LOCAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN THE PACIFIC NORTH-WEST
CIVICS, SOCIAL PRODUCTIVITY AND BUSINESS FOCUS

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Winston Churchill Fellow of 2010

Contents

1. Foreword and acknowledgements

During October and November 2010, I spent five weeks travelling in the west of the United States and Canada, visiting city and provincial governments and agencies, social enterprises, umbrella and support bodies, academics, students, journalists and civic organisations. I wanted to understand how not-for-profit organisations, and particularly those identifying as "social enterprises", operated in jurisdictions where government has traditionally intervened, and spent, far less than in the UK. Predominantly this was a learning exercise for me and I intend to bring what I have learnt during this project to my work in Southwark. However, I hope my experiences may be of some wider value and that this report can contribute to the ongoing national debate on how we can successfully create a more inclusive, citizen focussed and 'owned' public sphere, and open market space for a plurality of operating models and competing and complementary organisations.

Having the time and space to reflect on public policy from a geographical and social distance, has been a great privilege and for this opportunity I have a number of thanks to offer:

The generous sponsor of my travels and of this report was the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. The Trust has an annual programme of grant giving for travelling fellowships, the aim being for participants to bring back learning that can be applied for the benefit of the UK community. As well as details for applying for a fellowship, the fascinating reports of past fellows are available on the website and I would encourage you to visit – see www.wcmt.org.uk.

My thanks also go to my employers, Southwark Council, for allowing me a considerable block of leave at a difficult time and in addition for granting a week's leave study to allow me to complete the tour. I should also thank the members of my team who took on additional responsibilities and work load in order to cover my absence. This would be a good point to emphasise that I write here in a personal capacity and that any policy views expressed here-in are private, and do not necessarily reflect the view of Southwark Council.

Of course, great thanks must go to all of those individuals and organisations that welcomed me with such openness and generosity of time and ideas, both in North America and here in the UK. The content and any errors of fact, perception or spelling remain of course my own responsibility. Finally, Dr Helen Drury of ARK Schools both proof-read the final copy and tolerated my absence from home for five weeks. Thank you all.

Robin Rogers, May 2011

2. Executive Summary

Social Enterprise in North America is part of a vibrant community of not-for-profit organisations commissioning and delivering many of the health, human and environmental services which in the UK we expect to see delivered or commissioned by government.

Social enterprises allow more focus on individual community needs and offer a route away from traditional forms of state and charity based social support with a balanced model of earned income, state contract funding, and philanthropic investment.

While social enterprise may form a key part of this new public service landscape, my experience shows that it cannot both deliver immediate savings and immediate sector-wide transformation. It requires sustained investment and an acceptance that as in business, new social enterprises take time to become established.

Finally, social enterprise can build social capital and social productivity making the most effective use of the huge potential and capacity for innovation and hard work that we know exists within our communities. However, successful social enterprise requires a strong network of civic support. To be successful we must promote an integrated civic society and learn to share the delivery of social benefits with colleagues from the business community as well as with local people, service users, academics, and leaders and staff from the public and not-for-profit sectors.

3. Introduction

3.1. Social Enterprise

Social Enterprise is a contested term with fluid definitions within individual countries, and even more so across national boundaries. In essence, all might agree that the term refers to organisations run on business lines and operating in the market, where the principal motivation is to achieve social objectives. Many would extend this to incorporate environmental objectives. However, within this broadest definition very different beasts are operating under the banner "social enterprise" from businesses operating with social aims, even where profit is being made, through co-operatives and mutual and social business where profits are re-invested in the objectives, and on to the trading arms of traditional charities. From the simplest – say the Christmas card sales arm of a nature charity - to the most complex - such as an organisation trading in the market for the purpose of providing employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups – the point is that these organisation distinguish themselves from conventional charities in that their income is derived (at least in part) through trading, rather than from government or private donation.

On one level then, social enterprise exists to fund progress towards social objectives through earning income in the market. However, central to thinking on the benefits and possibilities of social enterprise is that many such organisations have an equally important approach of achieving what we will refer to as their *mission* through their trading activities.

In Britain, an official government definition was adopted in 2002:

"A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximize profit for shareholders and owners" (DTI, 2002)

This does not describe a legal status and organisations operating as social enterprise in Britain operate under a number of frameworks including as community interest companies, companies limited by guarantee and companies limited by shares, industrial or provident societies and indeed as registered charities.

Canada, like Britain, does not have a single legal definition of social enterprise, and indeed has no legal definition of "charity". A broad definition used by Enterprising Non-Profits (ENP, 2010), a Canadian umbrella organisation refers to social enterprises as *"…business directly involved in the production and/or selling of goods and services for the dual purpose of generating earned income and achieving or contributing to social and/or environmental aims."*

The US Social Enterprise Alliance ([What is Social Enterprise?](#)) adopts the broad definition that "a social enterprise is an organization or venture that achieves its primary social or environmental mission using business methods."

3.2. The UK Context – and the background of this fellowship

The proposal for this fellowship was submitted in the autumn of 2009. At the time, there was a growing sense that the increase in public sector spending over the previous decade had not been as successful as it could have been in improving outcomes and that there remained a lack of engagement and ownership by the citizens of many services. This had led to renewed debate around alternative models of the provision of public services. On top of this, demographic change indicates that in the coming decades, the need for services will only increase and that increases in spending to raise the level of services is therefore unsustainable.

Alongside the continuing debate on the role of the private sector, social enterprise was expected to be a key component of any shift away from direct state provision and was seen as an effective way of engaging users and staff in the design and management of more effective services that could operate with business efficiency whilst remaining free of the profit motive, of which successive generations of government reformers have found the public to be extremely sceptical.

Into this broader context, the expectation in 2009 was that whatever government was formed after the anticipated 2010 general election, significant public spending cuts would be made. All political parties were talking about a reduction in the role of the state and all were also all giving direction that their programme for reform would include a further promotion of social enterprise models.

This triple crisis of drop in productivity, increasing need and restricted public finance is the context for change across the public sector.

At Southwark, and previously in Southampton, I had been involved with a number of new and emerging social enterprises, including facilitating the initial research project that led to Southwark Circle, a high profile social enterprise that provides practical assistance and social networking to older people through a membership based model.

Southwark is a large central London borough, characterised by major regeneration projects and a growing, young, mobile and diverse population. The north of the borough is a significant centre of development and employment. Good transport links, important public facilities including universities and hospitals and strong communities are all contributing to an

improving standard of living. However, educational under-attainment, joblessness, poor public health and deprivation represent major challenges common to other urban centres.

Southwark has a strong municipal tradition and many progressive social reforms and service models were nurtured here in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Developing the services and infrastructure for decent standards of living in a London which, by 1900, had a population of 6.5 million while not even having had a basic sewerage system installed until the 1860s, was a remarkable achievement. The co-operation and civic leadership required to do no less than invent the modern city was inspirational and while in some areas, especially transport, the market and private capital provided, it was the many layers and iterations of local and city government, alongside charities and churches, that made the city a civilised place for the poor majority.

Southwark suffered tremendously in the bombing of the Second World War. Its proximity to the docks and its industrial activity led in some areas, such as Elephant and Castle, to almost total devastation. Reconstruction took decades and a further municipal push. This is, in part, the explanation of why over 50% of housing in Southwark is within the social sector, of which 40% remains directly owned and managed by the local authority.

While acknowledging the importance of what was done in making and remaking the city, from the perspective of the post-modern era, we can see that the big-state Southwark, in common with other central London boroughs developed over the proceeding century, has fostered elements of dependency on local and national government. This might be in the physical environment we have built, where rather than children being able to play outside in site of their parents and neighbours, the design of high rise apartments means that more organised activities have to be introduced. It might mean through our service policies, where for example we have provided low-cost housing for some, but not for others, creating the situation where grown-up children are often forced to live in the suburbs far from their ageing parents, and resulting in the state stepping in to provide care. Equally, it might be through the unintentional impact on community of the state taking on roles such as social insurance and care that would in the past have contributed, as a bi-product, the maintenance of community cohesion and the emergence of leaders.

Self-determination is central to ambition and responsibility, and dependency risks undermining this. Dependency certainly undermines community resilience, leaving communities less robust when confronting shock and trauma. I would argue that dependency is bad for aspirations and a sense of well-being and hence has an impact on health. While these points are contested, there is no question that reliance on state services is expensive.

To me, social enterprise, where it is developed by and in partnership with communities and service users, has the potential to ensure that control and responsibility remains at the lowest possible level, incubating responsive and innovative services, leading ultimately to better outcomes. The use of community intelligence at the core of organisations should lead to sensitive and adaptable services focussed on values and not either wider political concerns or the profit motive.

Importantly, social enterprise has the potential to make use of the reserves of community capacity that remain un-tapped where government takes on all of the roles as taxer, commissioner, funder, provider and ration book holder.

The strengths of social enterprise can be summarised as:

- The ability to foster innovation and dynamism
- Governance and resources from the community, building sustainable capacity
- Focus on values and mission

Given this background, my fellowship proposal was to explore how not-for-profits and particularly social enterprises operated in jurisdictions where government has traditionally done, and spent, far less that in the UK, and how this was interconnected to wider community and civic life.

The north western region of the United States and the Canadian province of British Columbia seemed to me good models to study. Cities in this corner of the US have a tradition of liberal social policies, but these are set against the US social settlement where the public sector deliveries far less in terms of social policy and services that in the UK. Equally, religious groups are less key to delivering social services as they are in some regions of the US. While Canada in general has a more similar social settlement to the UK, British Columbia is further down a path of reducing the size of government. On both sides of the border, there is a vibrant community of not-for-profit organisations, including well established social enterprises and in Vancouver, an expansive support network and active government programme of structural support. Therefore the communities of the US north-west and of British Columbia presented an opportunity to study how organisations deliver social goals in an environment where government does less.

In May 2010 a new coalition government was formed. Core to the new prime-minister's domestic agenda was a central government push for *Big Society*. The programme has struggled to grip the public imagination but if it means anything, it is about handing control down to the local level and of individuals, families and communities taking responsibility for themselves. Social enterprise as a delivery mechanism was made central to the initiative and Nat

Wei (then elevated to Lord Wei), a social entrepreneur himself, was appointed to head it up.

At this point research, policy development, commentary and re-branding of old ideas using the social enterprise tag reached new heights. Development of thinking on the establishment of new social enterprise models and the replication of existing ones became a priority.

The announcement of the comprehensive spending review in October 2010 brought the immediate stark reality of the scale of funding cuts back to centre view. Southwark's spending is being cut over three years by more than 25% and this was the acute context in which I undertook my fellowship travels.

3.3. Public Services in North America

It can hardly be said that public services in the UK are arranged in a straight-forward and easy to understand manor, but from any perspective, understanding the provision and governance of US services is, to say the least, challenging. Multiple and overlapping layers of federal, state, city, county and local government, along with parallel and independent school boards, policing districts and special purpose authorities sit alongside semi-public institutions with entirely independent provision of many public services, such as military establishments and universities. Providers, nowhere more so than in the health sector, range across for-profit companies, state provision, charitable and philanthropically led organisations, cooperatives, companies with a social mission (including social enterprises) and religious institutions.

Unlike in the UK, commissioning is not principally reserved to the state. Organisations such as city-wide foundations and branches of United Way not only fund and provide services, but are prioritising and selecting which services are to be provided.

To many, this market in service and the avoidance of a single monopoly of government commissioning is a strength in the system, embedding resilience and keeping responsibility as close to the community as possible. However, in the view of one business minded social entrepreneur I met, overlapping responsibility leads to "fragmented services and redundant infrastructure". A key question is where the balance between integration of services and diversity of providers and commissioners sits and where social enterprise can fit in.

From a UK perspective, the picture in Canada is more familiar, with a strong but remote provincial government resembling the role of Whitehall and Westminster, setting policy and keeping a tight rein on tax and funding, and local and city government pushing to take an increasing leadership role. Even more so than in the US, the federal government seems absent from domestic

policy setting in British Columbia. My interest then was to look at how social enterprise is delivering services in a similar jurisdictional environment to the UK but a tighter funding regime.

By a quirk of history, the provincial capital is set in the small city of Victoria on Vancouver Island, several hours by ferry from the mainland and the main business and population centre of the city of Vancouver. Float planes buzz between the harbours of the two cities all day but the physical separation of the policy makers from hard end of social policy delivery is curious and a line of enquiry here was how performance frameworks and support structures work to provide the governance that politicians require, and that public accountability demands.

A focus on both sides of the Atlantic for not-for-profits is the shift from generating income in support of the mission, role that the organisation's commercial activity itself has in delivering mission. This was an important area of study.

Finally, the role of business and philanthropy, especially of business philanthropy is more significant in North America than in the UK and I was interested in the role of this wider civic society in these systems, and how social entrepreneurs related to it.

3.4. Introduction to the Study - key experiences and this report

Having selected the areas I wanted to visit and thought about key lines of enquiry, my approach was to set up meetings and visits that would give me a diverse emersion into policy and delivery of social enterprise. A list of the organisations I visited is set out at the end of the report.

At the same time I planned to spend time in the cities and communities I visited to absorb the wider social and policy context. The timing of my trip coincided with the US mid-term elections. While this made it virtually impossible to meet senior politicians, there was a very active public political discourse. The role of the state in mandating and providing public services, especially health care, was a live theme in this election and Washington was a battle-ground state for its senate race. Seattle was a great place to be to open conversations both with those I met formally and through chance encounters in Seattle's very open public realm, the coffee shop. There really are a lot of coffee shops in Seattle and unless you make a real effort to be anti-social, conversation is inevitable.

In Seattle I had the opportunity to give a seminar on my work to post-graduate students at Seattle University's centre for non-profit and social enterprise management and to take part in a subsequent debate. I also met Kristi Heim a business reporter from the Seattle Times who writes a blog called *The*

Business of Giving. (She even blogged about me at [DIY social services? Big society in the age of shrinking budgets](). Well, mostly about the Big Society, but I was mentioned.)

The opportunity to revisit cities to follow up on introductions was invaluable, particularly to Seattle where I had the opportunity of meeting the former mayor, Norman Rice. Mr Rice was mayor from 1989-1997 and after a stint as CEO and president of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Seattle, he is now CEO of the Seattle Foundation and a member of the White House Council for Community Solutions. Much of the development and implementation of the Asset Based Community Development approach of Seattle staff member Jim Diers took place under Mayor Rice.

As well as visiting the cities of the west coast, I took a trip into the Kooteny Rockies to attend the 2010 Columbia Basin Symposium. Organised by the Columbia River Trust, this event brought together hundreds of representatives of communities, not-for-profit groups, government and business to work over the course of a weekend on a vision for the communities of the Columbia Basin. This was a great opportunity to meet a huge range of individuals taking different approaches to economic and community development, including the British Columbia Minister for Communities. Subsequent touring in the Rockies gave me the opportunity to visit some of the communities under discussion including extremely isolated and independent settlements. In many cases simple and mature examples of social enterprise could be seen in action in communities where the only option was for the community to take control itself. Credit unions and community power companies in particular were much in evidence and I was struck by the motto of the Nelson Credit Union which could well serve the social enterprise movement as a whole:

"Not-for-profit, not for charity but for service."

Taking five weeks out to talk, to listen and to reflect helped me order my own thoughts about the potential of social enterprise. Using the contrast of British Columbia and the US allowed me to come at the issues from a distance and be more challenging about my own preconceptions of who does what, and how, in the public sphere.

After returning to London I have had the opportunity to present and discuss these reflections in meetings and seminars with colleagues from Southwark Council, the Shaftsbury Partnership, Community Action Southwark and the Centre for Social Justice.

The remainder of this report sets out these conclusions supported by case studies from my visits.

4. Mission and Innovation

Advocates of social enterprise make two key claims: firstly, that social enterprise as an organisational form is uniquely placed to pursue *mission* and secondly that social enterprise promotes the kind of *innovation* that is hard to foster within the traditional public sector.

4.1. Mission

Mission is the fundamental "why" of an organisation's existence. Beyond specific aims and goals, mission is the basic purpose of an organisation's being. The independent funding structure of social enterprise allows it to doggedly stick to mission where organisations funded from outside, either from government or from philanthropy, are often required to skew their activities at the behest of their funders.

This is certainly true of Central City Concern, a housing led rehabilitation not-for-profit organisation in Portland, Oregon (see case study below). As well as providing employment and opportunities for clients, smart enterprises are supporting the organisation's core mission and its housing focus by generating funding.

Many not-for-profit organisations I visited were in the process of establishing the right strategic mix of funding. Tom Everill, the CEO of North West Centre (see later case study) told me that diversifying funding supported his organisation to pursue mission. Getting the right balance between earned income, state sector contracts and philanthropy allowed the organisation to stay focussed on its core purposes. Too much reliance on contracts and philanthropy make an organisation beholden to the priorities of its funders. Too much dependency on earned income means that the organisation may have to prioritise short term profit over long term mission.

Case Study: Central City Concern (CCC)

CCC is a Portland based non-profit agency working to provide pathways to self sufficiency for people with serious substance abuse problems. Founded in 1979, CCC now has 600 staff serving approximately 13,000 clients each year. CCC holds 501 (c) (3) status, the most common tax status for US not-for-profits including most social enterprises. Early in the organisation's development, it realised that key to sustainable interventions was stable housing and "housing first" remains core to what is now a comprehensive range of treatment, rehabilitation, training and work programmes.

Housing based recovery is much less costly than centre based treatment – perhaps by as much as 75% - and CCC can show that stable housing is a strong platform for independent living. With a history of effective intervention that ultimately saves money, CCC is able to demonstrate to other agencies its value and turn this into income. For example CCC is in a contract with the area hospital to receive discharged homeless emergency room patients who would have previously received a motel voucher. The proven reduction in re-admission rates and costs has meant it has been possible to re-align the spending to early intervention through CCC, generating savings to the area hospital, income to CCC and improved outcomes for clients.

CCC runs a number of social enterprise operations which support delivery of mission and while overall funding is from a variety of sources, the social enterprise arms allow the organisation to stick to its housing priority. For example, in partnership with the Downtown Business Alliance, an environmental services operation is keeping streets clean while providing income and stability of employment to clients. A consulting arm provides additional earned income.

4.2. Innovation

A second claim of social enterprise is that innovation can be fostered in independent organisations running along business lines but independent from government and bureaucratic control. One CEO with a background in global logistics had come to not-for-profits late in his career after transferring from the board into management on his retirement from business. His firm conviction was that the limitless human ingenuity that he had seen at work in the service of logistics in support of manufacturing could be tapped in the service of social goals and he was employing production techniques and processes to building functioning business for hard to reach groups.

I met a great number of entrepreneurs who were able to experiment with new approaches and ideas. Several candidly admitted that they expected perhaps

a significant portion of new ventures to fail. One entrepreneur who had previously worked for city government told me that it was the willingness of his board to allow him to embark in new ventures which they could not guarantee would succeed, that made the difference in his motivation and passion between working for government and working for a not-for-profit.

Several of those I met made direct parallel with venture capital where speculative investment drives innovation, although with high levels of risk to the organisations involved.

This acceptance of failure only works where there is a market of diverse providers for any particular client group. Single city-wide monopoly providers particularly of human services can not be allowed to fail and this reduces their appetite for risk. A good example was one not-for-profit provider of social services that was essentially an out-sourced city social services department. Whilst it was innovating as one would expect any high quality provider to do whether within government or not, this organisation was a local monopoly provider and understandably the appetite for risk was lower. Staff recognised that they were at risk of recreating the state style bureaucracy necessary to run large organisations and that can alienate service users. The point here is that simply transferring an organisation out of the state sector does not guarantee innovation. Appetite for risk and hence willingness to innovate is as much to do with the context an organisation operates in: what is the impact of failure? Are alternatives available?

The *too big to fail* Southern Cross sheltered housing group is a timely lesson here in the UK (BBC News - Southern Cross holds crisis meeting with creditors). Southern Cross innovated with the way it managed property, but this exposed the organisation to risk. It may be allowed to fail, just, but regulators and the government are likely to look at ways of preventing an organisation that has this much impact in social care to take the same level of risk again.

A challenge described by many was the problem of assessing success or failure of innovation in the social services. The market in for-profit companies works because the key piece of information always available is return on investment. In most circumstances, this data is either not easily generated or simply not relevant in human services. Failing organisations need to fail quickly or they increase inefficiency in the system.

5. Identity and Place

The social enterprises I met all relied on strong community support, especially support from local business and professional people. This involvement went far beyond simple philanthropy (although this is, of course, significant) to operational philanthropy where businesses invest in social programmes via their supply chain, and significant involvement of individuals in the running of organisations at board level. The importance of place based identity in this support cannot be over stated and is a key point of difference from the London context.

Residents of the west coast strongly identify with place. They have a shared geographical experience of weather and wilderness, of distance and of historic isolation. The flight from Washington, DC, to Seattle, Washington, takes four and a half hours. Separated by 2,700 miles and four time zones, Seattle is quite literally a continent away from the US capital. Similarly, the distance from the Canadian capital Ottawa to Vancouver is 2,200 miles. In the Rockies where point-to-point distances may be short, travel times are extended by intervening lakes and mountains. When I visited the Columbia Basin Trust symposium, community representatives had travelled for up to six hours to get there. For a Londoner, this is the equivalent of driving to a community meeting in York.

All of the communities I visited, both rural and urban, had exceptionally strong civic identities and civic institutions. While surveys have told us in the past decade that only 60% of residents identify themselves as residents of the London Borough of Southwark, and indeed only 80% identify themselves as living in London, there is no question that the vast majority of Washingtonians, Oregonians, Californians and British Columbians identify profoundly with their state or province, often ahead of their identity as an American or Canadian. Equally the residents of Portland, Seattle, Vancouver and San Francisco share a set of meanings of that identity. This is no idyll of consensus and these meanings are contested and fragmented. Washington State, for example, is fundamentally divided politically and socially between the cosmopolitan and liberal outlook of the Seattle metropolitan area and the rural and conservative values of the vast and thinly settled remainder of the state. Vancouver has a similar relationship to the interior and north of British Columbia. However, standing above social identity appears to be a geographic identity that binds people together, however they feel about each other's politics.

These cities and regions foster local institutions, universities, sports teams and above all industries that feed off and feed back into this sense of identity: Microsoft, Boeing, Starbucks and Nike, the ports, logging and minerals industries all have a strong identification with the Pacific North-West.

It struck me that the simple fact of distance in North America creates an independence from national institutions. The institutions of civic pride that growing 19th and 20th century cities built – hospitals, universities, symphony orchestras – in towns like Seattle and Portland have been maintained as local institutions by dint of distance. If you want to see an opera in Seattle, you can't simply hop on the train up to the capital as one might from Basingstoke, Southampton or Tunbridge Wells; you are going to have to build the opera house and that's exactly what has been done with philanthropic and non-government civic support building and supporting hospitals, universities, concert halls and libraries right up to the present day. In the UK, we have come to look to the state (or its creature 'the lottery') or the market to build such institutions.

Why is this important? It is surely true that British cities have a strong identity. I question however whether in many cases a self-confident institutional and industrial identity and related professional community exists to support the development and governance of not-for-profit organisations outside of the state sector.

The concept of identity in Britain is either not place based, in the context of faith and other communities of identity, or 'place based' at a level which is not operationalisable in terms of converting into real actions or financial support. London is a key issue here – too big for identity as a Londoner to mean anything substantial in terms of civic contribution, and too dominating of all strands of life in the UK to have a civic society separate from the national establishment. Alongside this challenge for a useful identity for London, most of its 32 boroughs are modern constructions. Even where borough names are venerable and ancient, for example Southwark and Westminster, the boundaries date from local government reorganisation in the 1960s and the communities brought together often have limited shared identity. Local boundaries in London, then, offer us limited opportunities for generating stronger civic identities and overcoming the limitations of these limited administrative boundaries is a core challenge.

In the UK, and especially in London, an active effort must be made to foster such institutions and the culture from which, and into which, they feed, if communities, business and government are to be motivated to come together to support social enterprise and the wider 'big society'.

6. Start Up, Survival and Expansion

6.1. Support

Offering a helping hand of support to individuals and organisations seeking to turn good ideas into successful enterprises has long been recognised as a worthwhile intervention in the market. Governments have invested in small business schemes, directed tax breaks, grants and enterprise incubators. The market has offered advice and support by lenders and active market development from established organisations to diversify supply chains. One step removed from business (although the same people and their money) is the more or less formal philanthropic support given to business start up through business networks.

In parallel, voluntary sector 'umbrella' organisations in the UK have developed over the past two decades and sector and geographical based organisations abound to provide support, advice and easier access to funding often along with basic infrastructure to cut the costs of start-up. These organisations in the UK have most often been funded by government often having developed out of a local authority voluntary-sector bureau type section.

In each case, the private and voluntary sector, the sectors along with government have concluded that while a market in business and charities may be efficient in the long term, barriers to entry need to be reduced for the market to operate effectively. With social enterprise sitting somewhere between business and the traditional not-for-profit sector, it is not surprising that funders and government have looked at the role of support organisations in easing the process of start-up, reducing the percentage of early failure, and providing routes to expansion to scale.

Two case studies show how civic communities can contribute to effect support structure in different ways. Firstly, the support network in British Columbia stemming from the Vancity Foundation's established non-profit support system, provides a clear route from idea to scale for a cross section of organisations. Secondly, Seattle University has developed a programme for developing leadership talent and creating social entrepreneur networks while the business school at Portland State University has established a social enterprise incubator to mirror its small business equivalent, the Portland State Business Accelerator.

Cindy Pandini from BCSVP told me that, in her experience, the most successful social enterprises where those focussing on the social enterprise as a stand alone business rather than spin-offs from established not-for-profits. From this perspective, start-up support is essential for the growth of social enterprises.

Case Study: Vancouver business development support pipeline

Vancouver's network of support organisations provide a process and framework for developing ideas into feasible plans and then into real social businesses. An integrated and staged network ensures the right level of support and investor monitoring at each stage.
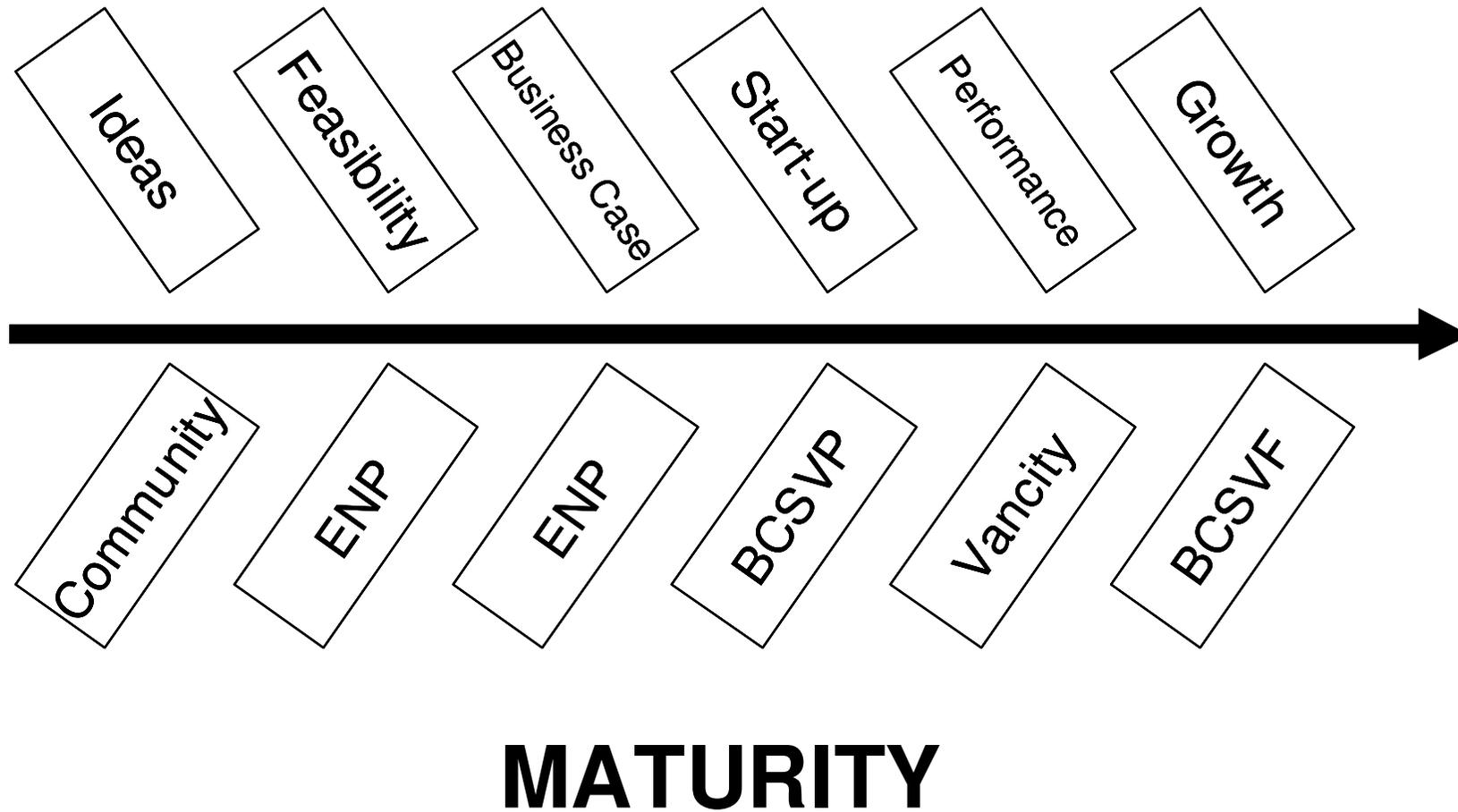
Enterprising Non-Profits (ENP) offers small support grants directed at business case development with a stream-lined application process scaled to the relatively small scale of investment along with business development support. British Columbia Social Venture Partners (BCSVP) is able to provide mezzanine funding and an on-going performance management relationship that can manage risks and ensure success or timely support. This includes the opportunity to form relationships with a business mentor and to tap into a network of volunteers offering professional services including finance, HR, business strategy, fundraising and governance. Social venture capital is available from the BC social venture fund (BCSVF) and further support and a governance framework for several of these programmes is provided through the well established Vancity Foundation, with its origins in the Vancity credit union.

Building Opportunities with Business is a not-for-profit smaller business development initiative. Its focus is with private sector community businesses but the fine line between a for-profit business with social aims and a not-for-profit social enterprise means that a connected net-work adds value to both sides. A good example here is an organisation called Nurses Next Door that provides home care services. This is in fact a for profit business but with a strong social aim, it is contributing to stronger communities and effectively 'tops-up' government services. Support to organisations such as this to help professionals take the step from employer to entrepreneur help reduce the barriers to entry into the social market.

Fig.1a   The supported development pipeline in Vancouver

	ENP	BCSVP	BCSVF	Vancity Foundation	BOB
Business case support	■				
Second stage investment		■			
Social venture capital			■	■	
Governance				■	
Economic development in the community					■
Policy lobby	■				
Market development	■				
Support services	■				

Fig.1b   The supported development pipeline in Vancouver

Ideas — Feasibility — Business Case — Start-up — Performance — Growth

Community — ENP — ENP — BCSVP — Vancity — BCSVF

MATURITY

This support network, and the network of connected professionals it has grown, has contributed to the development of a vibrant social enterprise scene in Vancouver including several internationally known organisations such as the Pot Luck Café Society, EMBERS (the Eastside Movement for Business and Economic Recovery Society) and Atira.

Case Study: Seattle University Centre for Non-profit and Social Enterprise Management and Social Innovation Incubator, Portland State University

Both Seattle and Portland State Universities run programmes to support the development of social enterprise and not-for-profit leadership and the development of new initiatives.

As well as being a research centre, the leadership programme at Seattle University offers outreach services and business school style courses to non-profit managers.

The social incubator programme provides support to existing organisations to grow social enterprises and provides a supportive environment for this to take place in a parallel programme to the universities small business incubator.

Both centres aim to create communities of thinking entrepreneurs and managers.

A respected set of support organisations can also support lobbying and political development with governments to support the development of a commissioning environment that supports social enterprise ways of working.

6.2. Creating Leveraged Networks

Traditional straight-forward philanthropic giving continues to make a major contribution to supporting human services in this environment. While this form of philanthropy has a place in a balanced funding model, some warned of the dangers. One business consultant told me that when organisations have to generate their own money, processes and services are necessarily run in a sustainable way. Equally, a concern where major givers are commissioning services across an increasingly large portfolio, accountability becomes an issue as the foundation grows further away from the people it helps.

Increasing emphasis is given to leveraging support and impact through making the most use of the organisation's supporters and through smart investing.

A network of committed participants at different levels of an organisation can help forward the mission both through further fundraising and participation at volunteer, including professional volunteers, and board level. While organisations have always made use of their board members to raise money – directly from the non-executives and making use of their contacts – increasing use is made of the professional skills both in direct support of the organisation and as business mentors to the executives. Equally, board members are able to lever their professional networks to maximise social enterprise earned income through supply chains. Finally, creating clever networks can provide opportunities for supporting the mission through practical direct support to the client group. For example, Farestart (described below) has a senior guest chef programme which provides high profile support to the business and a ready made network for placements of staff in peer restaurants. Bringing in volunteers to wait table creates another layer of support, as does the exclusivity of the weekly dinner nights which creates a further network of supporters.

Increasingly philanthropic foundations are becoming more focussed on investing only in those worthy causes that have a firm business case, both to maximise the impact of the foundation's investment and to protect its brand.

Organisations such as United Way and civic foundations, are increasingly investing smartly. The United Way of King County (Seattle) is finding that wealthy donors are increasingly interested in designating where cash goes from their gift where previously they were more willing to release it to the judgement of the foundation. Equally, some trusts including the Vancity Foundation are looking cautiously at how they can leverage their capital endowment by investing the endowment directly in social businesses rather than just the endowment revenues. Potentially this gives a double impact of generating investment returns for the foundation, while providing capital to enterprises with a social mission. The Columbia Basin Trust holds a

community endowment derived from the international Columbia River treaty settlement that allocates the power and water resources of the river basin between Canada and the US. The trust invests its endowment income back into the community but is now considering how the endowment itself can be invested locally. Some at the symposium I attended called for the trust to invest a significant portion of its capital in this way. The response of the trusts' management was that while there was an argument for an element of community investment as part of their balanced portfolio, they had a responsibility to maximise the trust's income and their experience was that this was most effectively achieved by keeping the goals of the investment staff and the programme staff distinct.

6.3. Value Offer and the Business Case

Getting the balance right between delivering community and commercial value is core to ensuring the success of social enterprise on both measures of financial viability and social impact. David Carleton at Farestart described the tension between mission services and operations as helpful in keeping business focus in a mission-led organisation.

Many of those I met emphasised that a social enterprise's selling point needs to be the business benefit and so services have to be high quality. This point was made by both those entrepreneurs doing business with business, and those marketing directly to the public as retailers of one form or another. Having said that, Farestart have found that the lunch business has actually increased during the economic downturn where other restaurants have suffered. A plausible explanation for this is that a conscious decision is being made by the customer that: "if I am indulging in an expensive lunch in these tough times, it may as well do some good."

The logic is that for sustainable funding, social enterprises need to know that their "products with a mission" will have a market in lean times as well as good ones. Any expectation of a social-conscious margin is therefore miss-placed and from this perspective, social enterprises need to compete in the market on cost and quality grounds, with the social responsibility element comprising an additional bonus.

If social enterprise is to retain its favourable tax status and business community support it must not carry any reputation for having an unfair advantage by abusing that tax status to offer lower prices or by being in a position to pay lower wages through social employment schemes. Indeed, David Carleton from Farestart told me that under-cutting for-profit businesses was simply not an option: Much of the philanthropic investment and in-kind work placement contributions to his operation comes from peers in the restaurant trade and Farestart is sure to avoid alienating this important group of stakeholders. For example, the mid-level pitch and choice of location for Farestart's high profile restaurant headquarters was chosen so as not to cut across the business of other Seattle eateries.

The importance of business focus was well made by those at Pioneer Human Services and North West Centre (see case study below) who look to "operational philanthropy" as a mainstream source of funding.

Case Study: Operational Philanthropy: Pioneer Human Services and Boeing

PHS was founded in 1963 by Jack Dalton, a senior lawyer and Seattle political and establishment figure who had became an abuser of alcohol and of his clients' funds and eventually an inmate of the state penitentiary system. On his release, he was driven to establish an organisation that could provide rehabilitation support to substance abusers and the chronically homeless, especially those with a criminal record.

The aerospace giant Boeing had established sheltered workshops during the 1950s manufacturing non-flight critical aircraft components. Dalton was in the right place at the right time, and with the right contacts, to persuade Boeing to let him expand this initiative into a comprehensive programme to provide jobs for recent offenders who would otherwise find it extremely challenging to enter the job market. PHS's genius has been to combine the philanthropic motives of Boeing in supporting a sheltered work programme with a hard nosed business plan of expanding the offer and supplying quality products on a business to business basis with what we would now call corporate social responsibility as an added bonus to the company, rather than the driving motive for the contract.

A former president of Pioneer Health Services, Gary Mulhair, says:

"Boeing works with subcontractors all day long. They're comfortable with that…we're not asking them to dress up like clowns and sell balloons at a fundraiser." (Harvard Business School, 1999)

PHS "gives a hand up, not a hand out". Its end objective is to get former inmates out of the PHS system, which incorporates housing and real world jobs and benefit schemes. Diversifying out from the original Boeing contracts, PHS now takes many opportunities including those in the janitorial, packaging, manufacturing and food industries. As well as providing employment opportunities, the businesses fund housing and rehabilitation schemes. 52% of revenue is from public contacts but the remainder of income is almost entirely earned with only 1% philanthropy. Pioneer Health Services claims that its USP was that all divisions contribute back to the business, including the social programmes.

Case Study: North West Centre

NWC was born from the social change and civil rights movement. It is a grass roots organisation built by the parents of those children that existing institutions excluded. This route led in the 1980s to targeting social enterprise as an income source, as funding came under pressure for social programmes.

As well as running social programmes, NWC is responsible for 400 inclusive jobs and 400 other posts. While the costs of the businesses are covered, the social programmes (the schools and support projects) are not covered.

The organisation's aim is clear, to move people up and out of the business into mainstream employment. The feel of the factory floor is a long way from a traditional supported workshop, where employees with learning difficulties work alongside mainstream workers, using the skills they have to the fullest extent. This creates and adaptive and coaching environment.

The independence of funding allows NWC to pursue its vision where other non-profits can in effect be agencies of their funders. NWC for example can and does focus on early intervention when funding for early intervention from state sources has been restricted. Having said that a balanced funding model is being sought. It is instructive that, having moved away from philanthropy and traditional fund-raising in the 1970s and 80s, the CEO is looking at how giving can make up part of a diverse funding base.

The business focus of North West Centre's CEO is clear. From a background in logistics, he brings to NWC experience of the scale of human capacity for ingenuity that can be deployed in pursuit of business efficiency and profit. His challenge is to harness this capacity for social goals. Production engineering solutions are applied to social challenges with great success. In manufacturing plants risk is minimised and quality controlled by removing choice from ordinary workers. So workers will be separated from hazardous areas not by a "do not enter" sign but by a fence. With care and thought, the same processes can be brought to bear on the specific risks of supported employment in manufacturing environments.

6.4. Taking to Scale

A central question for those interested in the role of social enterprise in delivering services as a significant component of the social system is what mechanisms are available for taking tight, community based initiatives to scale. Indeed, a deeper question is whether it is desirable to do so and whether there is something about the local and the specific that cannot easily be replicated without loosing its essence. If co-design with users really is an important part of social enterprise (as many social entrepreneurs insist) then how does this sit with a straight-forward wide-scale roll-out through replication?

Organisations I met with who were successfully pushing their model beyond their original geographic boundaries in general had found ways of sharing knowledge and experience with new start ups.

Farestart is a Seattle based enterprise described in a case study below. Its development director described to me their process for national expansion. It is important to recall here the importance of place and identify in the motivation and interest of the board and of other key supporters. Many are motivated by a desire to do good *in* Seattle – locally – and are naturally suspicious of 'mission creep' when there is plenty still to do in their own city. This is set against the sensible business instinct of the entrepreneur to make the most of their unique selling point and expand in other markets rather than expanding through diversification into other fields where the business has less specialist capacity. Farestart's compromise has been to develop a national network of locally developed and owned organisations, learning from Farestart Seattle but developing locally. This is a local ownership model, rather than a franchise, with Farestart providing a guidance and quasi-accreditation role. The model is moving towards a group of paying network members using the Farestart name, which will tighten up governance using peer review.

Pioneer Health Services had a similar tension: pressure to roll out a nationally recognised successful model, set against pressure to keep expanding the local service offer while there is still a high level of unmet local need within Washington State. The PHS solution is to offer a consultancy arm as part of the social enterprise income earning approach, sharing knowledge and experience with groups in other regions, and returning value to the local business to support mission. Central City Concern in Portland offered a similar consultancy service.

Senior Services of King County in its project *Enhance* operates a 'train the trainer' model of selling the franchise, incorporating a performance management framework which ensures that quality is maintained and the programme's brand is protected.

At the level of a support organisation, REDF (originally the Roberts Economic Development Fund) in San Francisco specially pursues replication by pairing the strongest social enterprise business models and the most viable organisations and focussing on them for investment. REDF also becomes involved in brokering procurement deals that support social mission of the organisations it supports. The model is similar in concept to a franchising system.

In each of these examples, models have been found where a new venture can be at the same time home-grown and specific and grounded in a successful model.

6.5. Reality on Time Scales and the Potential for Savings

To those following social enterprise and social policy debates in North America, the UK's Big Society programme had drawn some attention. A timely October 2010 New Yorker article drew further attention to the coalition government approach ([David Cameron and Britain's Big Society : The New Yorker](#)). I discussed the programme and the approach at length with many social entrepreneurs. Many supported the focus on community empowerment and the return of responsibility to the individual and the community alongside a more substantial leadership role for the organisations of civil society outside of government. Again, many could see how social enterprise could be a key component of this approach. However, all cautioned against some of the key expectations of the programme.

Firstly, the pace of change. The most business-minded of my contacts concurred that establishing new businesses takes time, and many fail. They told me that this was true of social enterprises, just as much as purely commercial businesses. Dot-coms aside, a reasonable start up period for any new organisation to establish itself and start to generate sufficient income to cover its expenditure might be between 18 months and 3 years.

Secondly, while entrepreneurs, researchers and commissioners passionately believed that social enterprise models would lead to more effective service models with better outcomes for clients and so ultimately, overall savings, in many areas there was no guarantee that these savings would be easily cashable. Equally, there was a strong message that savings would come only in the longer term, especially through transformational, but slow pay-back preventative strategies. Equally, while social businesses I visited could show how they were supporting their missions through income generation and through their business activities, in many cases the overall income required philanthropic support and/or government commissioning budgets. Often this was on a 1/3 earned income, 1/3 philanthropic and 1/3 contract basis. Some I met reported that their organisation's contracts with government were dependent on them increasing the amount of self-generated funding available. In some cases this has successfully led to a drive towards more entrepreneurial activity to generate income, but traditional charitable fundraising plays a very significant part in making up the difference where government has stepped back.

Introduced in 6.4 above, Farestart is a Seattle based social enterprise working with the food industry to prepare disadvantaged people for main-stream employment. On the face of it, Farestart can look like a business that generates sufficient income through its food operations to run its training programmes. The reality is that while the food businesses cover their own costs (with a modest profit) and provide the training opportunities and employment for clients, the social mission side of the organisation requires

further funding for the scale of operation and sheer numbers of training clients being supported.

Case Study: Farestart

At 9am on a Monday morning Farestart felt extraordinary. The energy and sense of purpose throughout the levels of the retail and industrial kitchens was palpable.

Farestart is a food preparation led social enterprise which provides training and routes into employment in the food industry to homeless and disadvantaged people in Seattle. As well as its high profile and high quality restaurant in Seattle's main business district, Farestart's commercial kitchens prepare trainees for the reality of life in the food industry and supply nutritious meals to disadvantaged local communities. Farestart's core tenets are of celebrating success, growing the community, building sustainability and empowering individuals,

Attendance rates are very high – all the more remarkable given some of the fractured lives led by many of the students. David Carleton puts this down to the structure of the programme, with self-discipline and professionalism being held in high-esteem. Rolling admissions means that new students work alongside those with higher skills and so informal peer mentoring is much in evidence. In the kitchens, there is little to delineate staff and students and there is real student ownership of the products. Indeed, students will, through the course, participate in lines which are creating meals for the shelters in which some of them live. There is some attrition in the first weeks (30% - comparable with other further education programmes) but those who get through tend to complete. Graduation is celebrated and for many students, this will often be their first recognised point of qualification. 85% of those who complete find work immediately.

The programme is built to be sustainable. At around 16 weeks (some students may take longer to graduate) it is relatively short. While all trainees cycle through the restaurant kitchens, the focus of training is in the commercial kitchens where more jobs are available in more stable environments than restaurant kitchens.

All of the individual catering businesses under the Farestart banner break even, but this does not cover the core running costs of the programme. Of a $6m annual operating budget, about 50% of turnover is within catering operations. This $3m turnover generates 10% social enterprise profit leaving $2.7m to raise for the pastoral care and training programme management through contracts with funding agencies and philanthropic fund raising.

Equally, several contacts warned me of the dangers of taking examples out of their specific historical and community context and trying to apply in a different environment without fully understanding the business. Their more positive message was that while specific models may not transfer, the principals and lessons learned most certainly do.

Case Study: Taking examples out of context

Great care needs to be taken when analysing the success of high profile enterprises if the intention is to then use the enterprise as a model of sustainability elsewhere.

For example, two social enterprises in Seattle are operating very successful, high profile and widely celebrated supported employment programmes. An obvious question was where the capital came from to establish their significant manufacturing facilities? In both each case, the organisation's financial security was underpinned by well exploited and managed property investments ultimately derived from philanthropic gifts.

Social enterprises, as any other business, should of course look to their property assets to maximise their ability to leverage social return, but policy makers need to understand the full history of the successful businesses they look to as models before basing on them their new policy expectation of similar success. Alternative mechanisms for providing capital, including the *Big Society Bank*, social investment bonds and proposed opportunities for personal social investments may provide alternative routes to capitalising social enterprises.

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7. Individuals and Leaders

Throughout this report, the need for solid business skills has been emphasised. One interviewee stated that "dreams may not be productive" and went on to say that, when it comes to generating social good, "lots of little cafes isn't going to do it".

It is surely the case that some of the drive to business language, methods and culture derives at least in part from the desire of managers across sectors "to be viewed as active entrepreneurs rather than passive bureaucrats" (Harvard Business School, 2005). Innovative managers do not want to be seen by their peers as plodding government workers. Never-the-less, individuals with truly innovate approaches and a willingness to take personal risks are found in the social sector even through the normal business motivation to take personal risk, personal reward, is absent. My experience was that these individual leaders are key to the vitality of many organisations.

I found several individual leaders in social enterprise who had already had successful careers in the private sector.

Case Study: Routes from business to social enterprise leadership

Effective leadership at the executive level is essential to any enterprise.

Exploring social enterprise in Seattle, the significant role played in the management of social enterprise of executives previously working in for-profit business is striking. Business experience seems to be important for a number of reasons:

- Empathy with business customers
- Focus on the bottom line
- Focus on strategy
- Sales experience

Both David Carlton at Farestart and Tom Everill at North West Centre had senior experience in business before moving to senior executive positions in social enterprise. Mr Carlton's background was in high-tech while Mr Everill's was in global logistics. In both cases their route into staff positions was from positions they occupied on the board while in private sector employment.

This is not to say that business background is essential. Ed Blackburn for example from Central City Concern in Portland is a former city employee.

Whether it is easier to train a business person in social goals or a social worker in business skills is not really the point here, and I saw plenty of inspiring examples from both sides. The key to a successful organisation seems to be in balancing management teams and boards between social and business experience and, importantly, social and business networks.

8. Key Learning Points

There is a long history of a strong and innovative not-for-profit sector in the Pacific North-West and social enterprise makes up an increasingly large component of this. Never-the-less, many Canadians and American entrepreneurs look to the UK and Europe for inspiring models and I make no comparisons here of the relative development of the social enterprise on each side of the Atlantic.

As a local government officer, working on this study has made me reflect on the several roles that local government does and can play in encouraging the development of social enterprise. These include:

- incubator
- commissioner
- supporter
- funder
- owner
- customer

As it has with its role in supporting the voluntary sector in recent years, local government must actively shape its relationship with social enterprise. Treating social enterprises as simply equal players in the market of providers may not be sufficient to ensure the model expands.

I have taken a number of key learning points from this study:

Firstly, the role of a strong civic community in promoting social enterprise and making it sustainable as a model of social delivery must not be underplayed. Leveraging networks, particularly through the involvement of senior business leaders in local organisations, gives social enterprises not just fund raising clout but access to business supply chains and operational philanthropy. The importance of local identity and sense of place is critical in forging a sense of civic responsibility.

Secondly, a support network is important in developing a strong market in social enterprise. The barriers to entry for new players are high, and if we expect entrepreneurs to take personal risk in the absence of the normal entrepreneur's incentive of financial reward, there must be active market intervention. There is no need for this to be created by government, but government can contribute to a supportive environment.

Thirdly, social enterprise models can be replicated, but mechanisms need to be found that ensures that the local and specific is preserved.

Fourthly, few social enterprises operate successfully with earned income only. A balance of earned income, philanthropy and social contracts is likely to be the most sustainable model.

Fifthly, commissioners should beware of short term goals. As with any business start-up, investors must be patient to see a return, or in the case of government, a saving.

If Big Society is to have an impact, by the end of the programme, the UK (or in the era of devolved policy making, at least England) will have undergone a review of the place of the state versus civic society in the delivery of community services. At the same time, all public services will be under significant financial pressures. Social enterprise has a unique opportunity at this time to be a major component of a new social settlement.

While difficult times are not a prospect that any commissioner, service provider or more importantly client relishes, as provincial officials in British Columbia told me, "if we're looking to encourage innovation, the tougher the environment the better."

References

The majority of the material used within this report is developed from visits and interviews by the author. Details of specific texts referred to in the text are given using the Harvard style of: "Author, (Year), Title, Publisher, Place of Origin". Within the text, this is abbreviated to: (Author, Year).

URL's are given as hyperlinks within the text and in full below.

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Social Enterprise Alliance (2010) *What is Social Enterprise*, https://www.se-alliance.org/what-is-social-enterprise

Appendix 1: Organisations visited

- **Washington**

David Carleton, Farestart, Seattle
Kate Turpin, Susan Snyder, Joanne Donohue, Senior Services of King County
Tom Everill, North West Centre, Seattle
Norman Rice (former Mayor of Seattle), Seattle Foundation, Seattle
Prof. Mike Bisesi, Centre for non-profit and social enterprise management, University of Seattle, Seattle
Carol Wood, United Way of King County, Seattle
Daniel Fey, Seattle-King County Workforce Development Council, Seattle
Larry Fehr, Pioneer Human Services, Seattle
Kristi Heim, *The Business of Giving,* Seattle Times, Seattle

- **Oregon**

Cindy Cooper, Centre for Global Leadership in Sustainability, Portland State University
Ed Blackburn, Central City Concern, Portland

- **California**

Cynthia Gair, Roberts Enterprise Development Fund, San Francisco

- **British Columbia**

Mark Medgyesi, Social Integration Branch, Ministry of Housing & Social Development, Government of British Columbia, Victoria, BC
Andrew Wharton, Resilient Capital project, Government of British Columbia, Victoria BC
Cindy Pandini, British Columbia Social Venture Partners, Vancouver, BC
Peter Roundhill, Enterprising Non-Profits, Vancouver, BC
Elizabeth Lougheed-Green, Vancity Foundation, Vancouver, BC
Shirley Chan, Wes Regan, Building Opportunities with Business, Vancouver, BC
Columbia Basin Trust, Cranbrook, BC

- **London**

Graeme Gordon, Tania Robinson, Southwark Council, London
Chris Sanford, Community Action Southwark, London
Anthony Hawkins and others, Shaftsbury Partnership, London
Jeffrey Bailey, Centre for Social Justice, London
Daniel Dickens, Southwark Circle, London

Appendix 2: List of Case Studies

Appendix 3: Resources

There are a huge range of resources on-line and many lively communities discussing all areas of social enterprise. I have listed some of those that I have found most useful below;

Enterprising Non-Profits (Canada)
www.enterprisingnonprofits.ca

Social Enterprise London
http://www.sel.org.uk/

Social Enterprise Alliance (US)
https://se-alliance.org/

Manhattan Institute
http://www.manhattan-institute.org/

Stanford Social Innovation Review
http://www.ssireview.org

The Business of Giving blog:
http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/thebusinessofgiving/