Unconditional Reciprocity and the Case of Italian Social Cooperatives

Simone Poledrini

Abstract
Although scholars of the nonprofit sector have looked at the theoretical implications of social enterprises (SEs), more details and clarification are desirable. In particular, most previous theoretical work refers to the nonprofit sector generically and fails to account for the particularities of organizations within a more general definition of SE. This article surveys previous theories and proposes a framework based on the theory of reciprocity and the concept of unconditional reciprocity to interpret a particular kind of SE: the Italian social cooperative.

Keywords
nonprofit sector, social cooperative, social enterprise, theory of reciprocity

Introduction
In recent years, social enterprises (SEs) have been studied in great detail. These studies concern numerous aspects of SEs, such as the links between the cultural, social, economic, and political development of various types of SEs (Kerlin, 2009, 2010, 2013). Some highlight the differences between American and European SEs (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Kerlin, 2006). Others consider the problems of finding financial resources and conducting business (e.g., Dees, 1998; Moore, 2000; Froelich, 1999), real-world examples of SEs (Spear & Bidet, 2005; Thompson & Doherty, 2006), or the theoretical perspective (Borzaga & Tortia, 2009; Valentinov, 2008). The latter aspect needs further investigation.

Indeed, as Borzaga and Tortia (2006) asserted, the prevailing theory in nonprofit studies explains the existence of SEs using a theoretical framework from traditional...