, it recruits 'social entrepreneurs' to exit to the private sector as a solution.

4.4.2 SEE's field boundaries versus nonprofits and cooperatives

As SEEs have recruited energetic students alongside corporate and foundation funders, some organizations operating in adjoining fields—specifically, traditional nonprofits and

Table 4. Field logics: SEE versus community organizing's political approach to social change

Approach	SEE	Political
Problem	Knowledge	Power
Action	Technical innovation	Collective action
Organization	Firm: for-profit or nonprofit	Association: constituency-based
Leadership	'Heroic' individual entrepreneur	Political organizer, advocate, leader
Sector	Private	Public
Focus	Market	State
Logic	Exit	Voice

cooperatives—have adopted the language and framing of SEE to leverage the field's budding success in attracting resources (Bradrick and Takagi 2014, p. 1; Lee and Bourne 2017, p. 795). As SEE has gained such traction, many organizations newly using the SEE label may thus be nothing more than traditional nonprofits or cooperatives, repackaged for marketing purposes. Indeed, they borrow the label but not the logic of SEE.

There are distinctions which partially demarcate SEE's field borders from that of traditional nonprofits and cooperatives, as made clear by the SEE field logic analyzed above. Nonprofit associations or nongovernmental organizations seek to promote social change or deliver social services, and the goal of these organizations is to do good and *survive*, by covering operating costs. The goal of SEEs, however, is make a profit, to 'do *well* by doing good'. This sets SEEs apart from the traditional nongovernmental organizations, operating in the previously established space of the nonprofit field. SEEs are also distinct from cooperatives, which sometimes attempt to use market-based strategies which produce a profit to advance social goals. But unlike cooperatives, SEEs in the USA are not by definition member-owned and democratically controlled organizations. SEEs are thus free to serve the interests of investors, rather than member–owners and citizens.

Furthermore, as shown above, SEEs seek to replace, not supplement, government. This is another key distinction between SEE and traditional nonprofits and cooperatives. SEEs claim that nonprofit organizations such as Jane Addams' Hull House were forerunners to the modern social enterprise.[31] Though such a historical reclamation may serve to enhance SEE's legitimacy, the field environment which produced nonprofits and cooperatives was markedly different. Traditional nonprofits, cooperatives and related social movement organizations, such as Hull House, provided services or solutions to social problems at a time when the state or market had little existing experience, capacity or history in doing so, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were directly empowered through legislation to act as a supplement, not as a replacement, to public sector capacity, which was then emergent (e.g. Wagner O'Day Act for government procurement from businesses employing the blind or disabled). The nonprofit and cooperative fields thus emerged out of an unorganized or inchoate field space in the 19th century, located between emergent civic capacity in civil society, Polanyi's (1944) ever-advancing market, and a weak, undeveloped state: the modern welfare state and labor movement had not yet formed as coherent fields. SEE, however, has not emerged out of an unorganized field space. Rather, the space was already occupied by well-defined fields. These pre-existing fields, such as nonprofit associations and cooperatives, have distinct legal forms and clear boundaries around their fields in most countries, which is not always the case with SEE. This porousness makes it difficult for founders to construct a distinct and standard definition of SEE across countries, and to police the field's boundaries globally.

As noted earlier, unlike the USA, some countries have moved to impose legal definitions and limits on SEE: France and Finland, for example, both place requirements and restrictions on enterprises using these terms.[32] A stronger concern for environmental and social

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31 Accessed at http://socialent.org/documents/EVOLUTIONOFTHESOCIALENTERPRISEINDUSTRY–ACHRONOLOGYOFKEYEVENTS.pdf on April 9, 2016.

32 In France, social enterprises are part of the legally-defined 'social and solidarity economy', which includes nonprofits, cooperatives and foundations. In Finland, social enterprises are narrowly defined to apply to businesses employing the disabled.

equity outcomes of SEE (affiliated with those in the EMES network) and greater SEE regulation is evident in these and many other European countries. With their more well-developed and maintained welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and stronger support of tri-partite corporatism (Jahn, 2016), European democracies have not only experienced arguably less of a neoliberal shift between the market and the state, but the shifts have also been of a different character, reflecting 'varieties of liberalization' (Thelen, 2014). These different national field configurations may explain the relatively greater blurring of field boundaries between SEE and its adjacent fields in these countries (Kerlin, 2013; Doherty *et al.*, 2014), as well as its variable nature across countries.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical implications

Organizational scholars' current focus on the dimensions and dynamics within individual fields limits our understanding of field emergence. Our primary theoretical contribution in this article has been to foreground the importance of analyzing dynamics within *and* across fields, which we accomplish through a multilevel field analysis in our tracing of SEE. We use the descriptor multilevel (cf. Schneiberg and Soule, 2005) intentionally, as a theoretical analog to the term's usage in quantitative research with nested regression models. A theoretical framework centered on multilevel field analysis is important for three reasons. First, it provides the foundation for an integrative mapping of both field emergence and development. Examining inter-field dynamics reveals the larger forces among fields that create ruptures, and the institutional openings that skilled social actors can exploit to create new fields. Examining intra-field dynamics reveals the processes by which those actors can organize and shape them. With SEE, only an analysis of the shifts among first-order fields can reveal the source of the rupture and the opening of new space into which SEEs emerged among second-order fields.

Second, a multilevel field approach allows us to examine the relationships among hierarchical fields, to distinguish between first and second-order fields, and to identify points of leverage created by their overlapping status hierarchies, spheres of influence and ideological affinities. It is where fields overlap that structural contradictions are highest, and where key allies, powerful new legitimation frames and resources for skilled actors are found. Our analysis, however, is only a preliminary first step in understanding the dynamics of these processes. An examination of other fields will help confirm the generalizability of processes we have detailed, and whether additional ones are at work.[33]

Finally, a multilevel approach helps us to extend theories of field emergence by distinguishing between two distinct types of succession: encroachment and displacement. A new field can emerge in the interstitial spaces between existing, overlapping fields, where it can coexist with competing fields, encroaching without completely displacing them while adopting key elements of their logic and strategies. We show how legitimacy is critical for a new field to cohere and grow. In cases of field encroachment, skilled social actors appropriate the logics, practices and discourses of preexisting fields in order to construct legitimacy. While the SEE case illuminates the importance of legitimation processes, additional cases are

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33 As parallels with institutionalists' four pathways of incremental institutional change suggest, see note 4.

needed to better explore how they operate in different kinds of fields, and at different stages of a field's development.

The SEE case also raises important issues about the long-term stability of fields that emerge from encroachment, particularly given the previously noted global standardization that has already developed across many fields today (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Although borrowing logics from other fields allowed SEE to cohere and grow, this hybridity presents serious challenges for its global coherence. Primary among these challenges is that, because it is constructed out of previously distinct fields, cobbled together from their disparate logics and rules, SEE boundaries remain weak. Though an examination of how the market has variably encroached on the state in different national contexts is beyond the scope of this article, future research on this front might yield insights into how field emergence varies across nations. It may also well imply that, contrary to Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) assertions, there are limits for field standardization despite time-space compression (Harvey, 1989; Giddens, 1990). Physical space and scale, as bounded by borders of nations, regions and cities, may still matter to a meaningful degree in shaping variations in some field configurations, stability and outcomes (Spicer, 2018).

5.2 Normative and empirical implications

These theoretical findings have empirical implications, both for SEE itself, as well as the first-order fields implicated in its rise. First, due to SEE's hybrid, derivative nature, its proponents may not be able to hang on to or control its ideological narrative, as it bleeds out into the adjacent fields, where other actors can appropriate the narrative. Where SEE can be deployed for profit, its proponents may construct the market as a legitimate field for the provision of public services (e.g. prisons, schools). But where it is not profitable, however, nonprofit associations, operating with or without the SEE label, may fill the void. This helps explain why SEE is a messy concept that is so poorly defined, and comes to have multiple meanings. SEE's lack of defined boundaries and exclusive field space make it quite fragile. This, combined with its poor track record of results, suggests that it is itself vulnerable to being encroached upon or displaced by other fields. The long-term survival of SEE is not ensured.

In the interim, however, SEE can still have significant impacts as it marshals resources and attracts adherents. It is important to consider, then, the normative consequences and implications of its legitimation. Of particular concern is SEE's impact on democracy in capitalist countries. The consensus view of democratic capitalism that emerged after World War II was that inequality of wealth could only be moderated by equality of political voice among citizens. Democratic government's role was not as a safety net for the unfortunate few, but as a publicly accountable institution, a countervailing power (Galbraith, 1954) that could advance the common good in domains as diverse as education, health care, research and national defense. It was the only mechanism that could employ the rule of law to rein in the power of private wealth.

As we have shown, SEE's rise is linked to the neoliberal renegotiation of this relationship between private wealth and public power over the last 40 years. Since the 1980s, elites hostile to constraints on private wealth have succeeded in promoting a neoliberal ideology that rejects government as instrumental in solving social problems and instead casts it as the source of most problems. Because the state is viewed as *the* problem, challenges turn into efforts not to improve it, but to dismantle it. The logic of such approaches creates its own internal dynamics of 'increasing returns to scale' (Pierson, 2000) within first-order fields,

destroying political will and capacity. This minimization of government's role undermines the power of ordinary citizens, democratic politics and the deployment of public resources to solve social problems. Citizens become customers, and, in the absence of constraints on spending, politics becomes a form of marketing. As a result, organizing the citizenry to demand public solutions to public problems grows increasingly challenging.

There are known solutions to most social problems; what is missing is the *capacity* to put them to work. A global body of knowledge exists on how to reduce inequality, educate children, address climate change, improve our cities and make decent health care available to all. For example, the knowledge of how to eliminate poverty already exists, but there is a lack the will to either 'pre-distribute' (Hacker, 2011) or redistribute wealth differently to achieve this goal, both in the USA and across the globe. Absent is the political will to restore labor rights, fund schools equitably, disincentivize carbon production, provide adequate urban housing and transit and control health care quality and cost. SEE fails to name, much less address these core political problems.

SEE's construction of social problems as deriving from a lack of technical knowledge, rather than from a power imbalance, has other serious political implications. Economist Albert Hirschman argued that in a system undergoing dynamic change, members can, in return for loyalty to a shared purpose, use their voice within the system to affect the trajectory of its change, or they can exit the system in search of another that can better meet their needs. The SEE approach promotes both individual and collective exit from the public sphere in favor of private approaches to social problems. SEE thus rejects innovation in how to employ collective voice and generate the social power needed to redirect public institutions to solve what are fundamentally political problems. In doing so, it undermines citizens' commitment to political engagement on which democracy is based. In a democracy, creating social change requires sustained interaction between the state and a vigorous civil society. SEEs, however, redefine civil society as a space in which to create parallel, private institutions that circumvent the state and citizens' claims to its resources. Constructing the disadvantaged as clients or customers, rather than citizens, undermines development of an active, engaged citizenry that can use its voice to participate in public institutions and democratic processes that reflect its will and needs.

Ultimately, our theoretical and empirical examination of SEE shows that the forces that created it, though reflective of a unique historical moment, can potentially be applied and replicated in other domains. While SEE emerged in response to a larger, historical shift between an advancing market and a retreating state, and was intentionally constructed to fill the void created by neoliberal political–economic policies, the current rapid erosion of democratic practices and undermining of democratic institutions creates an environment which might also produce similar neoliberal, market-based fields. A counter response might be for skilled social actors to create movements of active, engaged citizens who demand the preservation of democratic institutions and practices, particularly when they are under attack. Real change and equality that all citizens deserve, and that the public good requires, can only be achieved through voice, not exit.

Acknowledgements

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