



> Thursday, April 9th, 2026
> 10:30 – 12:00
> ICOR



EMPOWERING CHANGEMAKERS FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

‘DARWINISTS AND AVANT-GARDISTS: A RECOMBINANT PERSPECTIVE ON THE NOVELTY OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES’

PRESENTED BY NIKOLAS RATHERT – Assistant Professor at the Organization Studies Department of Tilburg University



ABSTRACT (1/2)

Social enterprises, organizations using market-based approaches to tackle social problems, represent a \$2 trillion global sector employing 200 million people.

As these organizations proliferate across diverse institutional contexts, characterized by divergent competitive dynamics, legal frameworks, and meanings of social enterprises, assessing both what makes social enterprises organizationally distinctive and where they converge becomes an increasingly complex undertaking for organization scholars.

Existing perspectives conceptualize social enterprises as categorically novel forms - either blending conflicting institutional logics or deviating from corporate archetypes - offering limited insights into these questions. In this paper, we introduce a recombinant perspective on social enterprises to capture their organizing novelty and conventionality across diverse contexts and organizational domains.



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ABSTRACT (2/2)

Mobilizing computational simulations that do not rely on predetermined reference categories and comprehensive survey data from over 1,000 social enterprises across nine countries, our approach examines combinations of fundamental organizational elements whose novelty and/or conventionality depend on their empirical prevalence within specific contexts.

We reveal three key findings:

- 1) the existence of two distinct novelty-conventionality configurations among social enterprises: Darwinists (embedding radical novelty in conventionality) and Avant-gardists (combining radical novelty with unconventionality);
- 2) based on an abductive analysis, the founder, organization, and context-level antecedents associated with novelty-conventionality configurations;
- 3) and a significant association between such configurations and a key organizational outcome: long-term survival.



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BIOGRAPHY

Nikolas' research examines the interplay of business and society to better understand how to organize for a sustainable and inclusive society.

He is interested in the role of both established market actors such as corporations and new/alternative forms of organizing such as social enterprises in addressing different societal challenges, and the institutional and organizational dynamics that shape this role. He has examined these questions in the context of decent work, global health, and political participation.

He has a PhD in Management from the Freie Universität Berlin and have held visiting positions at the Kellogg School of Management and Cornell University, where he was a Fulbright Scholar. Currently, he is the program coordinator of the Global Management of Social Issues tracks in the Master Organization and Management Studies/Sociology.