

sports clubs and event organisers is to demonstrate positive links to the brands of their commercial sponsors.

As a position statement this work is a useful addition to the academic canon, providing a clear and concise examination of the de facto role of sporting clubs, events and facilities in the drive to make cities more internationally visible. Where the book does disappoint is in the narrowness of its remit (perhaps inevitable given its publication following a programme of detailed comparative research) and its lack of a theoretical context within which to place its undoubtedly interesting observations. As spatially aware witnesses to the increasing commercialisation of sport and the ever growing major event spectacle, we are interested in how such developments impact upon urban regeneration, city growth or social outcomes; what return is there for the city authorities pressured into supporting events, or seeking to maximise the local impact of internationally renowned sporting 'brands'? Without venturing into the uncertain territory between marketing push and consumer behaviour, this book cannot start to answer those questions. It may, however, make such issues easier to contemplate for those coming after.

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## The Social Economy

Amin, A., Cameron, A. and Hudson, R. 2002:

### **PLACING THE SOCIAL ECONOMY**

*London: Routledge, £ 19.99 paper, ISBN 0415260892, 147 pages.*

The social economy has attracted considerable policy and academic interest in recent years. High expectations have been generated about its contribution to regenerating depressed communities. It has been portrayed as a more responsive and flexible way of meeting social needs than the centralised welfare state, a source of new employment and enterprise in areas abandoned by the mainstream economy, and a method of empowering socially excluded groups by combining skills training with confidence and capacity-

building. Put simply, there is a strong belief among current policy-makers in Britain and parts of Europe that mobilising local communities through local provision of goods and services (i.e. building 'social capital') can combat social exclusion.

This book offers a challenging assessment of this argument, with far-reaching implications for policy and attitudes towards the social economy. It analyses the performance of this sector in different parts of Britain against the various expectations that have built up. The result is a sobering account of experience on the ground and a thoroughgoing critique of current aspirations and assumptions about the purpose and impact of the sector. This book deserves to be studied closely by the relevant policy community, particularly at UK and European levels, since it offers some salutary lessons that could save much soul-searching later on.

The social economy is defined as non-profit activities designed to tackle unemployment and exclusion through the provision of socially useful goods sold in the market. They are provided by Third Sector organisations rather than the state or private sector. Unsurprisingly, the authors discovered enormous variety in the objectives and impact of social enterprises. So their first important conclusion is that there is no such thing as a model social enterprise that can be transplanted between areas through standardised policy actions. Some are effective at getting people into jobs or accommodating small businesses in managed workspaces, while others are better at increasing personal confidence and extending popular participation in local decision-making. Success depends on local conditions, such as the history of voluntary sector activity and community activism, which cannot be wished into existence by policy-makers. The importance of place and local context in influencing the nature and effectiveness of social enterprises is a recurrent theme of the book.

The second conclusion is that the sector's overall economic achievements have been modest in relation to policy expectations. The authors found some examples of highly impressive, purposeful, outward-looking and innovative social enterprises led by exceptional individuals. However, these stood out against the more general pattern of high failure rates, low quality entrepreneurship, restricted markets, modest job creation and

continuing dependence on public funding. The authors argue that the social economy cannot constitute a viable alternative to the conventional economy, especially in poor areas.

They suggest that social enterprises cannot normally compete on equal terms with commercial businesses because of their social obligations. They have to invest more in their staff, spend more time with their service users and involve the community in their decisions. There are also objective economic constraints in terms of resource availability, knowledge, skills and market viability in the kinds of communities where they tend to be started. One should not expect the social economy to replace the mainstream economy as an engine of employment growth in areas from which the private sector has withdrawn. The authors argue that it should be viewed instead as a symbol of a different kind of economy based on meeting social needs, developing human capabilities and promoting ethical values. They cite successful examples of such enterprises in more prosperous cities, such as Bristol and London.

Third, the social economy cannot substitute for the welfare state either. Social enterprises are sometimes put forward as a way of reforming state welfare on the grounds that they are more responsive to community needs and more efficient at delivering services. However, practical experience shows a pattern of patchy and generally limited success, hampered by stretched resources, difficulties in local recruitment, variable quality services and poor survival prospects. The authors argue that the social economy cannot cover the range of welfare demands in poor neighbourhoods consistently and rebuild community capabilities. It may become a poor form of welfare for the poor – a kind of community self-help – while the state focuses on those likely to be most useful to the mainstream economy through programmes such as welfare to work. They argue instead that social enterprises should be seen as performing a useful complementary role to high quality universal state welfare – along the lines of the Scandinavian model – by helping to innovate and improve the provision of targeted services in a user-friendly, participatory manner. They cite some useful examples of customised labour market and childcare support in Glasgow.

Finally, the authors argue strongly against the tendency in government to view the social economy as a localised solution to the problems of social exclusion. The causes of poverty and exclusion generally lie beyond neighbourhoods in wider economic and social processes, so they are not amenable to local solutions in isolation from broader national policies.

There are a few slightly disappointing features of this otherwise excellent book, such as the limited depth of the evidence base and number of interviews undertaken. In the absence of a more comprehensive analysis there is a danger of overstatement and partial treatment of complex issues. It would have been helpful to see more systematic comparisons of the social economy with other sectors, including the comparative costs and effects of policy support. I also found the description of conditions and policies in one of the case study areas inadequate, if not misleading. Local policy-makers tend to have more realistic expectations of the social economy than central government or the EC. The book does not have much practical advice to offer them, such as what kinds of functions social enterprises tend to perform better or worse. Housing is a surprising omission given the huge effort being devoted across the country to transferring stock from councils to local housing associations. Some of the maps and language are also difficult to decipher. Nevertheless this is generally a carefully crafted and stimulating contribution to the literature.

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## Mutualism in Public Policy

Birchall, J. (ed) 2001:

### **THE NEW MUTUALISM IN PUBLIC POLICY**

*London: Routledge, £65.00 hardback,  
ISBN 0415241308, xi 255 pages.*

This is, as Johnston Birchall notes in his editorial introduction, a timely book. In Britain a growing paradox has become apparent in official attitudes towards mutuality over the last few years. On the one hand, the Labour government professes

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