



## **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LAST 10 YEARS**

*A empresa social no contexto atual: uma revisão sistemática dos últimos 10 anos*

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**ABSTRACT:** The term social enterprise has gained notoriety since 2006, when Muhammed Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with Grameen Bank, resulting in a new business concept and the proposal of a new capitalist model. Social enterprises are focused on solving social, economic and environmental problems that have long plagued humanity, such as hunger, disease, pollution and homelessness. Due to the growing literature on social enterprises and the fragmentation of theories and concepts surrounding this term, this study investigates and shows that research on social enterprises develops over time. The research consists of a bibliometric analysis based on citation data from articles, books, and other materials available in the Thomson Reuters Web of Science database. This study analyzed 1063 articles on social enterprises dating from 2008 to 2018, noting that the number of publications on social enterprises changes over time.

**KEY WORDS:** social enterprise; bibliometric analysis; Web of Science database; WOS.

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## A EMPRESA SOCIAL NO CONTEXTO ATUAL: UMA REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA DOS ÚLTIMOS 10 ANOS

*Social enterprise in the current context: a systematic review of the last 10 years*

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**RESUMO:** O termo empresa social ganhou notoriedade desde 2006, quando Muhammed Yunus ganhou o Prêmio Nobel da Paz por seu trabalho com o Grameen Bank, resultando em um novo conceito de negócio e na proposta de um novo modelo capitalista. As empresas sociais estão focadas na solução de problemas sociais, econômicos e ambientais que há muito atormentam a humanidade, como fome, doenças, poluição e falta de moradia. Devido à crescente literatura sobre empreendimentos sociais e à fragmentação de teorias e conceitos que cercam este termo, este estudo investiga e mostra que a pesquisa sobre empreendimentos sociais se desenvolve ao longo do tempo. A pesquisa consiste em uma análise bibliométrica baseada em dados de citações de artigos, livros e outros materiais disponíveis no banco de dados da Thomson Reuters Web of Science. Este estudo analisou 1063 artigos sobre empresas sociais que datam de 2008 a 2018, observando que o número de publicações sobre empreendimentos sociais muda ao longo do tempo.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** empresa social; análise bibliométrica; Banco de dados da Web of Science; WOS

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of social enterprises came into being in Europe in the 1990s as a consequence of the Italian cooperative movement, followed by Belgium and the United Kingdom (DEFOURNY and NYSSSENS, 2010). However, it was only in 2002 that the British government defined "social enterprises" as a business, with basically social purposes, and that all profits generated should be reinvested according to the purpose of the business or the community (DTI, 2002).

The term social enterprise has gained notoriety since 2006, when Muhammed Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with Grameen Bank, resulting in a new business concept and the proposal of a new capitalist model.

Social enterprises are focused on solving social, economic and environmental problems that have long plagued humanity, such as hunger, disease, pollution and homelessness (YUNUS, 2010).

Due to the growing literature on social enterprises and the fragmentation of theories and concepts surrounding this term, this study investigates and shows that research on social enterprises develops over time. In addition, this study ex-amines the topics most widely found in the literature to identify possible weaknesses and gaps in scientific research in social enterprises. To achieve these goals, the research consists of a bibliometric analysis based on citation data from articles, books, and other materials available in the Thomson Reuters Web of Science database.

This study analyzed 1063 articles on social enterprises dating from 2008 to 2018, noting that the number of publications on social enterprises changes over time. After this brief introduction, Section 2 presents a literature review of social enterprises. Section 3 describes the search method. Section 4 discusses the results of bibliometric analysis. Finally, Section 5 presents conclusions, limitations and research opportunities arising from this study

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **SOCIAL ENTERPRISES**

Before the emergence of the concept of social enterprises, non-profit organizations, especially those of a religious nature, were already involved in generating income and business to complement their missionary activities. In the United Kingdom, in the mid-twentieth century, cooperatives functioned as a means of financing socio-economic agendas. In the United States, from the 1960s, non-profits organized businesses to create jobs for disadvantaged populations; and from 1970 onwards the Community Development Corporations (CDCs) emerged, which were very popular. Even in the 1970s microcredit organizations emerged in developing countries.

However, it is only in the last 15 to 20 years that academics, practitioners, and donors have been studying and registering cases of non-profits adopting market-based approaches to achieve their missions (ALTER, 2007).

The concept of social enterprises emerged in Europe in 1990, as a result of the Italian cooperative movement, which created "social cooperatives". The initial objective of these companies was the offer of lower cost of public sector services, as well as the generation of job opportunities for marginalized and unemployed populations (BORZAGA and DEFOURNY, 2001). In 1991, the Italian parliament approved a law that created a specific legal form for these cooperatives, which led to a great growth of the same. (1998), Spanish (1999), French (2001), Hungarian (2006), Polish (2006), and Portuguese (1998). This model was pioneered throughout Europe and has been influencing (totally or partially, with adaptations to national contexts) Czech (2012) (DEFOURNY & NYSSSENS, 2010; DEFOURNY & NYSSSENS, 2017). In the United States, the concepts of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise also had positive responses in the early 1990s. In 1993, for example,

Harvard Business School launched the Social Entrepreneurship Initiative, one of the milestones of the period (DEFOURNY & NYSSSENS, 2010).

The importance of social enterprises was recognized twice by the Nobel Committee, the first time in 2006, when Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to reduce poverty in Bangladesh by encouraging small businesses through microcredit offered by the institution he founded, the Grameen Bank. The second was in 2009, when, for the first time, the prize in Economic Sciences was given to a woman, Elinor Ostrom, for her work on small communities that, instead of competing with each other for the same re-sources, learned to cooperate to survive, something that refutes the idea popularized by the "Tragedy of the Commons", according to which the human being is condemned to face conflicts due to the scarcity of resources (GONÇALVES et al., 2016; HAUGH, 2012; YUNUS & JOLIS, 2007; HARDIN, 1968).

The importance of social enterprises to the academic field can be proven from its origin. The debate over its importance has expanded into various types of institutions; large universities have developed research and training programs in this area; international research networks, such as the European Research Network (EMES), which has been the focus of research-centers in most European Union countries (EU-15) since 1996, and the Network of Social Knowledge Enterprises (SEKN), established in 2001 by the main Latin American business schools and the Harvard Business School (DEFOURNY & NYSSSENS, 2010).

Authors such as Comini et al. (2012) and Buchko (2018) consider that there are three fundamental perspectives on social enterprises: the North American, the European and the developing countries.

1. The American perspective defines social enterprises as private organizations that apply the logic of the market for the resolution of social problems and includes any entrepreneurial action that has a social impact with its commercial action and can take various legal forms, such as limited companies, organizations non-profit, corporations, and corporations (Comini, 2011). Buchko (2018) complements that the American approach is divided into two schools: the first is called "social innovation" and is related to the concept of the "Ashoka" organization, the second is labeled "earned income" and refers commercial activities in support of its objectives.
2. The European perspective, born of the tradition of associations and cooperatives, emphasizes the role of civil society organizations with public functions (Comini et al., 2012). according to the model of the Italian "social cooperative". The prevailing academic approach in Europe emphasizes the importance of beneficiary participation in decision making and reinvestment of profit in the organization itself to enhance growth and social impact. This view is premised on the existence of a tension between obtaining financial and social results. The distribution of profit would have as a guide the search for the maximization of financial return to the shareholders / investors, which would be conflicting with the search for the maximization of social impact (Comini et al., 2012).
3. From the perspective of developing countries, as Comini et al. (2012), the usual term is inclusive business. The Latin American vision and the Asian view of Yunus (2007) have common elements. Both point out that social or inclusive businesses are strongly concerned about poverty reduction, and initiatives of this type should have a positive, effective and above all long-term social impact. The main reference for understanding the vision of social affairs in Latin America is the texts of researchers from the SEKN (Social Enterprise Knowledge Network) network. Formed in 2001 by leading business schools in Latin America, SEKN seeks to advance the frontiers of knowledge and the practice of social entrepreneurship through collaborative research, shared learning and case-study (Comini et al., 2012).

From the study of the three perspectives of social enterprises presented by Comini et al. (2012) and Buchko (2018), a bibliometric research was carried out to review the literature, aiming to identify the main definitions of social enterprises applied in research. Table 1 presents these definitions and their authors:

Table 1. Definitions of social enterprise publications

Definition	Authors
Social enterprises may refer to a non-profit organization, a socially-minded enterprise or a revenue-generating venture set up to create a positive social impact in the context of a financial bottom line.	Dees, 1998

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Social enterprise is an organizational form with key social drivers that undertakes innovative business operations to be self-sustaining and guarantees the creation, sustainability, distribution and / or dissemination of social or environmental value. Therefore, economic drivers are means to a social end, not the end in itself

Granados et al., 2001

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A social business is primarily a socially focused business whose surpluses are primarily reinvested for that purpose in the business or community, rather than driven by the need to maximize profit for shareholders and owners.

DTI, 2002

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Widely defined as the use of non-governmental, market-based approaches to addressing social issues, social enterprise has become an increasingly popular means of financing and delivering social initiatives in both regions.

Kerlin , 2006

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The main purpose of a social enterprise is to address areas of unmet social needs creating social and economic value rather than just making a profit for stakeholders.

Nicholls, 2006

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Organizations with an explicit purpose to benefit the community, idealized by a group of citizens and where the material interest of the capital investment is subject to limits.

Defourny and Nyssens 2006

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For the social enterprises of the European Research Network (EMES) "they are not private organizations that offer goods or services directly related to their explicit objective of benefiting the community"

Defourny and Nyssens , 2008

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Organizations that use business to achieve a social mission. Social enterprises adopt a wide range of strategies to address problems and opportunities in society.

Alter, 2007.

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The sustainability of social enterprises depends on their ability to cover the total costs of their operations and their ability to establish a market share. Unlike traditional companies, the premise is to develop self-sustaining ventures instead of maximizing profit. This means that there are no dividends for shareholders.

Yunus , 2008

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The social enterprise is a "non-profit organization" with a sustainable and scalable income stream generated from activities related to its social mission; it has an operational model and entrepreneurial leadership team

Brozek , 2009

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Although their organizational structure is based on a lossless, dividend-free basis, social enterprises are different from organizations of NGOs and non-governmental organizations.	Yunus et al., 2010
Social enterprises are organizations that seek to address social issues through the application of commercial practices and principles	Dacin et al., 2010
Social enterprises are private organizations that adopt strategies to achieve socially oriented goals.	Dacin et al., 2010
In Latin America, the Social Network of Entrepreneurial Knowledge (SEKN) defines social enterprises as organizations that generate social changes through market activities. This covers non-governmental organizations as well as traditional organizations involved in public sector welfare activities	Comini et al., 2012
Social enterprises seek to solve social problems through commercial ventures. They combine the efficiency, innovation, and resources of a traditional for-profit company with the mission, values, and passion of nonprofits.	Battilana, Lee, Walker and Dorsey, 2012
By definition, social enterprises adopt multiple stakeholders in pursuit of social missions through commercial ventures.	Smith, Gonin , Besharov, 2013
In social enterprises, the relationship between social missions and economic outcomes is not only mutually beneficial, but also mutually constitutive, so that social missions define business purposes and vice versa.	Smith, Gonin , Besharov, 2013
Social enterprises, such as organizations that combine a corporate and social dimension and operate in the interstices between the market and the state, have grown to become a salient phenomenon in academia and in the formulation of policies	Alegre & Berbegal-Mirabent , 2016
Social enterprises are often seen as a source of new and innovative solutions to persistent social problems and a means for better inclusion of employees and customers.	Konsti-Laakso et al., 2016
A social business is a business with social goals, whose profits are reinvested in the community or in the business.	Bull & Ridley- Duff , 2018.

The authors' definitions converge by presenting that the objectives or missions of social enterprises are social, the structures are of business or commercial organizations and must be profitable. Before proposing a definition of social enterprise, some characteristics peculiar to this type of business will be presented: a) - Economic and social market the market for an SE does not only refer to sales revenues, but is developed from the principles of market and philanthropic principles in terms of motives, methods and objectives, and argues that most social enterprises combine commercial and philanthropic elements in a productive equilibrium (DEES, 1998); b) Mission and purpose - these companies are dedicated to the fulfillment of a social mission that is fundamentally different from the main objective of conventional companies, that is, the

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maximization of profits in the interests of owners / shareholders (Defourny and NYSSSENS, 2017); c) Profit - in social enterprises, the main thing is not to maximize shareholder financial returns, but to expand the social enterprise and reach more people in need, and wealth accumulation is not a priority, and profits must be reinvested in the company for finance expansion (BUCHKO, 2018).

Based on the three basic characteristics presented by Dees (1998), Defourny and Nyssens (2017) and Buchko (2018) and the definitions presented in Table 1 of this article, it is proposed a possible definition for social enterprise, as presented in follow.

A social enterprise can be a private or non-profit organization to create positive social impact or organization that combines a corporate and social dimension with a social goal or direction or a social mission that seeks to solve social problems whose profits are reinvested in the community or business.

## **METHODOLOGY**

According to the purpose and purpose of this project, the research adopted the qualitative and quantitative approach. The form of logical reasoning used was the inductive method. In relation to the nature of the sources used the research is classified as bibliographic and experimental.

To identify the state of the art, a bibliographic search was performed using the systematic review method, which according to Sampaio and Mancini (2007), is a formal method for the synthesis of information available in primary studies that are relevant for the set of research questions.

According to Kitchenhan et al. (2008), the systematic review is characterized by the adoption of a methodology for the identification, analysis and interpretation of all available evidence during the research, so that it is free of bias and can be repeated if necessary.

Sampaio and Mancini (2007) presents three steps for the systematic review: planning, execution and reporting.

The planning stage basically consists of defining the research questions and preparing the review protocol.

The review protocol defines exactly how each step of the search is performed so that it can be reproduced.

The research is performed in the execution stage following the steps established in the review protocol and its results are presented with the preparation of the report.

The quantitative analysis of the results found with the systematic review provided an overview of the existing studies of temporal problems and the temporal indetermination in databases, as well as the solutions when dealing with this issue.

In order to guide the mapping of the systematic review of the literature of this work, we raised the research questions that act as a factor of inclusion and exclusion of the studies found. The research question guiding this work is:

- What are the definitions found related to social enterprises?

Subsequently, the search bases used in the research were defined. The study used Thomson Reuters's Web of Science database database, the former ISI Web of Knowledge, which is an online scientific information wizard. This database gives academics access to articles from scientific journals, books and other academic documents in all fields of science. In addition, Thomson Reuters' Web of Science journals have impact factors in the Journal Citation Report (JCR).

After defining the bases where the searches are made, the synonyms were defined for each item of the research questions, besides grouping the terms according to Table 2 below. Subsequently, search terms were defined (terms concatenated with Boolean operators).

It is necessary to represent the sets of terms found in the research questions in order to retrieve the relevant works in the searched databases.

In order to answer the research questions raised, the synonym groups were combined and the search strings were defined: "social enterprise"

After using the search strings in the publications databases already described, some criteria were used to select the articles for this systematic review of the literature, such criteria were:

- Articles published in revised journals or conferences that answer one or more research questions;
- Articles published in the last 10 years, from 2008 to 2018;
- Studies available for download in the search bases defined.

- Duplicate studies were excluded from the sample
- Articles that did not meet the scope of this work, ie works that did not answer all the questions that guide this research.
- After selecting the articles with the criteria already mentioned, all abstracts were sent to 2 reviewers of this systematic review of the literature, so that each one of them gave their final opinion on the articles, this being the last selection phase.
- Finally, studies that do not respond to research questions and those that were not available for download are excluded from the analysis.

The Systematic Review of the literature was carried out with two purposes: to gather knowledge about social enterprise and other fields of knowledge, with the purpose of finding primary studies on the subject and also the solutions pointed out in the literature.

The scope of this analysis covers all available documents, languages and countries because the purpose of this study is to obtain an overview of developments in social enterprise research.

## RESULTS

The study examines surveys dating from 2008 to 2018. The WOS database analysis focuses on social enterprise research (bibliometric analysis occurred in January 2019). To do so, this study looks at all the documents on the subject found in the WOS. The resulting sample comprises 1063 documents, including articles, annals, reviews, book reviews, editorial material, book chapters, meeting summaries, notes and letters. This article uses the term document as opposed to the article to refer to any of these forms of research production.

The bibliometric indicators used in this research are the following:

- Publication of research on social enterprise
- Number of social company research documents published between 2008 and 2018
- Countries where authors have published research on social enterprise
- Magazines in which the authors published research on social enterprise
- Areas of knowledge within which authors have published research on social enterprise
- Authors who published research on social enterprise.

## Languages

Table 2 shows the number of social enterprise publications by language, according to data collected from WOS. The most common language is English (1017 documents) as expected. The second most common language is Spanish (23 documents). This pattern meets expectations because the main journals are in English, which is the language that all re-searchers should know in the modern global academic community. One surprising result is the greater number of documents written in minority languages, such as Slovak or Czech, than in important languages such as German. This result may therefore be the preference of scholars in Slovakia and the Czech Republic for publishing in their own language.

Table 2. Languages used in research

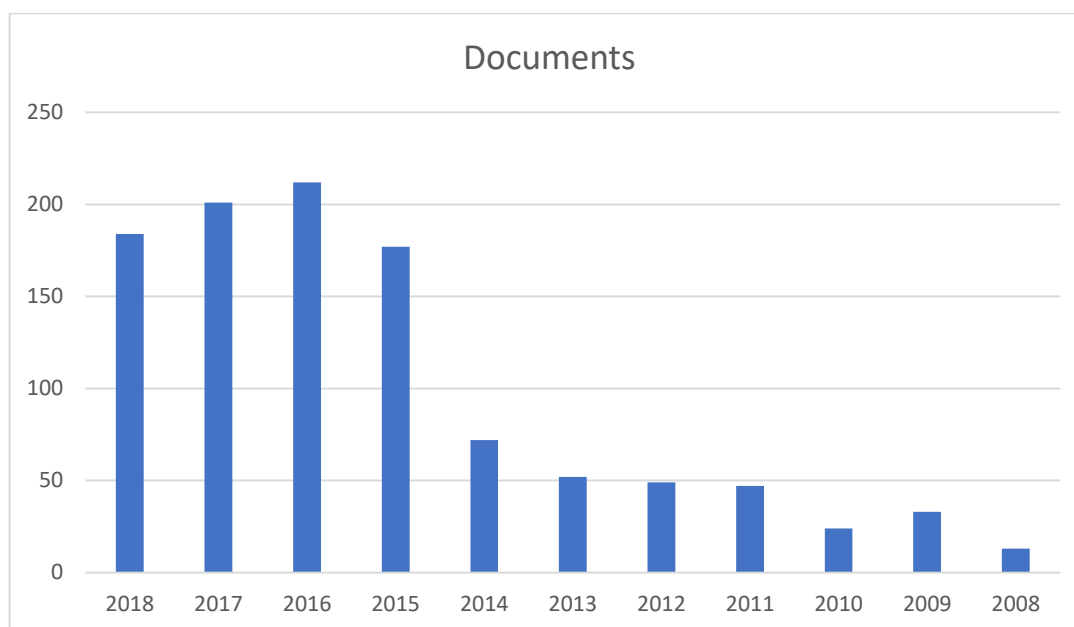
Language	Documents
English	1017
Spanish	23
Slovak	5
Czech	4
Croatian	2
French	2
Portuguese	2
Russian	2



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## Number of publications per year

A search for the concept of social enterprise in the WOS revealed that the first article on social enterprises appeared in 1949, remained until 1968 without any publication and in 1991 begins to appear with an annual periodicity which confirms the affirmation of Defourny & Nyssens (2010) that the concept of social enterprises emerged in Europe in the 1990s, as a consequence of the Italian cooperative movement, followed by Belgium and the United Kingdom. The number of documents published per year before 2008 is very low (less than 40 per year). Graph 01 shows the number of publications between 2008 and 2018. The data show how interest in this area of knowledge increased year by year. The number of publications increased annually, except in 2010, but from 2011 to 2014 it seems a period of relative stability. From the year 2015, however, in the academic interest, this topic has increased. In 2015, the number of social enterprise articles is almost 5.5 higher than the same number in 2009. A similar trend occurs between 2016 and 2018. By 2016, publications total 212 documents, and by 2018, published documents arrive to 183. This continued interest shows that social enterprise is still relevant to society and that researchers can still deal with many gaps.



**Graph 1. Number of publications per year**

## Countries

As Table 3 shows, the countries with the most publications are the English-speaking countries. Thus, English is the most common language for publishing research on social enterprises. Table 3 shows that, in the US, publications since 2008 on social enterprise total 212. England ranks second with 204 publications. Few studies are in other languages because of the difficulty of publishing research in non-English language. Currently, most scientific conferences accept research in English only, although there are exceptions.

**Table 3. Countries where social enterprise research has been published**

Country	Documents
Usa	219

England	204
Australia	87
Canada	79
Scotland	60
Peoples r china	49
Italy	45

### Higher Productivity journals

Knowing journals that publish social enterprise surveys is especially important in deciding which journals to read when conducting a literature review, but also to be familiar with the focus of each journal. Table 4 presents the journals that published most of the documents on social enterprise.

The study identified 334 journals that publish articles on social enterprise. Table 4 presents the 9 most productive journals in social enterprise research. We highlight three journals: A social enterprise journal with 62 articles, then *Voluntas* with 37 and the *Journal of social entrepreneurship* with 25 articles.

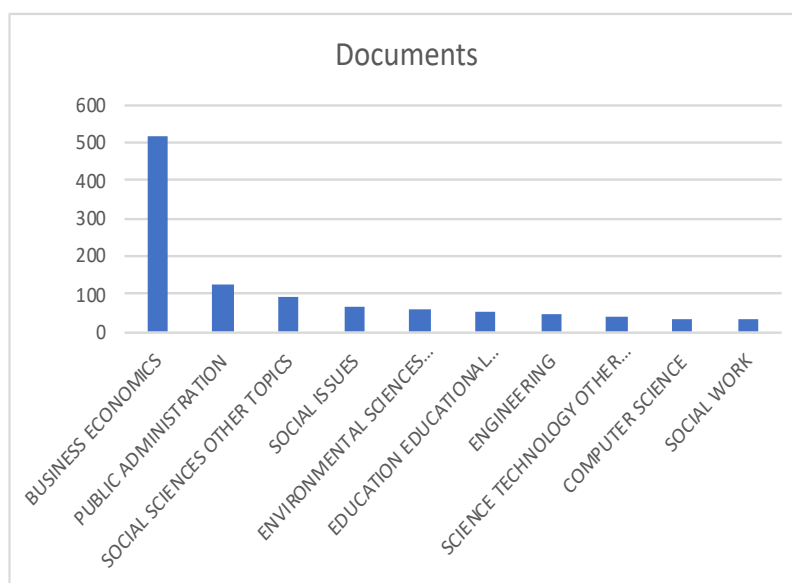
Table 4. Higher Productivity journals.

Journal	Documents
Social enterprise journal	62
<i>Voluntas</i>	37
<i>Journal of social entrepreneurship</i>	25
<i>Journal of business ethics</i>	20
<i>Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly</i>	16
<i>Proceedings of the european conference on entrepreneurship and innovation</i>	12
<i>Entrepreneurship and regional development</i>	11
<i>International journal of entrepreneurial behaviour research</i>	11
<i>Journal of cleaner production</i>	11

### Research Areas

The research areas with the largest number of research articles on social enterprise are business economics (513 publications), public administration (127 publications) and social sciences (94 publications). In addition to these more popular areas, many additional fields address social enterprises. These fields include environmental science, education, engineering, technology and computer science, Graph 2.

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Graph 2. Number of publications per research areas

## Higher Productivity Authors

The number of citations an article receives and the studies cited in an article are two of the most used bibliometric indicators to determine the quality of an article. However, the number of citations received by an article may be due to the popularity of the article's author or the field of research, not to the relevance of the article itself. Table 5 lists the most important authors in terms of social enterprise research. According to the WOS

Finally, the study analyses the impact of the most productive authors. Table 5 shows the authors who publish more on the subject are Roy MJ with 20 articles, Teasdale S has 10 articles and Barraket J, Donaldson C and Mazzei M with 8 articles. However, the most cited author is Defourny J, with 461. Despite having more publications, Roy MJ and Teasdale S are not the most productive authors; Defourny J (112.18 citations per article) and Nyssens M (19.80 citations per article) are more productive. Research in social enterprises is dominated by men, because most authors are men.

Table 5. Higher Productivity authors.

Author	Publications	Citations	C/P
Roy Mj	20	73	3,7
Teasdale S	10	191	19,1
Barraket J	8	34	4,3
Donaldson C	8	8	1,0
Mazzei M	8	4	0,5
Ferguson Km	7	37	5,3
Hazenber R	7	17	2,4
Doherty B	6	104	17,3
Lysaght R	6	14	2,3
Mason C	6	78	13,0
Baglioni S	5	1	0,2
Baker R	5	1	0,2

Corbiere M	5	17	3,4
Hall K	5	25	5,0
Kay A	5	18	3,6
Liu G	5	28	5,6
Nyssens M	5	99	19,8
Asmalovskij A	4	2	0,5
Bartlett B	4	8	2,0
Chandra Y	4	9	2,3
Cho S	4	5	1,3
Defourny J	4	451	112,8
Douglas H	4	10	2,5

## CONCLUSION

This article presents a bibliometric analysis of social enterprise research to determine the areas in which researchers are studying, the language of publication of this research, the trend in the number of publications from year to year, the most relevant periodicals for reviewing the literature, the most prolific and most cited social enterprise authors and the countries that are developing social enterprise research. This analysis provides a guide for those entering the field of social enterprise, providing information on which journals to consult and which authors are most eminent.

The bibliometric analysis of 1063 social enterprise research papers collected from the Web of Science (WOS) database shows that 777 are scientific articles.

However, the fact that a country has more publications does not mean that they are of higher quality. English is the most common language for posting surveys. English is currently the universal language and gives authors much more publishing opportunities than any other language.

Most of the documents in the Web of Science are articles because this format allows authors to publish concise search accounts in prestigious research journals. The journals with more articles on social enterprise are social enterprise journal with 62 articles, then the *Voluntas* with 37 and the *Journal of social entrepreneurship* with 25 articles. The prominence may be because these journals accept a greater number of articles in this area of research. Although many publications are part of business research, articles on social enterprises are part of many areas of research. The country responsible for most social enterprise research is the United States (219 publications). The most prolific author of the social enterprise is Defourny J (4 documents and 451 quotes).

The results of the bibliometric analysis show that the number of publications grows moderately. In recent years, only 774 surveys have emerged about social enterprises. Arguably, this may be because research on social enterprises is in its early stages. In addition, knowledge is fragmented because many areas of research mention social enterprises and their characteristics.

The main problem of bibliometric analysis is in the indicators to measure quantity, quality and connections between publications. The citation index or number of publications often measures quality or quantity regardless of the actual quality of the article. Future research could also compare the results of other databases with those of this research.

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