

## PUBLIC SERVICE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES CONCEPT

Iuliia ILIASHENKO

University of Insubria

Via Ravasi 2, Varese, Italy

juliya-ilyashenko@yandex.ua

**Abstract.** *This paper provides a general analysis of public service entrepreneurship as a substantial subdomain of the entrepreneurship as a science as well as entrepreneurial opportunities that have emerged in the context of the process of liberalization in public services industries. There are many scientific papers devoted to the experience of liberalization process in a number of countries in different industries. Nevertheless, the lack of conceptualization of the theoretical framework from standpoint of entrepreneurship has been revealed. The main goal of the paper was to provide evidence that in-depth exploration of the entrepreneurial activities in public service industries as previous stated-owned can contribute to the comprehension of the entrepreneurship core dimensions. In order to achieve the goal there have been three tasks to be done. First one has been to provide clarification of the public service entrepreneurship notion, second - to treat the practicability of its positioning as a scientific subdomain of entrepreneurship. The third task has been to distinguish appropriate entrepreneurial dimensions of its investigation. The discovering of the nexus between state approach to the economic transformation and entrepreneurial opportunities that occur could provide both theoretical and practical value in order to deepen the understanding of the nature of internal barriers and governmental constraints inherent to public services industries as well as its impact on the type and properties of opportunities.*

**Keywords:** *public service entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial opportunities; liberalization; utilities; public sector.*

### Introduction

The phenomenon of entrepreneurship remains of current scientific interest due to the increasing influence on the social and economic life of society on local and cross-country levels, particularly the core concepts of opportunities are still the most intriguing core concept of entrepreneurship. Many scientific types of research have already dealt with the issue of identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities and its place in the core concepts in the entrepreneurial theories. Theoretical and empirical works devoted to the entrepreneurial opportunities, its typology, and different models are staying of current scientific interest and typically grounded based on the concept of alertness developed by Kirzner and prior knowledge and asymmetric information proposed by Hayek's and developed by Shane, Eckhardt, and Venkataraman.

Meanwhile, the exploitation of the entrepreneurial opportunities, which comes from the liberalization of the regular economy, is remaining one of the most significant spheres of research. Special cases when an industry, passing through the

transformation period, provides public goods and has significant social meaning (for instance, utilities) is are of particular interest as well. Simultaneously, investigation of public sector entrepreneurship is becoming the subject of precise scientific interest over the last 20 years. Nonetheless, it is considered primarily through the lens of privatization and partially through start-ups, i.e. central focus lies on the firm formation and partially on the innovative component.

However, according to Shane a new firm formation is “merely one institutional arrangement for the identification, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities”, inasmuch as the same results can be reached by individuals within “existing firms or through market mechanisms” (Shane, 2003). Nevertheless, other dimensions typically are less considered. For instance, Pittz and White (2016) presented paper considers “public-private partnerships (PPPs) as exemplars of enduring entrepreneurship ... Many PPPs exhibit continual renewal and repeated acts of entrepreneurship as they explore novel solutions to intractable social problems...” (Pittz & White, 2016). Nevertheless, considering PPPs from the standpoint of Schumpeterian institutional innovations, issues devoted to the opportunities identification are omitted. This state of affairs has led to the fact that to date, the most of the studies related to exploration of opportunities, which comes from the economic transformation processes, have concentrated in the literature of public administration. This paper provides arguments that public service entrepreneurship phenomenon remains undisclosed, being in its turn highly relevant to the subjects of entrepreneurial theories treatment.

The main goal of the paper is to provide evidence that in-depth exploration of the public service entrepreneurship as a substantial scientific subdomain of entrepreneurship can contribute to the comprehension of its core dimensions. In particular, treatment of the public service entrepreneurship from the standpoint of opportunity concept could provide interesting patterns that will shed the light on the issues of the nature of entrepreneurial opportunities.

Recent research of Ramoglou and Tsang (2016) promotes a realistic perspective on the entrepreneurship, observing opportunities as propensities considering the key issues of the entrepreneurial theories. Current achievements prove the scientific interest increasing to deep existing theories with new approaches as well as the fact that interest to the opportunities exploration process remains at high level. One of the main issues of entrepreneurship as a field of research is the discussion about the subjective or objective nature of entrepreneurial opportunities. Paper presented by Ramoglou and Tsang (2016) promotes the approach, which defines opportunities “... as unactualized propensities - as an alternative that maintains a commitment to the objectivity of opportunities but does not have the shortcomings plaguing the discovery perspective...”. These theoretical achievements consequently have raised a new wave of discussion concerning entrepreneurial opportunities theorization, typology, properties, and the role of prior knowledge in its discovery as well. Thus, it can be considered of great importance to work out the conceptual framework for the entrepreneurship in the fields that provides public and social goods and are under the process of liberalization.

As well, the paper seeks to explain why it is reasonable studying the public service entrepreneurship to shift the attention away from the comprehension of the nexus individuals acting as entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial opportunities exploitation

(highlighted by Erhard and Shane (2003) towards the revealing of the nexus between state approach to economic transformation and opportunities exploration.

The notes are going to proceed by following steps. First step – to treat the origin of notion of public sector entrepreneurship and to describe the attributes that differentiate public service entrepreneurship; second – to provide brief literature overview to define the place of public service entrepreneurship among particular scientific domains; third – to distinguish the dimensions of entrepreneurship as a field of research treatment of which public service entrepreneurship subdomain in order to contribute the theory of entrepreneurship.

### **“Public service entrepreneurship” – the origin of the concept**

For the purpose of the paper in determining of the public service entrepreneurship notion, it was decided to adhere to the Baron's definition of entrepreneurial opportunities as “perceived means of generating economic value (i.e., profit) that have not previously been exploited, and are not currently being exploited by others”. On the other hand, Matthews' (2014) definition of the process of entrepreneurially acting in public sector as a pattern of specific behavior of identifying precise commercial opportunity and internal barriers as well as willing to exploit them taking into consideration “the operational and governance constraints imposed by the respective public sector agency itself” (Matthews, 2014) highlights the main peculiarities of entrepreneurship in public sector. Thus, firstly before to consider the meaning of public service entrepreneurship it is reasonable to discover closely related notion of public sector entrepreneurship. In various studies, this notion was implicated relatively recently. For instance, Tosterud et al. (1999) considered the public sector entrepreneurship as transference of the private sector entrepreneurial organizational tools at public sector enterprises in order to improve its efficiency. According to Leyden et al. (2015) public sector entrepreneurship has been defined as “the promulgation of innovative public policy initiatives that generate greater economic prosperity by transforming a status quo economic environment into one that is more conducive to economic units engaging in creative activities in the face of uncertainty” (Leyden & Link, 2015). Nevertheless, the patterns considered by the authors include revealing the impact of state acts on the public sector entrepreneurship on the example of small businesses and nonprofit organizations in particular universities and federal government laboratories which actively promote technology transfer to the private sector as commercialization of its exploitation as a “quintessential examples of the public sector recognizing and exploiting opportunities to bring about change and efficiency”. However, if we accept the description of national economies as the composition of “three major sectors: the private sector, the social or non-profit sector, and the public or government sector” (provided by Tosterud, 1999) it is becoming obvious that there is still some tangle of public service entrepreneurship perception between different scientist. The case of Leyden's mixing example of the treatment of public sector entrepreneurship through the consideration of nonprofit organizations is quite illustrative.

At this stage, it is reasonable to switch attention to the notion of public service entrepreneurship. Initially, it was applied at the beginning of XX century in the sphere of health and social care services in order to treat the peculiarities of mutual ventures

foundation. In addition, up to now, it is often applied exactly at that meaning. In return, Drucker (2009) in his note called "Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Public Service Organizations" includes to the public service organization education, health, and community service as well as stresses one the main attributes of the last one: the focus on enterprises first on "doing good".

*"The effectiveness of the public service organization may thus be measured by its increasing budget and increasing services or activities, or by its efficiency, providing more services at a lesser cost... While innovation and entrepreneurship may be more of a challenge in institutions of higher education and other public service organizations, it can be done. If opportunities are not addressed internally, someone else will address them externally, and the organization will eventually become obsolete." (Drucker, 2009).*

Based on statements mention above this paper seeks to provide clarification of the nexus between notions of the public sector and public service entrepreneurship. As it was revealed the majority of studies have examined health care, education institutes and public-private technology's transfers' from the standpoint of public entrepreneurship concept thus creating a huge gap in the entrepreneurial scientific literature. The treatment of public service entrepreneurship should include investigation of utility enterprises (i.e. water supply and sewage, heating, electricity, transport enterprises, etc.) as the source of contributions to the theories of entrepreneurship. These enterprises are a substantial part of national economies and provide services of great social meaning supporting all sphere of economic life as well. Instead of this, all scientific experience concerning this issue is tied up in literature devoted to the liberalization processes consideration. The exploration of public sector entrepreneurship including the sphere of health care, education, etc. should include investigation of public service entrepreneurship with a focus on the entrepreneurial activity of "utilities" as a separate scientific subdomain of entrepreneurship.

From this perspective in order to provide clarification, the entrepreneurial opportunities in public sector are defined as perceived means of generating economic value (i.e., profit) in order to support performing of social functions (i.e. formation of social value of particular quality level) in such a way that has not previously been exploited, and are not currently being exploited.

Public service entrepreneurship in its turn is a process of recognition of these opportunities in previously state-owned industries which provides public services and its further exploitation with respect to internal barriers and operational and governance constraints inherent in the public sector. The main goal of public services entrepreneurship study is to provide a general analysis of opportunities that have been emerged in the process of liberalization in public services industries as a specific kind of opportunities with the particular properties and the peculiar process of its exploration.

From this standpoint, it is reasonable to consider entrepreneurial opportunities in two main dimensions:

- to treat the entrepreneurial opportunities in public services entrepreneurship as specific kind of opportunities in the frame of classical dimensions of entrepreneurship;
- to analyze the process of recognition and exploitation of the entrepreneurial opportunities in public services entrepreneurship as ones which appear under the

transformational processes in the national economy (i.e. liberalization, institutional changes, etc.).

### **Public service entrepreneurship as scientific subdomain of entrepreneurship**

In order to identify the current positioning of public service entrepreneurship among existing theories and studies paper provides a brief overview of literature sources that considers this phenomenon from a different standpoint. As it has been mentioned before, one of the main lenses of its consideration is case studying of privatization and public-private partnership. Consequently, the vast majority of publications were concentrated in public management journals, such as International Public Management Journal, Public Management Review and Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, etc. The key point of these publications is application of management techniques inherent for private companies in the public sphere which generated the stream in management literature called “new public management” - Eckerd (2016), Brown (2011), Heijden (2016), Verhoest (2014), Grimmelikhuisen (2016), Wynen (2013), etc. The second source is reports of national and international associations, which aim is to investigate the consequences of economic transformation in countries. These publications cover issues connected to the processes of “demunicipalisation” and “demonopolisation” in public sector (for instance, Report of American Society for Public Administration (Pichla, 2014), Research Unit EU Integration, Public Services International Research Unit). The main feature of these reports is the absence of causality investigation. Another source of publications is management review journals. These publications are of significant importance as includes attempts to provide the “entrepreneurial point of view” to the issue of the public service entrepreneurship. For instance, Klein (2010) considering interrelation between public entrepreneurship and private entrepreneurial behavior, highlighted that public and private entrepreneurship critically differs by “the definition and measurement of objectives and the opportunities for rent-seeking” (Klein, 2010).

The achievements of specific interest were presented in the paper of Shaker and Zahra (2000) published in *The Academy of Management Review* by promoting a model of linking the privatization to a company’s entrepreneurial activities. The authors highlighted the lack of investigation of the influence of privatization on firms’ ability “to innovate and engage in entrepreneurial activities”, which could be considered as an indirect examination of the how liberalization effect on entrepreneurship development (Shaker & Zahra, 2000). Andrew Spicer et al. (2000) explore the nexus of privatization policies and effectiveness releasing entrepreneurial endeavors in transition economies through the lens of the speed of poverty reform. The main achievement of this study was the demonstration on the example of several countries (in particular, Hungary, Check Republic and Poland) that approach which state choose has a direct influence on the entrepreneurial enabling environment creation and consequently leads to the different kind of opportunities emerges in the similar conditions of economy transformation.

The overview of Gale Academic OneFile database revealed that the peculiarity of these publications is that further traces of citations showed that 65% of it leads to the publications in strategic journals (i.e. Journal of Strategic Innovation and Sustainability, Strategic Organization, etc.), 10% accounted for Corporate Governance Journals, such

as Industrial and Corporate Change, Corporate Governance An international overview, etc., another almost 10% goes to Policy Journal, for instance Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law, as well little bit more that 10% of paper are published in management journals, such as Academy of Management Review, and the rest devoted to the different studies, the most relative to the topic among them is Urban Studies journals. It illustrates the lack of systematic approach to the issue under consideration causes the further analysis does not deepen previous achievements, instead of this it deviates into the different stream of studies with the different objectives and applications.

Finally, the last place by the number of related to the theme publications represented by the journals of entrepreneurship and business journals. Nevertheless, these publications are of great importance with respect to disclosure of public service entrepreneurship phenomenon. For instance, indirect consideration of the opportunities recognition process is observed in the recent investigation devoted to the peculiarities of searching the information on public sector tender opportunities of small and medium-sized enterprises taking into consideration firm's innovative orientation (Reijonen et al., 2016). Morris (1999) paid precise attention to the characteristics of the environment in which public sector enterprises operate and the increasing meaning of entrepreneurship within this operation from the standpoint of contingency theory. The peculiarities of introduction the quasi-markets in public sector, which can be provided only through the application of entrepreneurial activity is considered by Boyett (1996). The literature overview showed that at 90-ies of XX century the issue of public service entrepreneurship was considered primarily in entrepreneurial journals but then there was a shift of scientific attention to the direction of public administration research which prove statement concerning the gap in the consideration of entrepreneurial activity in public service industries from the point of entrepreneurship and the concept of opportunity in particular.

If consider the second task stated in the first part of the paper it is necessary to study the literature which deals particularly with processes of economic transformation in public service industries. There is a lot of liberalization experience in this field, organizing special forms of entrepreneurship (for example, the experience of Italy to organize mixed water supply enterprises (Marra, 2006). Nevertheless, there is a lack of research concerning the generalization of this problem that could provide enterprises with a theoretical base with respect to the issue of how to make this process less painful for the industries that have a great social meaning. One of the interesting researches on this issue was provided by Roeder (1998). It stated that instead of liberalization in these countries one integrated command economy is replaced by many smaller mercantilist economies with strong patronage-based welfare policies. Thus, there are many peculiarities of the post-soviet countries liberalization process. Nevertheless, not enough attention has been paid to the consideration of liberalization as an economic transformation that acts as a specific source of entrepreneurial opportunities from the standpoint of core concepts of entrepreneurial theories.

In addition, it was revealed the lack of scientific literature that considers the peculiarities of market development in the industry with respect to its role as the environment in the process of entrepreneurial opportunities exploration. For that matter, there is the essential definition of public service industries as initially state-controlled sector of the economy under deregulation processes. In such a way it is developed enabling an environment for privatization processes and "because of an

active free market in other sectors, there are many successful examples of the newly deregulated firms to follow” (Shaker & Zahra, 2000). The last statement highlighted the necessity of rigorous economic transformation processes in public service industries as the peculiar environment of entrepreneurial opportunity exploration and exploitation. The empirical outlook with this respect is presented through the analysis of the city development strategies from the standpoint of identification of urban entrepreneurship objects (for instance, Hong Kong case (Jessop et al., 2000)).

Thus, conceptualization of public service entrepreneurship through the treatment from the opportunistic concept in entrepreneurship with respect to the disclosure of the state approach and opportunities-emergence nexus has a potential as a subdomain of entrepreneurship as a science to deepen comprehension of its key dimension.

### **Public service entrepreneurship through the lens of entrepreneurial dimensions**

In general, the investigation of entrepreneurial opportunities exploration under the liberalization process in public services industries should be considered through all four dimensions of entrepreneurship as a field of research, highlighted by Shane. Nevertheless, this paper is focusing mainly on two of them: the discussion of the nexus of opportunities and individuals and the discussion of means-ends relationships, innovation, and new combinations are supposed to be the dimensions mentioned above.

#### ***The state approach – entrepreneurial opportunities vs. individuals-opportunity nexus***

The paper argues that from the perspective of potential contribution to the theory of entrepreneurship it is reasonable to shift attention away from the treatment of the nexus between individuals and the process of opportunities recognition and exploitation towards the investigation of the nexus between state approach to economic transformation and types of entrepreneurial opportunities emergence. In the case of concentration on the individual-opportunity nexus, the great level of social responsibility is one of the main features of public service entrepreneur. Thereby under consideration of this nexus, the main focus will be on the perspective of personal characteristics of entrepreneurs as individuals, willing to bear the social responsibility and to overcome internal operational and governmental barriers in the exploitation of the opportunities. It could be considered as a step back to the concentration on the entrepreneur personality. Contrariwise, exploration of entrepreneurial opportunities sensitivity to the state approaches can provide researchers with necessary information of the nature of these barriers and its impact on the type and properties of opportunities, for instance, life cycle etc. The following brief case study of Berlin water supply enterprise liberalization will seek to provide illustrative evidence to this statement. Currently, this case is treated as for example of the liberalization failure and management is gradually returning to the public governance. Prior to the partial privatization Berlin Waterworks (Berliner Wasserbetriebe, BWB) was a substantial institution for 3.7 million people, and produced million euro profits annually as revenue into Berlin’s budget (Werle, 2004). The general reason for the privatization was an expansion of the large multi-utility groups, who are always on the outlook for new investments possibilities, as well as in the neo-liberally fashioned ideology of the global economy (Werle, 2004). However, analyzing this case in terms of

entrepreneurship conceptual cause of this failure could be determined as the absence of nature precondition for the entrepreneurial opportunities emergence. There was no disequilibrium between the perception of value or price. As well as we take into consideration possibility of particular disequilibrium inherent for public service, specifically price-quality disequilibrium, which is one of the most important attributes of public service entrepreneurship development. Anyway, it was not a case of Berlin as well as there were no any managerial crises. Therefore, this entrepreneurial opportunity was artificially generated and proved to be unsustainable. However, in the most cases, scientific literature-inclined to call privatization as an antecedent of entrepreneurial opportunities emergence, careful treatment of such cases from the standpoint of entrepreneurship will have both theoretical and practical implication.

Another important source of scientific interest under the subject of consideration lies in the treating of local entrepreneurship phenomenon. As a result of the high sensitivity of entrepreneurial opportunities exploration in public services entrepreneurship to the inherent approach of the state and municipal authorities to the transformational processes the protraction of the transitional stage to the opportunities, exploration is observed. Consequently, appears alternatively units of opportunities exploration and exploitation which starting to act as entrepreneurs without waiting for a response from the city authorities.

The phenomenon addresses to the discovery theory acting as a support for the objective existence of entrepreneurial opportunities appealing to the issue of prior knowledge concerning customer needs. One of the first forms of local public service entrepreneurship across European countries (Poland, Check Republic, Ukraine, etc.) are small and medium private firms that deal with general household chores. The appearance of such phenomenon is a result of situations when customers are not satisfied with a quality of public services (Ukrainian case: water supply industry) or they have no access to it (South Africa case: water supply industry). Local public services entrepreneurship is represented by initiatives of individuals who managed with this problem in an alternative way, acting as entrepreneurs. Thus, different opportunities with different properties are promoted under transformational processes in public service industries. Exploitation opportunities under local entrepreneurship are less sensitive to the municipal authority regulations, have a higher level of freedom with faster reaction to the market requests, but are less innovative by its meaning, with a comparison to entrepreneurship initiated by municipals regulations.

### ***“Public well-being” concept vs. “for profit” entrepreneurial opportunities***

The second dimension mentioned above that should be addressed is an issue of such necessary property of entrepreneurial opportunities as profitability. According to Shane et al. efforts to pursue opportunities “for profit” within existing means-ends frameworks, such as arbitrage, do not involve entrepreneurship because entrepreneurship is limited to efforts to pursue profit opportunities by recombining resources (Shane, 2010). Consideration of entrepreneurial opportunities, which appears under the liberalization in public service industry in terms of profitability of opportunities, allows treating this issue from the standpoint of “arbitrage” concept that in this particular case more accurately to define as “public well-being” component. The general goal of effective functioning of public services enterprises is increasing the

quality of citizens' life and maintaining other industries with particular resources. Therefore pursuing opportunities promoting the development of public service entrepreneurship cannot be limited to the pursuing opportunities for profit, but for social value as well (if not primarily) whilst Baumol (1990) in his work insists on the primacy of profit-seeking activities. According to Lee and Venkataraman (2006), the opportunity of social value creation should not be considered as entrepreneurial opportunity" (Lee & Venkataraman, 2006). In this aspect, the interrelation between goals and its side effects represented through the combination of social entrepreneurship and profit gaining as a reflection of the altruistic component in entrepreneurship (Austin et al., 2006) is of particular value for the exploration of inherent characteristics of entrepreneurial opportunities exploitation in public sector. Nevertheless, in the case of public service entrepreneurship, the profit-social effects combination is observed, representing in its turn another challenging issue to be addressed in a study.

## Conclusion

Public service entrepreneurship as a substantive part of public sector entrepreneurship still remains undisclosed and underestimated from the entrepreneurship theory perspective. The majority of public entrepreneurship studies are focused primarily on the consideration of the application of the tools of private sector management to the public sector organization, such as health and social care or education, treatment of utilities in this aspect is undeservedly omitted.

Herein the paper's goal has been to provide further progress toward understanding of the properties of entrepreneurial opportunities, which emerges during process of economic transformation in the industries which provides public services, in particular utilities, as well as internal barriers and inherent governmental constraints impact on its exploitation in order to advance the state of knowledge about the concept of opportunities.

The catchall conclusion is that the identification of the public services entrepreneurship as a subdomain of entrepreneurship as a science is able to facilitate its several core concerns and suchwise to contribute the theory of entrepreneurship.

The discovering of the nexus between state approach to the economic transformation and entrepreneurial opportunities that occur under these processes could be helpful for the countries that are still under the liberalization to make it more effective and less painful for public services industries, providing emergence of the persistent entrepreneurial opportunities.

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