

## SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

From value-based skepticism to conditional practice

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# Social entrepreneurship

## From value-based skepticism to conditional practice

Patrick VALEAU<sup>1</sup> and Jérôme BONCLER<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The French nonprofit sector could be a field of application for social entrepreneurship principles, yet French experts and researchers have expressed some reservations about what they perceive as a concept rooted in the US context. On the other hand, little has been reported about the views of leaders of nonprofit organizations. To what extent are their attitudes, but also their practices, compatible with the principles of social entrepreneurship? Social entrepreneurship (SE) is both a theory and a practice born in the USA at the end of the 90s and imported to France during the following decade. We first examine some of its founding texts and summarize its principles as follows: 1) Hybrid management. SE consists in using tools from the business sector in order to produce goods and services more efficiently contributing to social goals; 2) Hybrid finances. SE avoids depending on public subsidies as far as possible; 3) Hybrid status. SE is not limited to the nonprofit sector. It can take and combine any kind of structure whatever its status.

The purpose of this paper is to study the attitudes and practices of the leaders of NPOs i.e. members of the board and managers, in relation to SE principles, following a scientific approach. We are not concerned with whether or not they have appropriated the term 'social entrepreneurship', but rather whether they apply its principles. Our research questions concern the entrepreneurial and management pathways in which these leaders are engaged and to what extent the recommendations of the SE literature are compatible with their representations and practices? Thus, this paper studies the frames of references (Watzlawick et al, 1975) and the rationalities (Simon, 1947; Weber, 1921) of these actors.

Based on 35 semi-directive interviews, our results show that, beyond ideological barriers, nonprofit managers are already dealing with these three issues, trying to find a sustainable management pathway between pragmatism and the respect of their core values. Based on their sociopolitical activist principles, they may have strong negative opinions about a SE approach often perceived as a for-profit concept. On the other hand, they need to adopt more moderated attitudes toward issues such as efficiency, diversity of resources and competition in order to work out the management problems they experience in the field. However, we also suggest that the culture of French NPOs introduces an ethical bottom line beyond which they will not go.

Thus, this paper explores a version of social entrepreneurship more adapted to the French nonprofit culture. One of the main innovations of the nonprofit sector consists in "killing several birds with one stone", by producing new services and at the same time creating a social network of stakeholders. The framework of references and processes of thought (Piaget, 1971) underlying SE principles do not allow people to perceive and value these kinds of performances. SE principles, as introduced in the French context, often refer to social utility, yet does the efficient achievement of social goals justify all technical and economic means? We call for adaptations integrating 'value-based rationality'.

The case presented at the end of the text illustrates a possible pathway from SE to an activism conforming to the values of the French nonprofit sector. This young graduate at first saw his NPO as a badly managed service (step 1). He was confused about the logic of action of the people around him (step 2). He then progressively began to understand and to subscribe to their value system, becoming, in turn, an efficient activist (step 3).

**Key Words :** social entrepreneurship, nonprofit organizations, culture, values.

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## Résumé

L'entrepreneuriat social constitue à la fois une théorie et une pratique construite aux Etats-Unis à la fin des années 90 et importées en France au cours des années 2000. Nous examinons tout d'abord quelques-uns des textes fondateurs de ce mouvement et résumons ainsi : 1. Un management hybride consistant à utiliser des outils des entreprises pour produire des biens et services contribuant plus efficacement aux finalités sociales ; 2. Des financements hybrides, en évitant autant que possible de dépendre des fonds publics ; 3. Des statuts hybrides ne se limitant pas au secteur non lucratif. L'objectif de cet article est d'étudier scientifiquement les attitudes et pratiques des leaders des associations, autrement dit des membres des bureaux et des cadres, vis-à-vis de l'entrepreneuriat social. La question n'est pas de savoir s'ils se sont ou non approprié l'expression « entrepreneur social », mais s'ils appliquent ses principes. Nos questions de recherche consistent à identifier sur quelles voies entrepreneuriales s'engagent ces leaders et dans quelle mesure les recommandations de la littérature en entrepreneuriat social sont compatibles avec leurs représentations et leurs pratiques. Cet article étudie ainsi les « cadres de références » (Watzlawick et al, 1975) et les « rationalités » (Simon, 1947; Weber, 1921) de ces acteurs.

A partir des données de 35 entretiens semi-directifs, nos résultats montrent que, au-delà des barrières idéologiques, les leaders des associations sont d'ores et déjà confrontés à ces enjeux, essayant de trouver des voies de gestion management équilibrées entre pragmatisme et respect de leurs valeurs. Compte tenu de leurs principes sociopolitiques militants, ils développent parfois des opinions fortement négatives vis-à-vis de l'entrepreneuriat social qu'ils voient comme un concept lucratif, d'un autre côté ils adoptent des attitudes plus modérées sur les questions d'efficacité, de diversification des ressources et de compétitions en vue de résoudre les problèmes auxquels ils se retrouvent confrontés en pratique. Cela dit, nous remarquons que la culture du secteur associatif pose des limites éthiques au-delà desquelles ils refusent d'aller.

Partant de là, cet article explore une version de l'entrepreneuriat social mieux adaptée à la culture du secteur associatif français. L'une des principales innovations de ce secteur consiste à « faire d'une pierre plusieurs coups », en proposant de nouveaux services tout en créant des liens entre les parties-prenantes. Les cadres de références et les schèmes mentaux (Piaget, 1971) qui sous-tendent l'entrepreneuriat social ne permettent pas de percevoir et de valoriser ce type de performances. Les principes de l'entrepreneuriat social tels qu'introduit en France, se réfèrent souvent à la notion d'utilité sociale, mais l'atteinte de ce but justifie-t-elle tous les moyens techniques et économiques ? Nous appelons à une adaptation de l'entrepreneuriat social intégrant des formes de rationalités en valeur.

Le cas présenté à la fin de l'article illustre cette voie possible entre l'entrepreneuriat social et un militantisme confirmé aux valeurs du secteur associatif français. Ce jeune diplômé jugeait tout d'abord que l'association qui l'avait recruté était très mal gérée (étape 1), les logiques d'action des salariés et bénévoles autour de lui le déroutaient (étape 2), avant de progressivement mieux comprendre leur système de valeurs et d'y adhérer, devenant à son tour à un authentique militant (étape 3).

**Mots clés :** Entrepreneuriat social, associations, culture, valeurs.

## Resumen

El empresariado social constituye a la vez una teoría y una práctica construida en los Estados Unidos a finales de los años 90 e importadas a Francia a lo largo de los años 2000. Examinamos al principio algunos de los textos fundadores de este movimiento y lo resumimos así 1. Una gestión de empresas híbrida que consiste en emplear herramientas de las empresas para producir bienes y servicios para contribuir con mayor eficacia a las finalidades sociales ; 2. Financiaciones híbridas, tratando lo más posible de depender de los fondos públicos ; 3. Estatutos híbridos que no se limiten al sector no lucrativo.

El objetivo de este artículo es estudiar científicamente las actitudes y prácticas de los líderes de las asociaciones, es decir de los miembros de las oficinas y de los directivos, respecto al empresariado social. La pregunta no es saber si se han apropiado o no la expresión « empresario social », sino saber si aplican sus principios. Nuestras interrogaciones en la investigación consisten en identificar en qué vías empresariales se comprometen estos líderes y en qué medida las recomendaciones de la literatura sobre empresariado social son compatibles con sus representaciones y sus prácticas. Así este artículo estudia los « marcos de referencias » (Watzlawick y al, 1975) y las « racionalidades » (Simon, 1947; Weber, 1921) de estos actores.

A partir de los datos de 35 entrevistas semi-directivas, nuestros resultados enseñan que, más allá de las barreras ideológicas, los líderes de las asociaciones ya se enfrentan con estos objetivos, al tratar de encontrar vías de gestión de la empresa equilibradas entre pragmatismo y respeto de sus valores. En función de sus principios sociopolíticos militantes, desarrollan a veces opiniones muy negativas respecto al empresariado social que consideran como un concepto lucrativo, por un lado adoptan actitudes más moderadas sobre las cuestiones de eficacia, de diversificación de los recursos y de competiciones para resolver los problemas con los que se enfrentan en la práctica. Dicho esto, notamos que la cultura del sector asociativo pone límites éticos más allá de los cuales se niegan a ir.

A partir de esta comprobación, este artículo explora una versión del empresariado social que se adapte mejor a la cultura del sector asociativo francés. Una de las principales innovaciones de este sector consiste en « matar dos pájaros de varios tiros », al proponer nuevos servicios creando al mismo tiempo relaciones entre las partes interesadas. Los marcos de referencias y los « esquemas mentales » (Piaget, 1971) que sostienen el empresariado social no permiten percibir ni valorar este tipo de resultados. Los principios del empresariado social como se introducen en Francia, a menudo se refieren a la noción de utilidad social, pero ¿justifica alcanzar esta meta todos los medios técnicos y económicos ? Pedimos una adaptación del empresariado social que integre formas de racionalidades en valor.

El caso presentado al final del artículo ilustra este camino posible entre el empresariado social y un militantismo confirmado entre los valores del sector asociativo francés. Este recién graduado consideraba por una parte que la asociación que le había contratado se gestionaba muy mal (etapa 1), le despistaban las lógicas de acción de los asalariados y voluntarios alrededor de él (etapa 2), antes de ir comprendiendo mejor su sistema de valores para luego adherirse a él, volviéndose a su vez un auténtico militante (etapa 3).

**Palabras clave :** Empresariado social, asociaciones, cultura, valores.

## Introduction

'Social entrepreneurship' (SE) became very popular within Anglo-Saxon cultures during the 90s. In France, actors from the nonprofit sector, consultants, experts and politicians first began to use the term ten years later, during the 2000s. The idea promoted was that SE could help NPOs to achieve their social goals more efficiently. Valéau, Cimper and Fillion (2004) summarized SE's recommendations as follows: the use of management tools from the business world, business models requiring less public resources and hybrid structures combining not for profit and for profit projects. As a result, beyond efficiency, the SE approach involves profound changes to the way these organizations are managed (Boncler and Valéau, 2010; Valéau and Annette, 2010). The nonprofit sector constitutes a potential field of application for social entrepreneurship principles. However, over the past ten years, a large part of the French research community has adopted a relatively critical line toward what they perceive to be a US concept that does not fit the French nonprofit tradition. Rather than debate the subject, the purpose of this paper is to study the attitudes and practices of the leaders of NPOs i.e. members of the board and managers, in relation to SE principles, following a scientific approach. We are not concerned with whether or not they have appropriated the term 'social entrepreneurship', but rather whether they apply its principles. Our research questions include: To what extent are these leaders already engaged in entrepreneurial management pathways? To what extent are the recommendations of the SE literature compatible with these leaders' representations and practices? Thus, this paper studies the 'frames of references' (Watzlawick and al., 1975) and the 'rationalities' (Simon, 1947; Weber, 1921) of actors, in order to understand why some of them are reticent toward SE principles while, at same time, they have sometimes already developed relatively flexible practices. Our main hypothesis is that leaders of the French nonprofit sector, based on their sociopolitical activist principles, may have strong negative opinions about a SE approach often perceived as a for-profit concept, but, on the other hand, need to adopt more pragmatic and moderated attitudes toward issues such as efficiency, diversity of resources and competition in order to work out the management problems they experience in the field. Furthermore, we also suggest that the culture of French NPOs introduces an ethical bottom line beyond which they will not go. Based on 35 semi-directive interviews and an in-depth case study, this paper's challenge consists in interpreting leaders' verbatim records, distinguishing between vocabulary issues and deeper problems of compatibility with the contents of the SE approach, and in differentiating between matters of principle and practical considerations. With this in mind, the aim is to develop an entrepreneurial model taking into account French leaders' goals and values. In order to illustrate the feasibility of such a process, this article finishes with the testimony of a young manager explaining how, initially determined to run the NPO where he had been hired as a business, he progressively became committed to the nonprofit culture and developed a mixed model of development combining some of the principles of social entrepreneurship with the culture and traditions of French NPOs. We first study in detail the recommendations of the literature on social entrepreneurship, examining some of the main US papers that initiated the movement at the end of the 90s. We then give an overview of the debates that followed its introduction

into the French nonprofit sector. We present the qualitative methods we used and the data collected giving managers' points of view concerning each of the three main principles of social entrepreneurship. The theoretical model presented at the end highlights zones of compatibility between social entrepreneurship and the French nonprofit culture, as well as major stumbling blocks pulling these two frameworks in different directions. With this in mind, we target a series of adaptations required in order to allow the diffusion of a more entrepreneurial approach to NPOs within the French nonprofit sector.

## **1. Two different worlds: two bodies of literature**

We first examine some of the founding texts on social entrepreneurship as the latter have not always been referred to during the debates that have taken place on the subject. We then review the literature about the French nonprofit sector. In this way, we will be able to establish a first set of assumptions about the compatibility of SE principles with the culture of the French nonprofit sector, the latter orientating our further qualitative investigations.

### ***1.1. The founding principles of US social entrepreneurship***

SE is both a theory and a practice born in the USA at the end of the 90s and imported to France during the following decade. In this part, we will refer to what we consider to be the original social entrepreneurship approach using quotations from authors of this period. We consider this flashback to be necessary as the importation of the term SE within the French context has often occurred without a full understanding of the theory or practical implications behind it. "The idea of 'social entrepreneurship' has struck a responsive chord. It is a phrase well-suited to our times. It combines the passion of a social mission with an image of business-like discipline, innovation, and determination commonly associated with, for instance, the high-tech pioneers of Silicon Valley. The time is certainly ripe for entrepreneurial approaches to social problems. Many governmental and philanthropic efforts have fallen far short of our expectations. Major social sector institutions are often viewed as inefficient, ineffective, and unresponsive. Social entrepreneurs are needed to develop new models for a new century." (Dees, 1998, p.1). Shumpeter (1935) has identified entrepreneurship as the main factor in the development of nations. SE aims to introduce this dynamic within organizations working on social goals. The invention of the concept is usually attributed to Dees (1998) in a text only available on the internet. Dees starts his text with a series of statements about the lack of efficiency of nonprofit organizations and introduces the entrepreneurial approach, as observed in business organizations, as a possible solution to these social productions. Hibbert, Hogg and Quinn (2002) define social entrepreneurship as the use of entrepreneurial behaviors in order to achieve social goals. SE aims to increase the efficiency and the sustainability of nonprofit organizations. (Canadian Center for Social Entrepreneurship, 2001). According to Johnson (2000), the nonprofit sector needs this new input in order to deal with the decrease in traditional financial resources and the increasing competition to acquire them. Looking for more efficiency, SE gets its inspiration from the business sector, trying to optimize the ratios between the resources used and the results obtained. For instance, SE suggests reducing the unit price of the service by dividing the cost of

the structure using economies of scale. According to classical economic theory, the market would naturally lead business entrepreneurs toward this efficiency, regulating access to sustainable positions and associated profits. According to Johnson (2000), the context of nonprofit organizations is getting closer to that of the business market: NPOs have become more and more numerous and resources, in particular government and public subsidies, are becoming scarcer, obliging them to be more productive and competitive. Faced with such a context, managers are becoming social entrepreneurs. According to Brunham (2002), social entrepreneurship helps nonprofit organizations to reduce their dependency on public resources without changing the focus on their social goals. According to him, the money used to develop these projects 'should' be 'truly' earned. Boschee (2001) promotes a similar perspective, distinguishing the capacity for the development of new activities from the ability to sustain the latter without depending on philanthropy and public subsidies as two different aspects of entrepreneurship. Thus, this literature promotes the idea that true social entrepreneurs don't resort to public subsidies. They will eventually integrate donations, based on the marketing approach toward fundraising. Ideally, they will create for-profit businesses to acquire the income necessary to finance their social nonprofit activities. This recommendation implies two steps: first, NPOs selling their social services at a price allowing them to reach the break-even point; second creating a business generating profit that will be used to finance charitable activities. This approach can be related to Penrose's (1959) 'resource theory'. The latter identifies resources acquisition as the main function of organizations when trying to achieve their goals. According to Penrose (1959), these resources must be sustainable and specific enough to be difficult to copy, this situation representing a competitive advantage. Therefore, social entrepreneurs diversify their resources, innovate new forms of marketing and create new business opportunities. One of the examples given by Hibbert, Hogg and Quinn (2002) is the case of the 'Big Issue', a magazine sold by the homeless community, with a part of the income being given back to finance the structure. "Social entrepreneurship (SE) is emerging as a common approach to meeting social needs. However, SE founders appear to be organizing under both for-profit and nonprofit organizational forms to engage in essentially the same activities" (Townsend and Hardt, 2008, p.685). According to Johnson (2000), SE blurs the traditional borders between private, public and nonprofit sectors with new hybrid structures. These authors acknowledge NPOs' leaders as part of the SE movement, but also consider leaders from businesses developing elements of a social approach such as corporate social responsibility. In fact, one of the main aspects of SE literature lies in this concept of hybridization. The papers reported above are among those that contributed to the emergence of SE. Even though this review is not exhaustive, it introduces some of the main recommendations that define SE theory and practice. Many new papers on SE are published every month, but the core ideas remain relatively stable (Stengers, 1988). Social entrepreneurship now stands as a field of research in its own right with its own references and contents. As a result, SE does not only consist in applying entrepreneurial science to NPOs. It involves actors drawing on creativity and pragmatism in order to seize opportunities (Shane and Vankatamaran, 1997), but its approach is also very specific, aiming to transform the nonprofit sector into an efficient competitive sector. In line with Valéau, Cimper and Filion

(2004), these aims have been translated into the following three principles:

- **Principle 1:** Hybrid management. SE consists in using tools from the business sector in order to produce goods and services more efficiently contributing to social goals.

- **Principle 2:** Hybrid finances. Social entrepreneurs avoid depending on public subsidies, as far as possible.

- **Principle 3:** Hybrid status. SE is not limited to the nonprofit sector. It can take and combine any kind of structure whatever its status.

### ***1.2. The application of social entrepreneurship to the French nonprofit sector: issues and challenges***

The 1901 French law ('Loi 1901') defines nonprofit organizations as "conventions through which two or more people put to use, in a permanent manner, their knowledge and activities in order to achieve something other than profit". Today, in France, there are more than 1.1 million of nonprofit organizations, among which 150 000 employ paid workers. In total, French NPOs manage a budget of 60 billion euros and have created 1.9 million part-time or full-time jobs (Tchernonog, 2007). Economists consider nonprofit organizations to be part of a social economy producing goods and services, answering demands from minorities, often insolvent, forgotten by public welfare and ignored by the market (Archambaud, 1996; Demoustier, 2001). Sociologists analyze nonprofit organizations referring to a broader set of functions such as restoring social bonds (Hoarau and Laville, 2008; Laville and Sainsaulieu, 1997) and providing jobs for the long term unemployed. According to this approach, volunteering can also constitute a form of social and professional insertion. NPOs often invite beneficiaries to take part in the production of services, empowering them (Barthélemy, 2000). From a more political perspective, NPOs are frequently based on participative and democratic forms of governance (Biondy and al., 2010 ; Boncler and Valéau, 2010 ; Defourny, 2010). Over and beyond their own borders, NPOS' activities contribute to the development and the transformation of their territories (Chéroute, 1998). To summarize, NPOs attach a great deal of importance to principles and values (Boncler and Valéau, 2010), giving birth to a different kind of management based on a multi-criteria approach to performance (Valéau, 2003). The introduction of SE within the French nonprofit sector during the 2000s has given rise to a series of impassioned debates. On the one hand, certain experts saw this approach as the second wind of the social economy in general and of the nonprofit sector in particular. According to them, SE could help these organizations to adapt to today's economic and political environment (MOUVES, 2012; Sybille, 2008). Nevertheless, other experts strongly rejected this approach, accusing it of promoting business principles that were not compatible with the essence of the nonprofit sector (Draperi, 2010a, 2010b). Before focusing on the managers' points of view, it may be useful to provide an overview of this debate. "We pose the hypothesis that social entrepreneurship defines itself according to its goals that consist in acting explicitly for the community. These goals are more important than economic issues. (...), even if the latter are important as social entrepreneurs, just like any entrepreneurs, must be able to acquire new resources. Social entrepreneurs use their resources to achieve their social goals, yet enrichment and spirit of

competition are not absent as the modern surrounding society is more or less explicitly based on competition and profit.” (Boutillier, 2008, p.50). Different authors, such as Boncler and Hlady (2004), Boutillier (2008), Valéau, Cimper and Filion (2004), and Zoonekynd (2004) have contributed, during the last decade, to the introduction of the concept of social entrepreneurship within the literature on entrepreneurship. One of their main questions has been whether or not SE is different from business entrepreneurship. According to Boutillier (2008), the differences only concern the entrepreneurial goals, the approach, means and manners used being relatively similar. “The issue consists in reinforcing the entrepreneurial approaches of the nonprofit world without taking them for granted. In the coming years, NPOs will have to cooperate, to economically reinforce some parts of the sector in order to improve the quality of their goods and services and to ensure economies of scale. (...) The issue also concerns the diversification of NPOs’ financial resources with a greater use of corporate philanthropy, which has not been very well-developed despite tax incentives” (Sybille, 2008, p.1). SE has been introduced into the French context through different forums and blogs within which experts and leaders of nonprofit collectives and syndicates began to debate. The main initiators of this debate have been Ashoka France and the MOUVES. Nevertheless, Sybille (2008), recommending a more pragmatic approach to NPOs’ technical and economic development, has been identified, almost unwillingly, as one of the main advocates of SE. In fact, Sybille’s (2008) views accord with SE’s principle 1 by supporting the idea that management tools from the business world could help NPOs to fit new private and public financiers’ efficiency targets and with principle 2 in advising resources diversification. “The social entrepreneurship movement applies to the observed economic and social practices, a body of conceptions directly inspired from multinational and global markets.” (Draperi, 2010a, p.1). “Aspiration toward equal rights, socially constructed practices and specific laws and status prevent any assimilation of social economy as developed in France with social entrepreneurship.” (Draperi, 2010b, p.1). Draperi’s (2010a) first article called *Is social entrepreneurship a movement rooted in capitalism?*, partly because of its title, united a large part of the scientific and expert community, in particular the sociologists who were already skeptical about the relevance of this new concept. In fact, the content of Draperi’s (2010a ; 2010b) two articles was not overly critical of SE, but more analytical in line with the question asked in its title. The debates that followed in the Journal of Cooperative, Mutualist and Nonprofit Studies (RECMA), for example, expressed the ongoing mistrust between those who wished to remain rooted in the traditional principles of the nonprofit movement, and those who looked to move ahead with more pragmatic approaches. Fayolle and Matlay (2010) point out the cultural dimension of SE, suggesting the adaption of this concept to the national context in which it is introduced. Referring to the European Network on Social Enterprise’s (EMES) definition, Draperi (2010b) indicates that SE does not pay enough attention to the participative governance tradition and to the sense of citizenship that characterizes the French nonprofit movement. Valéau, Cimper and Filion’s early study of the literature (2004) also points out that SE does not take into account the sociopolitical activism that underlies the French nonprofit sector. According to Boncler and Valéau (2010), SE does include the collective dimension that NPOs develop within and around them. These sociopolitical issues go beyond

the social goals that SE refers to as they introduce a 'value orientated rationality' (Weber, 1921). According to this approach, NPOs do not only deliver a service, but also allow different stakeholders, such as volunteers, paid workers and beneficiaries, to take part in the decision making activities underlying their production. Valéau and Annette (2010) examine the short and medium-term consequences of the introduction of the concept into the French nonprofit sector. In particular, they question the evolution of the practices of public authorities when referring to this new logic of efficiency as part of the modernization of its policy for financing the nonprofit sector. Public subsidies represent 83% of French NPOs' income (Tchernonog, 2007). Consequently, according to Valéau and Annette (2010), the danger is that NPOs that do not comply with these new SE rules, in particular small grassroots NPOs based on community values, will no longer be able to acquire resources and will progressively disappear. Valéau and Annette (2010) consider the above debate to be of great importance in the negotiation with public authorities about how this new public management policy is going to be enforced. In our opinion, debate on the relevance of SE is interesting and necessary, yet it neglects to give a voice to the actors themselves. These discussions call into question the fundamental principles that historically gave birth to the French and European social economy and nonprofit sector, addressing these issues exclusively at macro-economic and sociological levels. They don't take into consideration what the leaders of NPOs are actually thinking and doing in their nonprofit organizations in the field (Boncler and Valéau, 2010). Behind every NPO, there is a project, and behind every project there are groups of citizens, volunteers and/or paid workers, that give their time and energy. Among them, some are taking on bigger responsibilities, adopting a leadership role that involves making decisions about the direction their NPO should follow. The current research focuses on this population. It confronts their points of view with the three SE principles identified above in order to evaluate the degree of compatibility between the two, in practice and in the field. Drawing from the three principles of SE, we identified three research questions:

- Question 1 : To what extent are the leaders of NPOs ready to use management tools from the business world in order to become more efficient?

- Question 2 : To what extent can they and do they want to hybridize their resources to depend less on public subsidies?

- Question 3 : How do they feel about competition from businesses encroaching on their field of action?

## 2. Method

One of the main epistemological and methodological concerns of this research was how to introduce the topic to our interlocutors, without being too directive (Rogers, 1961). The word 'entrepreneur' still has a 'business' connotation in the French NPO sector. As a result, the term 'social entrepreneurship' introduced a high risk of critical reactions. Even the word 'management', in some cases, may be seen as a business trademark. For this reason, there was no way we could have started our interview with a question such as: Do you consider yourself as a social entrepreneur?. In fact, our focus was not on their opinion about SE,

but rather their role as managers and the way they were governing their NPO. Therefore, we started our interview with a presentation of the history of their NPO. Then we would ask the manager to tell us about his or her career within the organization: - When did you become president or executive director? ; - What is your role? ». Our respondents were either the executive managers or the volunteer presidents of the board. One of the problems in our study was determining which of these actors the entrepreneur was. We noticed that the relationship between them varied depending on their personality as well as on the phase of development of their organization. There are several models of this relationship in existence (Mayaux, 1996). We conducted a first series of 20 interviews as part of our research on the management of NPOs and SE. We analyzed the data collected in order to establish our categorizations and build our grounded theory model (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). We constituted a second sample composed of another 15 NPO leaders to conduct a 'replication' (Yin, 1984). As recommended by Denzin (1994), we 'triangulated' interviewers in order to ensure that the data collected would not be affected by our own bias. We trained a group of MBA students to carry out the semi-directive interviews as part of their course. The interview that each of them conducted was a compulsory part of the module and counted toward their final mark. We then used this second series of interviews to validate our model and check its capacity to account for all the cases and, therefore, to saturate its contents (Morse, 1994). Table 1 shows a sample integrating, for comparison purposes, a large diversity of NPOs (Morse, 1994). The number of paid worker went from 0 to 280 with a mean of 18, their budgets were between 1000 euros up to 3,6 million euros with a mean of 690 000 euros. Some of these NPOs were created recently whereas others had already been in existence for a number of years. These NPOs operated in all kinds of fields of activity.

	Number of paid workers	Budget (euros)	Duration	Fields of activity
Minimum	0	1000	6 mois	Social and health ; sports ;
Mean	18	690 000	11,5 ans	culture and leisure ; equal rights ;
Maximum	280	3,6 millions	56 ans	education, insertion

Table 1: Sample

The interpretation of the interviews first consisted in taking into account what the respondents meant (Rogers, 1961), without questioning their vision of the development of their NPO. A second interpretation consisted in confronting these contents with the three core principles of SE previously identified. The analysis involved taking into account present practices as well as their potential evolution. Some of our respondents were explicitly against the SE approach, yet, as hypothesized, they often showed a strong engagement toward a diversification of their financial resources, in line with the second principle of SE. Consequently, we took into account the interpreted compatibility, rather than the compatibility indicated by the respondents themselves (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, Adler and Adler, 1994). Our results are displayed in the third part of the paper. A complete case study is also presented at the end of the discussion to illustrate in detail the learning process and adaptations social entrepreneurs have to go through in order to efficiently and relevantly participate in the development of the French nonprofit sector.

### 3. Results

The presentation of our results is structured according to the three principles of social entrepreneurship: the adaptation of new management tools in order to become more efficient, diversification of financial resources and status hybridization. Each part contains a short reminder of the SE principle concerned, followed by a table displaying a selection of verbatim records from the interviews illustrating the diversity of our respondents' points of view.

#### 3.1. The attitudes of leaders of French NPOs toward a more efficient management approach

Our first research question tackled nonprofit leaders' motivations for using management tools from the business world in order to become more efficient, efficiency in the service of social goals being one of the main tenets of social entrepreneurship (Johnson, 2000; Dees, 1998; Hibbert, Hogg and Quinn, 2002). Some of the leaders we met were working to make their NPO more efficient (table 2).

Ref	Positions	Illustration
1	Forseeing efficiency	<i>"Our president has always wanted our NPO to work like a business. (...) He wanted the best results, he used to challenge us with difficult targets."</i>
2	Budgetary Control	<i>"It is an ongoing issue, it is always on my mind, let's say that we work like a business. For instance, we never launch a new project before being sure we have enough money for it. We always keep an eye on our budget."</i>
3	A rational organization	<i>"Our work processes are very standardized. Once the situation is categorized (eg. refugees, epidemic, etc) a long process of decision making begins concerning chain supply logistics, staff profiling, material we are going to use. Everything is planned."</i>
4	Professionalization and the limits of volunteering	<i>"Considering the importance of the budgets that we are going to have to manage, I won't be able to work with volunteers. These children need a qualified staff."</i>
5	The limits of productivity	<i>"Social work is a fuzzy field of action making evaluation difficult. What indicators should we take into consideration to measure the success of our action against incivility? Should we measure the number of square meters of wall graffiti?"</i>
6	A matter of commitment	<i>"Through this bundle of leisure activities, our purpose is that people from the neighborhood start to talk to each other and get more committed to the development of our community. We start with leisure activities to, then, engage them in more serious issues... What matters to us, is people's commitment."</i>
7	The nonprofit spirit	<i>"In my opinion, there should not be too many rules. The nonprofit organization is above all a collective action i.e. people sharing the same values. When you start imposing job descriptions and job profiles, you lose this spontaneity, then you're just a business like any other"</i>
8	How to develop an NPO?	<i>"The job of the president consists in developing and promoting our sport. Yet, how can we attract new members, how can we make new people hear about us?"</i>

**Table 2:** Verbatim records from leaders of French NPOs concerning efficiency

In verbatim record 1, the respondent expresses the wish to progress in this way. Verbatim record 2 refers to a budget control quite similar to those in business practice. Verbatim record 3 presents the rational and standardized organization developed in the field of humanitarian action. Verbatim record 4 goes a step further with the professionalization of human resources, suggesting the limits of volunteering in the pursuit of efficiency. However, the following four verbatim records raise a certain number of objections: such transformations should not be conducted without taking into account the values of NPOS (verbatim record 8). Leaders' first objection when confronted with the idea of a more efficient system of management concerns the difficulty of fairly evaluating the value of their production (verbatim records 5 and 6). It is almost always possible to estimate the value of the goods and services they deliver by referring to their unit cost of production. However, a lot of NPOs would also like to take into account the indirect values of the latter such as social insertion or community development. These extra added-values may then justify higher costs. The trouble is that they cannot easily be quantified and, as a result, prevent any optimization. Another objection concerns the collective dimension of nonprofit organizations, (verbatim record 7). According to a lot of leaders, the humanistic ideals that initially inspired the organization's actions should also inspire their human resources management. The French nonprofit movement often refers to values of fraternity based on freedom to join the association and equal rights for all members. Yet, with the process of professionalization that most NPOs go through as they grow, formalization and hierarchy change the relationships among members. Therefore, many leaders acknowledge that professionalization will lead to more efficiency, yet worry that it will result in the loss of the 'nonprofit spirit'. Indeed, NPOs opting for a professional pathway often have to go through a deep identity crisis (Valéau, 2012).

### ***3.2. The attitudes of leaders of French NPOs toward resource diversification***

Our second question aimed to find out whether or not the leaders of NPOs were ready to hybridize their resources. According to Boschee (2001) and Brunham (2002), social entrepreneurs should not depend on public subsidies. They should rather raise donations or even better, they should launch business activities and use the profit to finance non-profitable activities. This proposition opens up a whole range of new approaches and marketing practices leading to new business models (Boncler and Valéau, 2010). Some of the leaders interviewed do feel dependent on public money, in particular when formally or informally having to take into consideration public policies (verbatim record 1). For this reason, some NPOs definitely do work on the diversification of their resources. Their first move often consists in getting in touch with business sponsors and individual donors (verbatim record 2). Leaders often value invisible resources such as volunteer work (verbatim record 7), whereas SE does not take this into account. Verbatim records presented in table 3 illustrate the struggle most NPOs have to go through trying to acquire the resources they need to achieve their mission. In France, fund raising based on donations and sponsoring is, to a large extent, conditional on obtaining the public utility label that only a few of them acquire (verbatim record 2). NPOs that do not use public subsidies may be proud of themselves (verbatim record 6), yet most of them would actually prefer to have access to them. In France, public subsidies still remain by far the main

financial resource of the nonprofit sector (Tchernonog, 2007). Nevertheless, the ways of accessing them are changing, progressively moving from political affinities to new requirements in line with the principles of SE and the arrival of the so called new public management reforms (Valéau and Annette, 2010).

Ref	Positions	Illustration
1	Dependence on public policy	<i>"If we try to be more autonomous and develop our own orientation, they won't say anything, but when we present our budget, they say yes, if you want a subsidy, you could integrate this aspect (...) They do not oblige us, but they give us strong incentives to do what they want."</i>
2	Donations and sponsors	<i>"We are the first NPO in the area to obtain the public utility label. This label allows us to say to business men and other donors that they can take 66% of their donation off their taxes. This actually allows us to receive some important donations."</i>
3	The limits of sales	<i>"We don't get any public subsidies and that's the trouble. With just 15 euros per member, we haven't enough money. What is really bothering me is people who come but are not ready to pay"</i>
4	Les limits of sales 2	<i>"Our members often behave like customers. For instance, parents leave us their children and just go away"</i>
5	Donations in kind	<i>"When we organize an event, the business men and women often give us goods such as food. The town hall provides a podium. In the end, we usually only pay for 10 to 15% of the costs, the rest being given free."</i>
6	Donation in kind 2	<i>"We are quite proud to be able to achieve without the help of the town hall. Actually this is not totally true as our buildings belong to them. We can use them for free."</i>
7	Donation of time, volunteer work	<i>"Our NPO has only three paid workers, everyone else who helps, and they are numerous, is a volunteer."</i>

Table 3: Verbatim records from the leaders of NPOs about financial resources

However, the acquisition by NPOs of other sources of funds recommended by SE can also involve pressures to act in ways that do not exactly correspond to their values (Boncler and Valéau, 2010). For instance, Pierre Berger, the president of the biggest AIDS charity, started criticizing what he perceived as an over emotional communications strategy by the biggest NPO helping people with myopathy: attracting donations from the public requires them to feel empathy for the cause. Yet how far can NPOs go to provoke this emotional response? Valéau (2003) describes a situation in which a NPO working to help homeless people decided to use a picture of a mother and her child to illustrate an article in the local newspaper. This was done to make a bigger emotional impact, despite the fact that the majority of its beneficiaries were men. Increasing sales income is not easy either: the French population has been used to NPOs providing their services for free or for low prices (verbatim record 3), their costs being totally or partially covered by public subsidies. Beneficiaries who have to pay more for a service have a greater appreciation of its value but may also feel like customers, which does not correspond to the community spirit most NPOs are trying to create (verbatim record 4). Beyond SE principles, a lot of NPOs receive donations in kind (verbatim record 5) or benefit from volunteer work (verbatim record 7). These resources have a social value as well as a financial value corresponding to the money that would have been paid for them if they had to be bought. French accounting practice now allows NPOs to integrate these elements into its accounts. They are also taken into consideration by public authorities searching to confirm the existence of a 'real' nonprofit activity. Indeed, SE tends to ignore these aspects of the nonprofit sector.

### 3.3. The attitudes of leaders of French NPOs toward status hybridization and competition with businesses.

Our third question was about the attitude of the leaders of NPOs toward the increasing competition from businesses in their field of action. Social entrepreneurs are supposed to develop hybridized organizations combining nonprofit and for-profit projects (Johnson, 2000). According to Townsend and Hardt (2008), this hybridization can take the form of nonprofit organizations launching profitable projects to get new financial resources, but also businesses with social goals. In this research in the field of the French nonprofit sector, apart from a few organizations aiming to provide long term unemployed people with 'normal' job opportunities (verbatim record 1), we did not see much real motivation to launch profitable businesses. One possible explanation could be the French taxation system that tends to categorize each organization in just one category. As a result, hybridization, in this context, essentially takes the form of businesses, more and more numerous, developing social goals, entering fields of action historically belonging to the nonprofit sector. (verbatim record 5).

Ref	Positions	Illustration
1	Employment NPOs	<i>"We would like to develop some kind of businesses for our workers when they have finished our integration workshop"</i>
2	Competition between NPOs	<i>"I was looking for people who were not already members of the other NPOs. We started with 35 members but a lot of them came from the other NPO. They know us, they know we are very dynamic. We now have more than a hundred members."</i>
3	Too many services	<i>"Society has changed, people are spoiled. They can have it all, there are too many different sports available."</i>
4	Spirit of competition	<i>"He wanted our NPO to be perfect and to be the best. The president wanted our NPO to be number one in the coaching of new business entrepreneurs."</i>
5	Competition with businesses	<i>"The president of the regional council said that part of the activity would be given to businesses, but these businesses are not going to be interested in helping people that live in remote areas. We used to do that. What's more, I am not sure these businesses are going to give their workers enough time to talk to the elderly people for whom they will provide their service. As far as we are concerned, talking to people, caring for them, is part of the service."</i>

Table 4: Verbatim records from the leaders of NPOs concerning hybridization  
 In the past, competition has not been part of the culture of the French nonprofit sector. Nevertheless, the latter seems to be going through major changes making it hard to anticipate its evolution (Valeau and Annette, 2010). The difficulty of accessing financial resources combined with the multiplication of NPOs and other organizations working in the same field (verbatim record 2) introduces competition within the French nonprofit sector. Some of the leaders we met found this situation stimulating (verbatim records 3 and 4), but most of them worry that this competition will lead others to adopt opportunistic behaviors (verbatim records 4 and 5). For instance, competition for the donations market has recently generated some conflict between an AIDS charity and an NPO working to help myopathy sufferers. In the future, there will be few fields of action belonging exclusively to the French nonprofit sector as the latter is losing many of its monopolies. Businesses are now progressively competing in all areas. This is, for instance, the case with day nurseries and home services: whereas public subsidies used to be given to NPOs to provide these services,

public authorities now give the subsidies directly to the beneficiaries who can then choose from any available provider. Clearly, the authorities want to make this market accessible and profitable to attract businesses and add to the services offered by the nonprofit sector. The majority of the nonprofit leaders we interviewed seem to consider this competition with the business sector to be unfair as the latter do not hesitate to save on human resources or to neglect the parts of the market that are not profitable enough (verbatim record 5).

#### 4. Discussion

A few social entrepreneurs are already at work in the many different hybrid organizations that have emerged over the past years as part of the French social economy. This is the case with the job insertion sector for long term unemployed people or home services. These organizations have captured the attention of political leaders and experts, but represent a minority. Drawing from the diverse points of view presented in the results section, the discussion examines the conditions that would allow a more general transition from social entrepreneurship to a nonprofit entrepreneurship in line with the culture and traditions originating from the 1901 legislation on NPOs.

	<b>Nonprofit Entrepreneurs</b>	<b>Social Entrepreneurs</b>
<b>Efficiency</b>	Dilemmas and trade offs between means and ends	Maximization of output
<b>Resources</b>	Subsidies, donations and sales	Sales
<b>Competition</b>	Meeting unsatisfied demands	Cost minimization

Table 5: Comparative analysis of nonprofit entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs. Nonprofit entrepreneurs take into account multiple values and goals (Laville and Sainsaulieu, 1997 ; Valéau, 2003). Whereas social entrepreneurship consists in maximizing a single variable such as the quantity of services produced with a given amount of resources, nonprofit entrepreneurship consists in trying to simultaneously achieve multiple performances (Table 5). When these different performances conflict with one another, innovation consists in looking for margins of action, but also in making arbitrations (Valéau, 2003). Nonprofit leaders refer to the word ‘development’ (ex. table 4, verbatim record 8), rather than optimization. All resources introduce their own risk of dependence and biases (Boncler and Valéau, 2010). Nonprofit entrepreneurs consider public subsidies as financial opportunities just like any other (Table 5). Public subsidies are open to all NPOs. Nonprofit entrepreneurs have to innovate to connect the mission and values of their NPO to the priorities and criteria of the public authorities. The latter can be seen, just like any stakeholder, as a possible partner in negotiation (Gianfaldoni and Rostaing, 2010). According to this view, independence does not only depend on the kind of resources used, but also on the vision of the entrepreneur. Verbatim records from tables 2, 3 and 4 illustrate the fact that NPOs using public subsidies can actually create new added-value. They transform the money they receive into goods or services that could not have been developed in the same way by public administrations or businesses. Social entrepreneurship literature proposes the hybridization of profit and social goals (Johnson, 2000), or in other words to maintain a minimum of profit while serving social and ecological issues. Nonprofit entrepreneurs do not integrate

profit as one of their goals, as the latter are exclusively social (Defourny, 2010). Furthermore our results illustrate the fact that nonprofit entrepreneurs develop value-oriented rationalities as much as purposive rationalities. Therefore, when encouraging competition between NPOs and businesses to obtain public subsidies (Valéau and Annette, 2010), multiple criteria should be taken into account in order to respect the added-values NPOs often create.

According to Valéau and Annette (2010), Draperi (2010a, 2010b), Valéau, Cimper and Filion (2004), social entrepreneurship introduces a risk of turning NPOs into businesses, taking them away from their essence. Our data confirms the potential tensions between this approach and the traditional way of managing NPOs. Some of the propositions could actually help NPOs to increase their productivity, but they could also stifle the production of added-values such as work against exclusion, reinforcement of social integration, community building, participative democracy and local development. The adoption of SE principles by public authorities but also by foundations or businesses could threaten small NPOs whose contributions are not easily measurable.

Ref	Steps	Illustration
Step 1	A social entrepreneur	<i>“ I have a masters degree in human resources management. Just after I got my diploma, the president of the board came to me and offered me the job of director. (...) I had other plans in mind; I wanted to be an executive manager in a business, preferably in a big company. I accepted the job because I had nothing else at that time, but I had no intention of building my career in the nonprofit sector. My plan for the NPO was to make it more organized at the financial, human resources and production level. (...) I wanted to run it like any business delivering a non-market service. ”</i>
Step 2	Doubts and confusion	<i>“ I didn't like my first few months personally and professionally. I was working in a field for which I hadn't been trained. I was saying to myself: what the hell am I doing here?.. I was just about to give up and leave. I even informed the president that I had started to look for another job. ”</i>
Step 3	An activist	<i>“ Indeed, it was during the second year that I really got involved with the mission and values issues, the values of the sector as well as the values of my NPO (...) When I first arrived I had no notion of nonprofit commitment or activism. For me this was just a second rate sector. Two years later, I can say that I am an activist of the nonprofit world. Public administrations and businesses cannot carry out social actions at a very local level. NPOs are essential mediators, we are an essential and complementary actor of development. My commitment comes from the people I'm working with, the culture and the acknowledgement of my work ... As a result, I have signed up for another two years. ”</i>

**Table 6:** Case study, the adaptation of a young social entrepreneur to a community NPO

Nonprofit entrepreneurs are known and acknowledged for providing society with added-values that other entrepreneurs from other organizations and other sectors cannot. Local grassroots community NPOs, like the one referred to in table 5, are an emblematic example of these added-values. Through their observable activities, they promote citizenship commitment. Hence, one of the main innovations of the nonprofit sector consists in “killing several birds with one stone”, by producing new services and at the same time creating a social network of stakeholders. The framework of references (Watzlawick and al., 1975) and processes of thought (Piaget, 1971) underlying SE principles

do not allow people to perceive and value these kinds of performances and innovations. SE principles, as introduced in the French context, often refer to social utility, yet does the efficient achievement of social goals justify all technical and economic means? We do not reject SE principles outright, but call for adaptations integrating value-based rationality. The case presented in table 5 actually demonstrates the possible pathway from SE to an activism conforming to the values of the French nonprofit sector. This young graduate at first saw his NPO as a badly managed service (step 1). He was confused about the logic of action of the people around him (step 2), He then progressively began to understand and to subscribe to their value system, becoming, in turn, a true activist (step 3).

## Conclusion

This paper's main contribution lies in its analysis of the principles of social entrepreneurship grounded in the field (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), based on the perceptions and sensemaking of nonprofit leaders themselves. We made the choice to exclude all experts from our samples to focus solely on the latter. Our semi-directive interviews confronted these NPO leaders with core SE principles, without mentioning the term SE connoted with so much controversy. The main limitation of our study concerns the use of semi-directive interviews which were based on leaders' thoughts, self-reported behaviors and subjective perceptions of their management practices. Future research should combine semi-directive interviews with documents and other artifacts for greater objectivity. The nonprofit business model method presented by Boncler and Valéau (2010), combining interviews with facts and documents, could be used to improve the reliability of results.

Boutillier (2008) considers that social entrepreneurs are not very different from business entrepreneurs. Just like business entrepreneurs, they create new ventures, help them grow and sometimes risk bankruptcy (Knight, 1921). They often need to innovate and seize opportunities (Fayolle, 2007 ; Filion, 1997 ; Shane and Vankatamaran, 1997 ; Shumpeter, 1935 ; Verstraete, 2002). SE principles give a new perspective on the creation and development of nonprofit organizations, yet they are sometimes inappropriately pragmatic, only taking into account technical and economic achievements. Nonprofit entrepreneurs combine multiple criteria of performance: they do not seek to maximize their production but try to follow a balanced development between socially useful results and ethical ways of achieving them. In our mind, it is possible and highly relevant for SE to rework its principles to fit the diverse ways of managing and developing NPOs.

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