

Project Report: B2 – Sustainability and the Social Economy June 2008

The following is a research activity summary and final report for Project B2 – Sustainability and the Social Economy – completed June 30th, 2008. The overall project timeline is May 2007 – April 2009. This report covers research activities and outcomes for the period June 2007 – June 2008.

Project Description – Annex A (2007)

The original project outlined in Annex A of the 2007 SERC 2 Workplan encompassed a broad research agenda focusing on the theoretical and practical implications of socio-ecological questions for the social economy or solidarity economy.

The initial proposal outlined three parallel avenues of research:

1. a critical review or ‘reading against the grain’ of the existing SE literature for evidence of reflection on the sustainability question, and analysis of the practical challenges and possibilities of converting the SE economy to sustainability principles.
2. an initial exploration of the emerging bioeconomy and its relationship to the social economy in BC and Alberta and more broadly. For example, in SERC 2 we anticipate new theory emerging from our examination of the linkages and synergies between the social economy, resource management and rural revitalization in BC and Alberta. These relationships are relatively new and, as such, are under-theorized.
3. a critical review and reflection on the implications of sustainability for measurement and indicators of wellbeing in the SE sector (this in conjunction with work being done by Mark Aneilski of SERC 3, and discussions with the national SE mapping group about the environment). Many SERC 2 members have strengths in sustainability indicators and that debate needs to be integrated with the ways people are measuring and conceiving indicators of the social economy’s impacts.

Four specific project objectives were outlined in the original proposal:

- To critically assess the implications of the sustainability debate for social economy theory and practice.
- To look at the literature and what’s out there in terms of good project models in Sweden and internationally, and critically assess what is happening elsewhere as it relates to the question of social economy, resource management, and rural revitalization in BC and AB.
- To explore how the SE sector can take a lead role in the emerging bioeconomy and the conversion economy more generally.
- To explore sustainability as it relates to performance indicators of the SE, and the measurement of SE community impacts.

Research Assistant

Lena K. Soots – Research Assistant
PhD Student
Simon Fraser University

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Lena Soots was hired as an RA for the project in June 2007 on an occasional basis (* see revised contract for Lena). Her 'official' contract for the project commenced in October 2007 and ran until June 2008.

As outlined in the student contract, Lena's role was to "review the existing social economy literature and explore broad questions related to sustainability and the future of the social economy, focusing on the possible role of the social economy in the transition to a more sustainable society" and to "work closely with Mike Gismondi (and other supervisors) in the initial contract period to scope the overall B2 project and determine specific deliverables and timelines".

Revised Project Description

After an initial scan of the literature and reflections on experiences so far in each field, Lena and Mike decided to shift the emphasis of the project to focus primarily on the first research avenue (critical review of the literature) and the first and third research objectives (ie. implications of the sustainability debate for the social economy, and how the SE can take a lead role in the emerging conversion economy).

Lena's experience and conversations at the Canadian Association for the Study of Cooperation (CASC) conference in May 2007 in Saskatoon, revealed a general lack of 'sustainability consciousness' in the cooperative and social economy discourse and a 'blind spot' in recognizing the common goal of social change. Furthermore, the term 'social economy' had very little salience for those engaged in environmental and sustainability research.

The revised project objectives and outputs included:

Purpose/Objective:

The purpose of the B2 work is to contribute to the overall SERC 2 project on the social economy and sustainable rural development. The objective is to provide a theoretical and conceptual discussion of the similarities, differences and points of convergence between traditional sustainability and sustainable communities frameworks and the social economy. The B2 project will point to areas where the two fields of thought can actually inform and mutually support one another in the movement towards a more just and sustainable society. The project will provide a theoretical framework and context for the more sector-specific work being done in SERC 2 (food security, land tenure, energy, etc).

In order to achieve this objective, we decided to focus the project outputs on academic publications and conferences that would take the discussion to a broader academic audience as well as contribute to BALTA's student learning and publication objectives. The intention of this work, then is to provide the theoretical and conceptual understanding upon which the more specific SERC 2 work could be built.

Specific Project Outputs:

1. A bibliography to be used as a reference tool for linking sustainability and the social economy in other SERC 2 and BALTA related projects

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2. An academic research paper
3. Two conference presentations
4. Publications submission

Achieved Project Outcomes

- ✓ **Bibliography**
(describe after sorting)
 - ✓ **Academic Research Paper (15-20 pages)**
A research paper entitled “Sustainability, the Social Economy and the Eco-social Crisis: Traveling Concepts and Bridging Fields” was researched and written over the 8-month contract period with abstracts submitted and accepted to two (2) academic conferences.
 - ✓ **Conference Presentations (2)**
In order to facilitate transdisciplinary dialogue between the two fields, the paper was presented at the following association conferences at the 2008 Social Sciences and Humanities Congress at UBC in Vancouver:
 - Environmental Studies Association of Canada (ESAC)
 - Association for Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER)*
- * ANSER required an additional 8 page paper summary and published the paper in peer-reviewed Conference Proceedings.
- ✓ **Publication**
The following academic journals have been identified as potential targets for submission:
 - Capitalism, Nature, Socialism
 - International Journal of Social Economics
 - Community Development Journal

Based on the publication deadlines and criteria, a revised version of the paper will be submitted to one of the above journals by the end of 2008.

In addition to this research report, the following pieces are submitted in completion of the research contract:

- Bibliography
- Research Paper
- Conference Abstract Submissions and ANSER Paper Summary
- Conference Presentation (ppt)