

CONCEPTUALIZING THE YOUNG WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP PHENOMENON IN AL-MADINAH AL-MUNAWARAH

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

History of article:

Received: 6 May, 2024

Revised: 29 May, 2024

Accepted: 30 May, 2024

Published: 30 June, 2024

Keywords:

Islamic Philanthropy, Social entrepreneurship, Young women, Holy City of Madinah

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship has become a global trend, and in Saudi Arabia, it is gaining traction among public authorities, financial institutions, young people, and academics. Despite its growing popularity, scientific publications on the subject remain limited. This study aims to conceptualize the phenomenon of young women's social entrepreneurship in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah, the cradle of Muslim civilization and Islamic charity. Based on the field experience of Basiqat Waqf, which trained 128 young women from 2020-2022 in personal development and entrepreneurial excellence using the Personal Development Analysis (PDA) tool, the study finds existing models insufficient to capture the multidimensionality of this phenomenon. A key factor identified is the intrinsic pleasure young women derive from engaging in social entrepreneurship projects that sustainably improve the quality of life in the holy city. The challenge lies in identifying what these women love doing while being beneficial to others. Despite limitations, this study aids stakeholders in better coordinating efforts to promote social entrepreneurship among young women in Madinah beyond merely creating a competitive or attractive ecosystem. Data from 2023-2024 indicate that many of these trained women actively participate in the Basiqat project, particularly in organizing the breaking of the Ramadan fast at the Prophet's Mosque.

How to cite: Belabes, A., & Alhejaili, B. (2024). Conceptualizing The Young Women Social Entrepreneurship Phenomenon in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah. *Jurnal Ilmu Ekonomi dan Bisnis Islam*, 6(1), 73-81. <https://doi.org/10.24239/jiebi.v6i1.282.73-81>.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has embarked on a significant global transformation program through its vision 2030. Through this unique transformative social and economic reform, the country aims to stimulate entrepreneurship, promote the creation of innovative startups, and support the

development of the non-profit sector, notably *awqāf*, which represents a historically significant part. Social entrepreneurship is receiving particular attention (Belabes, 2022a). Most studies focus on women entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia and pay little attention to women's social entrepreneurship, much less to women's social entrepreneurship in specific institutions, as is the case in this

study through a field survey over two years. The holy city of Madinah, better known as al-Madinah al-Munawwarah (literally the enlightened city), appears to be one of the most promising Saudi cities in this field regarding its intrinsic specificities that cannot be found anywhere else in the world, including the kingdom. Based on the fieldwork carried out by the *Basiqāt* Waqf until the end of 2022 with the organization over two days of the *Munjtijīn* (producers) event on 28-29 December 2022, the study aims to conceptualize the young women social entrepreneurship phenomenon in the holy city al-Madinah because, regarding the specificities of this splendid holy city, quantity is an emergent property of quantity, not the reverse. The migration of the Prophet Muhammed ﷺ from Mecca to Madinah in 622 was the turning point in the history of Islam and the beginning of a splendid civilization which has influenced the course of world history.

This study is organized in the following way. The second part presents an overview of the literature, which sheds light on three epistemological postures. The third part concerns the methodology used for this study, given the above. Part four presents the conceptual framework based on field data collected by the *Basiqāt* Foundation. The final part for the conclusion, which provides the theoretical and practical contribution, limitations, and future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite a genuine interest in social entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia, particularly since the launch of 'Vision 2030' in 2016, academic publications remain rare (Aljuhani, 2024). Based on the available literature, we have identified three prominent epistemological positions as follows:

The first epistemological posture approaches social entrepreneurship through the prism of Islamic finance, where it would be financed through instruments assimilated to the principle of profit and loss sharing (Kayed, 2006; Kayed & Hassan, 2010). This literature is out of touch with reality as the application of equity financing instruments such as *mudārabah* and *mushārah* remains very minimal compared to loan-based instruments such as *tawaruq*, *murābah*, and *ijārah* (Belabes, 2019).

The second epistemological posture approaches social entrepreneurship through the prism of the competitive advantage of nations (Porter, 1990), where the Saudi government is called upon to create an ecosystem (Khan, 2016), a support (Hakami, 2021), in which social enterprises can thrive. It requires clearly defining social enterprises, understanding their challenges, and identifying their need for funding to remain viable and grow balanced. In this regard, the Saudi government could provide support in five major areas as follows: awareness raising and promotion of social entrepreneurship culture, basic infrastructure, adequate financing, access and networks, and education and training in line with developments (Halaoui & Althukair, 2020). Similarly, strategic measures are recommended to foster social entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia by disseminating entrepreneurial culture, access to finance, taxation and regulation, education and training, and coordinated support (Nieva, 2015).

The third epistemological posture combines the two postures to show that religious values influence social entrepreneurial behavior in Saudi Arabia (Alarifi & Alrubaishi, 2018). It overlaps with previous studies on entrepreneurship (Audretsch et al., 2013; Balog et al., 2014).

Entrepreneurship usually involves essential qualities in religious communities, such as passion, commitment, and often a degree of optimism that overcomes the fear of tomorrow (Seabright, 2016). Considering business's religious or spiritual dimension is essential for a more complete view of the entrepreneurial phenomenon (Gundolf et al., 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a systematic literature review to better conceptualize the phenomenon of young women's social entrepreneurship in al-Madinah in association with Islamic philanthropy. Despite the relative scarcity of academic publications on the subject, we have selected the relevant studies by distancing ourselves from the widely shared views in the

popular literature. The study is interested in a rigorous theoretical framework considering the social sector, not a third sector, in light of al-Madinah's historical trajectory. However, it is the first sector to use the terminology employed in vogue today. Indeed, when the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) migrated from Makkah to al-Madinah, the first thing he did was to build the mosque of Qubā' as a *waqf*. The foundation of the state and the market came several days after, as illustrated in Figure 4. More than a donation contract or an economic or financial institution, the *waqf* reflects an organization of community life that refers to the principle of subsidiarity. A society nourished by such a principle starts from the bottom and lets each person develop his actions first (Belabes, 2017).

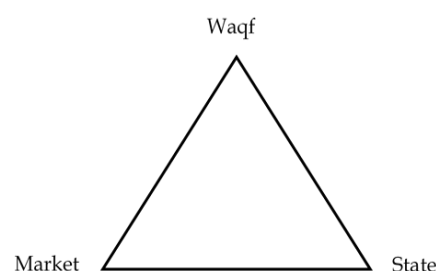


Figure 4. The social dimension in the historical trajectory of the city of Madinah as the first sector
Source: Authors' elaboration

This conceptual framework relating to the historical trajectory of the holy city of Madinah shows that the interpretation that social entrepreneurship transcends or blurs the boundaries between the public and private sectors is not valid. The social dimension of Islamic philanthropy, which serves the community's general interest and improves the quality of life to fulfill the rights of creators and creatures, is the primary virtue of this sacred city. It remains firmly rooted in the culture of the local population despite the passage of more than fourteen centuries since the emigration of

the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Most of the young women who have come into contact with the *Basiqāt* Foundation seem steeped in this ancestral culture, which is nourished by the narrative that the *ansār* (the inhabitants of Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah) welcomed with open arms the *muhājirūn* (those who migrated from Mecca to Madinah to save themselves from the ill-treatment of the *Quraysh*, i.e. the Arab tribe that historically inhabited and controlled Mecca and its *Ka'aba* which attracts pilgrims from all over). This state of mind cannot be captured authentically

through books and articles or the internet. You must rub shoulders with the local population to understand that for them, there is no cut-off between here and hereafter, sacredness and secularization, just as there is no cut-off for the Achuar in the Amazon between nature and society (Descola, 2005).

In this respect, it is necessary to make an effort to immerse oneself in the life of the city by doing fieldwork without going through an intermediary, to know the language of the population studied, to cut oneself off from what one has learned in the academic world, to show empathy to feel the emotions of others and to understand their aspirations (Malinowski, 1922). Apart from the fact that what we observe depends crucially on the measurement we make, it is essential to understand that we can only hope to know some of the characteristics of what we observe (Espagnat, 1994). Suppose the objects of scientific studies do not exist outside the measuring instruments and the specialists who interpret them (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). In that case, the boundary between the observer and the observed is blurred (Bohm, 2004). It leads any down-to-earth observers to take a more perceptive look at themselves in the mirror of others and to give up sticking ready-made conceptual recipes to themselves. If the practices are taken seriously, as is the case of the training experience of Basiqāt in favor of the social entrepreneurship of young women of Al-Madinah al-Munawarah, the operations of articulation of composition between practices will always pose vital problems. Such an experience reinforces the need to think about knowledge through its environment (Stengers, 2003). The informed reader will have deduced from the above that our approach is multidisciplinary. It draws on the progress of research in philology, history, anthropology, mesology, quantum physics, and the sociology

of knowledge. In this sense, there is no economic problem *sensu stricto* but a multidimensional phenomenon in which economics is one of the most prominent aspects, whether we want it to be or not.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Between early 2020 and the end of 2022, the *Basiqāt* Foundation trained 128 young women in social entrepreneurship, as illustrated in Figure 2. The annual frequency reflects the growing interest in social entrepreneurship in the holy city of Madinah, both from political, social, and economic actors and the local press. A series of elements can explain this growing interest. Social entrepreneurship aims to improve the quality of life of the local population. It is also seen as an answer to the funding problems of non-profit organizations. Finally, it is promising in terms of social and economic impacts, such as job creation. No academic publication on social entrepreneurship in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah has been identified. This lack shows the interest of the present study, which is the first of its kind.

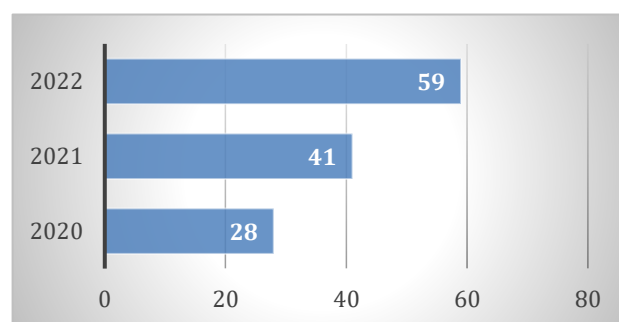


Figure 2. Annual frequency of the young women trained in social entrepreneurship

Source: *Basiqāt Waqf*

Through the training program '*Personal Development and Entrepreneurial Excellence*' (figure 3), the main virtue of the *Basiqāt Waqf* is

to put all young women on the same footing, to design adequate training for each of them, to accompany them to discover deep inside themselves a social entrepreneurship project that gives them a passion and can improve the quality of life in the holy city of Madinah. In

light of current experience, social impact is based on three major factors: a timely social need, an applicable idea to satisfy it rigorously, and the originality of the idea to provide a pleasure that persevered.



Figure 3. Training program 'Personal Development and Entrepreneurial Excellence'

Source: *Basiqāt Waqf*; <https://baseqatbusiness.com/development/>

The *Basiqāt Waqf* refers to the pleasure provided by the social entrepreneurial project rather than the innovation associated in the mainstream discourse with an idea that has found a market (Belabes, 2022b). The factor of pleasure, creation, the deep and sincere feeling of doing what one loves to do and doing it well,

generally relegated to the background, makes it possible to relativize conventional explanations: to be independent, to get recognition in the society, to build a successful business, to be innovative, and to perpetuate the family tradition (Vijaya & Almasri, 2016). This pleasure factor, if it recalls the book *The*

Pleasure of the Text of Roland Barthes (1973), i.e., from the pleasure of reading to the desire to write, has the merit of not thinking of women in opposition to men and refers to a universal fraternity that frees itself from group logics, as Marguerite Yourcenar (1938) recommended in her book *Oriental Tales*. As a social entrepreneur, in the name of serving the general interest rather than as a woman, most of these young Saudi women see their place in the holy city of Madinah.

According to the latest available statistics, the unemployment rate is estimated at 10.1% in Saudi Arabia in the first quarter of 2022 (General Authority for Statistics, 2022). In Madinah, the unemployment rate was estimated to be 14.8% in the last quarter of 2021. In terms of social and solidarity economy, the Madinah Chamber of Commerce states in its latest report the following:

"The Chamber works to enable the private sector to carry out its obligations towards civil society, in addition to its societal contributions through:

1. *Empowering business sectors to support effective social responsibility;*
2. *Contribute to the development of the societal economic system"* (Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah Chamber of Commerce, 2021).

Suppose the economic strategies seem disadvantageous for the city quantitatively because of lower economic growth compared to other major Saudi cities. From a qualitative point of view, in terms of spiritual serenity, the holy city of Madinah is first. In this respect, if ranking economic performance as a criterion of evaluation makes quality a simple emergent property of quantity, in terms of serenity, day-to-day state of being serene spiritually, quality is not and must not be an emergent property of quantity, as illustrated in Figure 4. For many young women who have benefited from

training in the *Basiqāt* Foundation, the spiritual serenity is difficult to explain. It should be lived to be understood.



Figure 4. The Role of Spiritual Awakening in shaping young Women's Social Entrepreneurial attitudes and Behaviors in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah

Source: Author's Own

This lively daily interaction between the sacred and the profane invites reflection on developing a technical language that considers the various social modes of entrepreneurship. For example, it would be appropriate to use the notion of collective instead of society to include all living beings (trees, animals, things), the notion of engendering (Latour, 2019) instead of producing because it is about solutions to improve the quality of life that emanate from the depths of the person, the notion of design feeling instead of innovation by emphasizing the importance of human emotion at the center of the creative process (Whitehead, 1929), and the use of spontaneity, imagination, desire and passion for feeding the design process in its vital evolution (Bergson, 1907).

The interest of this conceptualization, which starts from the historical trajectory of the city of Madinah through an organization of life

from below (Thompson, 1966), is that it opens the field to diversity which could, through local knowledge, nourish open, dynamic systems generating bifurcations which are neither predictable nor calculable a priori (Stiegler & the Internation Collective, 2020). Knowledge can be a life skill that allows one to conduct oneself appropriately in a social context and to interact appropriately with others, an existential knowledge intimate to the person, a know-how that refers to skills acquired through experience in practical problems, a technical knowledge, a scientific knowledge, a practical knowledge, or a theoretical knowledge. As social entrepreneurs practice knowledge, they transform themselves and knowledge by inscribing singular bifurcations in it, i.e., by inventing new ways of living, feeling, hearing, smelling, seeing, doing, thinking, and coming into harmony with one's inner self.

CONCLUSION

The interest of this field survey (2020-2022) from a conceptual point of view is to draw attention to the fact that the interest in social entrepreneurship of young women from Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah is nourished above all by spiritual serenity, which plays a crucial role in social responsibility initiatives.

As proof, a significant portion of the study sample participates in volunteer initiatives intended to serve pilgrims during *Hajj* and *Ramadhan*, as evidenced by the data covering 2023-2024. It shows an interest in making data speak beyond purely quantitative considerations and in constantly comparing the theories developed with field data. Making data speak requires deep reading, careful observation, and active listening. Hence, the limits of conventional indicators in terms of the competitiveness of cities, the attractiveness of

territories, and the participation of the non-profit sector in the gross national product tend to hide what is essential in life. This field survey should be extended to other institutions in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah working in social entrepreneurship for young girls. It would also be helpful to conduct similar surveys among young boys to assess the relevance of the factor relating to the role of spiritual serenity in active action in favor of social responsibility, knowing that such research progress to be achieved requires extremely substantial and sustained efforts.

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