

**BOOK REVIEW**

# Dennis R. Young, Elizabeth A.M. Searing, and Cassady Brewer (Ed.): *The Social Enterprise Zoo: A Guide for Perplexed Scholars, Entrepreneurs, Philanthropists, Leaders, Investors, and Policymakers*

Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA, USA, 2016, 305 pp.  
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Dennis Young, Elizabeth Searing, and Cassady Brewer's *The Social Enterprise Zoo: A Guide for Perplexed Scholars, Entrepreneurs, Philanthropists, Leaders, Investors, and Policymakers* will prove to be a foundational work in nonprofit and social innovation studies, as so much of Dennis Young's work does<sup>1</sup>. Among the many achievements of this edited book, two are most noteworthy: the proper and effective use of a biological analogy in a work of social science and, relatedly, a powerful and flexible framework for understanding in the past, present, and future of social enterprises, that is, organizations attempting to blend social purpose and profit.

The "zoo" metaphor, Dana Brakman Reiser writes in her forward to *The Social Enterprise Zoo*, "posits the social enterprise category as a collection defined for its diversity, responsive to changes in habitat, and curated by humans" (p. xi). Metaphors are comparisons of familiar objects to less familiar objects that add clarity to the latter. The use of the zoo metaphor achieves that as it is effective in getting a handle on the regularly changing theory and practice of social enterprise throughout the book. At times the metaphor becomes a little too quaint, such as describing the

<sup>1</sup> Full disclosure: this reviewer was asked and did provide input on this book at several points in its development.

American financial instrument of programs-related investments (PRIs) as a “new addition to the menu” and as “a very specialized food source” (p. 98). A few other times the metaphor just does not work, such as in Chapter 10 entitled “Social Innovation in the Zoo”, the topic of social innovation needed to be addressed but no analogous zoo activity or object could be imagined. The vast majority of the time, however, the zoo metaphor aids in our understanding of multitudinous dimensions of social enterprise. For example, Brewer in “The Ongoing Evolution in Social Enterprise Legal Forms” (Chapter 3) interestingly conceives organizational “instincts”, explaining how they illuminate the choice of organizational auspice. “Social entrepreneurs often choose the nonprofit form because its legal ‘instinct’ of alleviating undesirable social, environmental, or economic conditions is consistent with the purpose of most social enterprise organizations” (pp. 42-43).

Each and every chapter begins with a description of its relation to a zoo. In Chapter 2 “Designing the Zoo” by Young and Wesley Longhofer, the zoo metaphor likens the many varieties of social enterprise to animals in the zoo: social businesses, social cooperatives, social innovations, socially responsible corporations, public sector social enterprises, benefit corporations, and sustainable businesses all reside in the social enterprise zoo (pp. 18-19). The variety of social enterprise “animals” generates the figure of the “social efficiency frontier” (Figure 2.1, p. 24). The “social efficiency frontier” locates the different social enterprise animals in the northeast quadrant by the axes of net social impact (public sector social enterprises produce the most impact) and profitability (sustainable businesses are the most profitable). “In sum,”—Young and Longhofer write—“the efficiency frontier construct helps us to carve out a conceptual piece of real estate for the social enterprise zoo” (p. 26).

One of my favorite chapters in *The Social Enterprise Zoo* is Chapter 5 “Ecologies within the Habitats of the Zoo” by Searing, Jesse Lecy, and Frederik O. Andersson. “One of the unique benefits of the ‘zoo’ typology offered in this book is its versatility in defining boundaries of inclusion in the social enterprise space” (p. 95). “Ecologies within habitats” is an interesting way to consider the lifecycle of niche development, generating a useful graphic (Figure 5.1, p. 97) that demonstrates the emergence, expansion, maturity of organizational niches by the axes of niche density and organizational failure rate.

One criticism of *The Social Enterprise Zoo* is that, while the zoo metaphor would seem to have stimulated many figures and illustrations, there is only a paucity of them. And the effectiveness of these two figures—the social efficiency frontier and the lifecycle of niche development—makes one wish that there would be more such graphics.

*The Social Enterprise Zoo* is vulnerable in a few places. Let me here register a few other criticisms by starting with a strength. A salient strength of the book is its expanding on Young’s classic oeuvre in nonprofit and social innovation studies. Chapter 7 “The Role of Social Entrepreneurs in the Social Enterprise Zoo” utilizes his field-defining book *If Not for Profit, Then for What?* (1983) that offers a behavioral model of nonprofit entrepreneurship to capture the many motivations of entrepreneurial behavior. In *The Social Enterprise Zoo*, Young is correct to criticize the field of social entrepreneurship

that in general fixates on the heroic, Schumpeterian entrepreneur causing large-scale change that ignores “the general case of the social entrepreneur”, which his 1983 model emphasizes (p. 154). This position neglects the vast literature on the Kirznerian entrepreneur that does indeed conceptualize the “general case of the entrepreneur” on a smaller scale (e.g., Kirzner, 1999). Similarly, Chapter 8 “Feeding the Animals” by Searing and Young is premised on Young’s important book *Nonprofit Finance*, specifically its concluding chapter “Toward a Normative Theory of Nonprofit Finance” (Young, 2007) that links the types of goods a nonprofit produces to specific instruments of finance. The problem with deploying his model of *nonprofit* finance for *social enterprise* finance is that, although sometimes the identity holds (e.g. in many European contexts), social enterprises are often for-profits and therefore not nonprofit organizations (e.g., in the U.S. and U.K.). While nonprofit organizations characteristically rely on “various mixes of public, group, private, redistributive, trade and associative goods and services” (p. 169), social enterprises are indeed *enterprises* that transact almost exclusively with private (rivalrous and excludable) goods and services. Thus, the premise of the chapter does not hold.

The handful of criticisms, however, do not detract from the enormous achievement of *The Social Enterprise Zoo*. Young, Searing, Brewer, and all of their outstanding contributors have given us a foundational work and enduring framework that enable us to understand the past, present, and future of social enterprises.

## References

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