



Sustainability, the Social Economy, and the Eco-social Crisis: Traveling Concepts and Bridging Fields

by

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Abstract

Current global issues such as climate change and peak oil have brought attention to the severity and complexity of our eco-social crisis and called for local action and community-based solutions. There is a need for middle level analytical concepts and tools that engage the organizational and operational forms and practices of mutuality and trust needed for a conversion to eco-social sustainability. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the social economy can help to address local issues in this context and contribute to the transition to a more sustainable society. The paper compares the historical and ideological foundations of the social economy with those of the sustainability movement, identifying both theoretical similarities and ‘traveling concepts’ used by practitioners in the two fields. We argue that effective community responses to current socio-ecological crises would benefit from some bridging and building between the two schools of thought and fields of practice.

As part of the British Columbia-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA) our paper presents some early analysis from three sectors in BC and Alberta (farmers’ markets, land trusts and built environments). Using these examples, we highlight how practitioners in both the social economy and sustainability fields can understand the eco-social crisis and compare how each organizes its alternatives around notions of trust, mutuality and sensitivity to community locale.

Introduction

Current global issues such as climate change, peak oil, and food and water security have brought attention to the severity and complexity of the challenge of sustainability. There is a growing understanding that the current crisis we face is both ecological and social – it is truly an eco-social crisis. The question of a sustainable future has attracted much meta-level analysis that offers little analysis of the transition to sustainability question or, when it does, moves quickly to global change or local action. Given the complexity of the issue of transition to sustainability, however, we argue that there is a need for more reflection on some middle ground analysis, in particular the organizational and operational forms and practices needed to move toward regulating ecological resources, reinstating democracy, and reclaiming sustainable futures.

In this paper we compare the historical and ideological foundations of the social economy with those of the sustainability movement, and argue that effective community responses to the current eco-social crisis would benefit from some bridging and building between the two schools of thought and field of

practice. We explore how the social economy offers organizational practices and forms of mutuality, trust and democracy that could help a transition to sustainability. We also identify some theoretical similarities and 'traveling concepts' at play in the two fields. The final part of the paper sets out some early research directions of the British Columbia – Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA) that examines practices in both social economy and sustainability.

Defining the Eco-social Crisis

Defining current patterns of social and ecological unsustainability as eco-social is one way of making transparent human-nature connections. Like many critical theorists, we are trying to both embed the social in the ecological, while at the same time making sure to socialize ecological problems so that we can reveal their unequal causes, lopsided impacts, and the patterns of social stratification in people's experience of the eco-social crises. "Resolving the crisis must address its social origins, and this means addressing ecological issues as social justice issues. There can be no ecological survival without social justice." (Johnson, Gismondi, Goodman, 2005)

Sustainable Development

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Commission) issued a report entitled *Our Common Future* coining the term 'sustainable development' within international political discourse and calling for a global development agenda that would address environmental degradation as well as alleviate poverty and social inequity (WCED, 1987) The Brundtland Commission laid the institutional framework for protecting the Earth's ecosystems while also promoting both economic and social justice goals. As Edwards (2005) points out, the emergence of the sustainable development concept brought with it the expansion of earlier environmentalist perspectives on preservation and management of the environment to include issues related to the economy, employment and equality.

Since then, the term itself has received considerable criticism, particularly because of its ambiguity, inherent contradictions and subjectivity to interpretation (Dale 2001; Keiner 2004; Robinson 2004; Sneddon et al 2006), and for its perpetuation of northern mal-development, over-consumption, and disregard for the challenges faced by southern countries (Johnson, Gismondi, Goodman, 2005). However, despite criticisms and definitional arguments, there is general agreement that while actions to be taken by northern countries and southern countries will differ, sustainable development requires the reconciliation of three imperatives: social, ecological and economic. The ecological imperative to live within global biophysical carrying capacity and to maintain/enhance biodiversity; the social imperative to develop democratic systems of governance and ensure social equity, and; the economic imperative to ensure that basic needs are met worldwide (Robinson and Tinker 1997; Dale 2001).

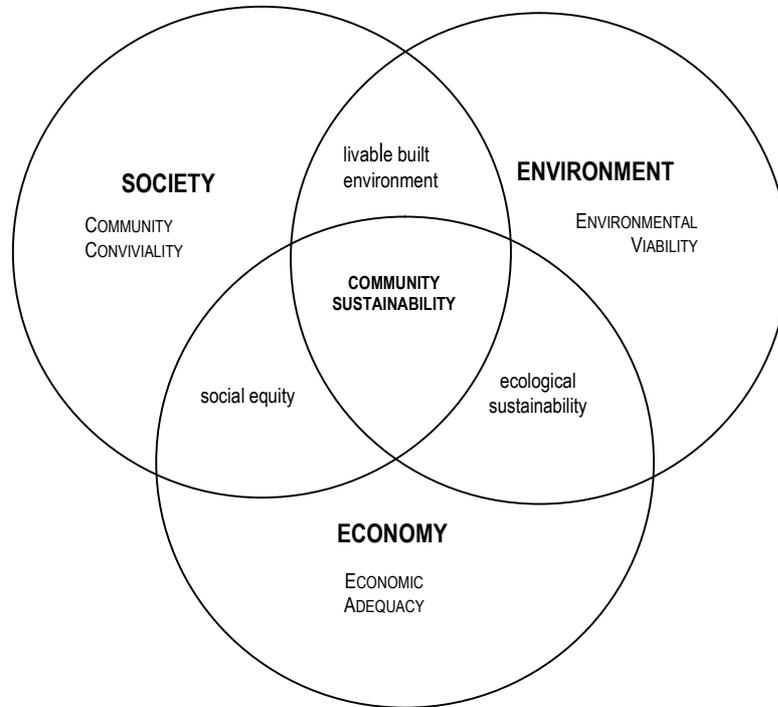
At the international level, there has also been recognition that although the eco-social crisis is of global significance, its consequences and implications are most directly felt at the local level. At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, Local Agenda 21 was endorsed by national governments as a mechanism for supporting the mobilization of local governments in sustainability strategies, planning and implementation (ICLEI 2008). This issue of scale and organizing at the local level was taken up by Bridger and Luloff (1999) who argue that discussions of 'sustainable development' and the creation of a 'sustainable society' have very little salience for people as they require levels of abstraction not relevant to daily life. It is at the community level – the level at which people's lives and relationships play out and the natural environments in which they operate – where sustainability can be most clearly defined, realized, and implemented. Furthermore, it is at this level of social organization that the consequences of environmental degradation are most strongly felt and where successful intervention is most noticeable (Bridger and Luloff 1999: 380). There is not a naïve localism, but a globally aware and informed one.

Sustainable community development (SCD) has emerged as a conceptual framework and a field of practice that brings the abstract notion of sustainable development to the local level where the identification of problems, priorities and planning can take place in the context of local realities. Sustainable community development emphasizes the integration of social, economic and ecological imperatives in the context of community development. Bridger and Luloff (1999: 381) offer the following definitional clarification of SCD:

Broadly speaking, definitions of sustainable community development stress the importance of striking a balance between environmental concerns and development objectives while simultaneously enhancing local social relationships. Sustainable communities meet the economic needs of their residents, enhance and protect the environment, and promote more humane local societies.

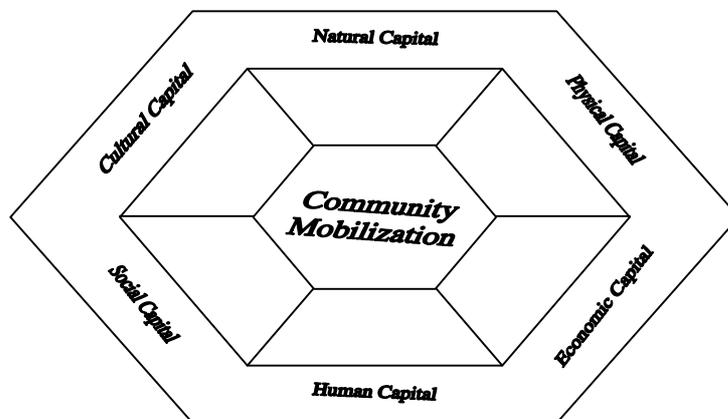
Hancock (1997), uses a classic Ven Diagram (Figure 1) to illustrate that community sustainability lies at the intersection of people, the environment and the economy. He emphasizes the importance of a livable built environment, ecological sustainability, environmental viability, community conviviality, social equity, and economic adequacy.

Figure 1: Community Sustainability (Hancock 1997)



Roseland (2005) offers another conceptual model for SCD based on 6 forms of community capital: natural, physical, economic, human, social and cultural (Figure 2). According to Roseland (2005: 27) SCD requires “mobilizing citizens and their governments to strengthen all forms of community capital”.

Figure 2: Community Capital Framework (Roseland 2005)



A large number of people around the world have taken up the concept of sustainability and are working with key concepts such as citizen involvement, green accounting, sustainability indicators, local trading systems, ecological economics, and more to try and change society. Many of the principles underlying such concepts will sound familiar to practitioners of the social economy: the links between the ecological idea of proximity and the social idea of local scale; the recognition of how green consciousness is linked to community salience; or the concept of many kinds of capital (natural, social, and economic). With this in mind, we turn now to a short summary of the social economy, its origins, and some of its key concepts.

The Social Economy

Often referred to as the 'third sector', the social economy (SE) has deep roots in the 19th and 20th century movements for social and industrial democracy, cooperatism, community development, and anti-capitalism. While the term 'social economy' is relatively new, its reference points are to this older, globally significant and highly organized sector of the world's economies. The ethos, organizational structures and scale of the social economy is of particular interest to us as analysts interested in middle level analysis of the conversion economies and the path of transition to sustainability.

Pearce (2003) refers to the social economy as the "third system" of the economy. According to Pearce the first system represents the private sector and is primarily profit driven. The second system is the domain of the public sector and is focused on redistribution and planning. The third system is about "citizens taking action to meet and satisfy needs themselves and working together in some collaborative way to do this" (Pearce 2003: pg). More specifically, the social economy is defined as all that part of the third system which is on the trading side or that sells goods and services in the market place for social purpose(s).

Restakis (2005: 12) provides the following definition from an organizational perspective: "Social economy organizations are those organizations whose members are animated by the principle of reciprocity for the pursuit of mutual economic or social goals, often through the control of social capital". Restakis' definition includes all co-operatives, credit union, non-profits and volunteer organizations, charities and foundations, service associations, community enterprises and social enterprises that use (in part or in whole) market mechanisms to pursue explicit social objectives. For-profit enterprises are included only if surpluses are mutually shared by members in a collectively owned structure such as in co-operatives or collectives. What is not included are state institutions or programs and conventional capitalist firms such as sole proprietorships, partnerships and investor-owned or publicly traded companies (Restakis, 2005).

Social Development Canada (2005) defines the social economy as “a grass-roots entrepreneurial, not-for-profit sector, based on democratic values, that seeks to enhance the social, economic, and environmental conditions of communities, often with a focus on their disadvantaged members”. Western Economic Diversification Canada (2005) defines the social economy as “an entrepreneurial, not for profit sector that seeks to enhance the social, economic and environmental conditions of communities”. Similarly, Economic Development Canada (2005) defines the sector as one that “produces goods and services within the context of the market economy, but whose aim is to redistribute surplus in support of social and community objectives”.

The Chantier de l'économie sociale – the Quebec Task Force on the Social Economy, defines the social economy as association-based initiatives founded on values of solidarity, autonomy, and citizenship embodied in the following principles (Ninacs 2002):

- A primary goal of service to members or the community rather than the accumulation of profit;
- Autonomous management (as distinguished from public programs)
- Democratic decision-making processes
- The primacy of persons and work over capital, and the redistribution of profits

In the last 20 years there has been a re-flourishing interest in the social economy as an alternative to the capitalist market and the state. This new consciousness of the social economy recognizes that it is entrepreneurial, and not only provides for a wide range of social purposes such as training and social housing, but is effective and competitive against private firms in all areas of the economy (from agriculture and food production and sales, forest industry, and small manufacturing to day care and elder care, community based medical services, to arts and entertainment), and that the social economy's impact on the GDP is significant and growing. For example, the non-profit and voluntary sectors alone account for 8.5 per cent of Canadian GDP (including valued volunteer labour) (Hall et al, 2005).

The social economy combines democratic ethos and reciprocity, and grassroots, multiple-scaled market effectiveness, with well tested organizational structures such as coops, enterprising non-profits, and intermediary networks and clusters of support. Rooted in places yet outward looking and solidarity based, these organizational forms suggest the potential of the social economy to make significant contributions to further mobilization of a sustainability movement. In the next section, we outline some theoretical and conceptual comparisons, and attempt to tie the two fields (SCD & SE) together.

Theoretical Linkages and Conceptual Comparisons

Our review and analysis of the literature reveals a common misconception that keeps the social economy and the sustainability movements as distinct and separate fields. The current 'sustainability movement', and historically the 'green movement' have often been equated with environmentalism and eco-centric

arguments; however, the purely eco-centric nature of this perception is inaccurate when the ideological roots are examined. With strong historical links to green political thought, social ecology and eco-socialism, the sustainability movement has a considerable, and perhaps even surprising social emphasis.

Green Political Thought

At the core of green political thought is an environmental ethic that assumes a moral community consisting of humans, animals, plants and the Earth itself (Dobson and Lucardie 1993). In addition to these ecological values, green political thought has evolved through the influence of earlier political traditions such as feminism, socialism and anarchism to include social values such as decentralization, participatory democracy, self-sufficiency, egalitarianism, alternative technology, pacifism and internationalism (Dobson and Lucardie 1993).

Helleiner (2002: 259) speaks to the misconception that 'green' discourse is the same as environmentalism,

[The greens] are sometimes associated with the environmental movement, but the two should not be confused. The greens are concerned not only with environmental issues, but with a broader political economic project...What is particularly distinctive about the greens' approach to political-economic issues is their enthusiasm for the decentralization of social life.

Helleiner (2002) goes on to point out that, in green political discourse the "greens" have been concerned not only with environmental issues but with broader social and economic issues within society, and have had as much a social as an ecological agenda. A wide range of both ecological and social issues have been on the green political agenda including: racial and class aspects of unequal and uneven access to sustainable built and natural spaces, controlling patterns of growth, and intra- and inter-generational equity.

Doherty and de Geus (1996:2) acknowledge the distinction between 'greens' and 'environmentalists' as well, stating that, "...[the greens'] radicalism on issues such as the scope and depth of democracy still distinguishes them from those environmentalists who do not link their defense of the natural environment to any wider project for political change."

Smith and Young (2007) point to an early emphasis on economic democracy within green political thought, referring to the development of green political ideology in the 1970s and 1980s and the emphasis on economic democracy. With economic democracy as a central element in the greens'

approach to political economy, "...workers' co-operatives became the favoured institutional form on which a new green economy could be built" (Smith and Young 2007: 2).

Doherty and de Geus (1996:6) also speak to the greens' interest in co-operative models of organization,

The greens' advocacy of participatory democracy extends well beyond the reorganization of parties...One such form of democratization that has been central to the green project has been the reorganization of work...Greens argue that the hierarchical organization of the workplace concentrates too much economic and bureaucratic power in the hands of too few. They argue in favour of placing more emphasis on the informal economy, for a secure basic income independent of work...and for a redistribution of available work...One means for achieving this, repeatedly advanced by greens, has been the workers' co-operative....Greens hope that co-operatives will enhance local democracy and lead to a more egalitarian organization of work.

Social Ecology

Social ecology, most often associated with the intellectual eco-anarchist, Murray Bookchin, is defined by its assertion that nearly all of our present ecological problems arise from deep-rooted social problems. Social ecology confronts the social and political roots of contemporary ecological problems, critiques the ways of conventional environmental politics and points toward radical, community-centred alternatives (Tokar 2008). Clark (1997:3) defines social ecology as a philosophical approach that "investigates the ontological, epistemological, ethical and political dimensions of the relationship between the social and ecological and seeks the practical wisdom that results from such reflection".

Bookchin (1993) argued strongly about the relationship between social and ecological problems,

[T]o separate ecological problems from social problems – or even to play down or give only token recognition to their crucial relationship – would be to grossly misconstrue the sources of the growing environmental crisis. In effect, the way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to addressing the ecological crisis. Unless we clearly recognize this, we will surely fail to see that the hierarchical mentality and class relationships that so thoroughly permeate society are what has given rise to the very idea of dominating the natural world.

Bookchin imagined a particular kind of society in which a reconciliation of human and non-human nature was possible, one in which human communities would be embedded in non-human nature in an

integrated “ecological society”. The society capable of achieving such an integration, Bookchin argued, would be decentralized, mutualistic, non-hierarchical and co-operative (Biehl 1997:14).

Social ecology holds a strong reverence for ecology and the inherent value of all species and ecosystems, and balances this with a strong advocacy for social systems organized around small, decentralized communities. Bookchin (1964) argued that a decentralized society not only allows for closer connections and harmonization between humans and nature, but also enhances the connections and harmonization of humans with each other.

Hill (2005:49) defines social ecology as, “the study and practice of personal, social, and ecological sustainability and progressive change based on the critical application and integration of ecological, humanistic, relational, community and spiritual values”. Hill believes that in order to address both social and ecological problems, we must develop our understanding and caring for both ourselves and for others. “The personal task,” Hill argues, “is to respect, value, support, and develop mutualistic relationships with others so that their needs may be satisfied and their creativity and gifts to the world expressed. The social task is to create contexts that are supportive of doing this.” (Hill 2005: 55).

Within Hill’s discussion of social ecology, he points to Hunter, Bailey, and Taylor (1997) and the importance of what they refer to as “co-operacy”. As the next stage after autocracy and democracy, co-operacy includes the central principles of caring and sharing, transparency and access, inclusiveness and participation, comprehensiveness, responsibility, and proactivity – all qualities that are critical to the building of social capital and the improvement of sustainability (Hill 2005: 56).

Eco-Socialism

The idea of eco-socialism has been developed mostly over the past 30 years based on the works of Raymond Williams, Rudolf Bahro and Andre Gorz, among others. Lowy (2005) argues that for eco-socialists the capitalist market’s profit logic and the logic of bureaucratic authoritarianism are incompatible with the need to safeguard the natural environment. “While criticizing the ideology of the dominant sectors of the labour movement, eco-socialists know that the workers and their organizations are an indispensable force for any radical transformation of the system as well as the establishment of a new socialist and ecological society” (Lowy 2005: 18). Eco-socialism aims for an ecologically rational society founded on democratic control, social equity, and the predominance of use-value, and assumes collective ownership of the means of production and participatory democratic planning.

Sarkar (1999) sets out the case for eco-socialism arguing that socialism, while it lacked ecological sensibilities (which would have to be overcome), offered a more measured and non-contradictory commitment to an egalitarian, anti-exploitative, alternative to the current capitalist system. Sarkar’s

synthesis of red and green would include increased state control of markets, solidarity with people living in poverty and attention to social justice, ending exploitation of workers and, more positively, support for an ecologically sound economic democracy. Much of what Sarkar supports can be found in the cross over area between the social economy and sustainability literature, although Sarkar's work itself argues against eco-capitalism or a green capitalism, even as a transition to eco-socialism and would be critical of our attempts to rescue the third sector within capitalism, even as a transition to what we are calling a sustainable economy.

Many activists and scholars have long argued against eco-capitalism (Johnson, Gismondi, Goodman 2007). Most critics question whether we can work within a capitalist or market economy to change or reduce its impacts, phase out or replace certain practices by greener systems, and achieve job security and sustainability. Others argue for some sort of eco-socialism. Both seem to agree on the need to move towards what Bellamy Foster called a "conversion economy". His notion of a conversion economy discusses what Chatterton (2002) argues are issues of "strong sustainable development" that curtail growth, and emphasize reinforcing a local social economy in a globalizing world. Both Foster and Chatterton press us to consider a socially planned conversion of the economy that would delink it from fossil fuels over the next few decades, reorganize labour and capital to protect jobs, rearrange our uses of nature, conserve ecosystems and ecosystems services, and make a transition to alternative community designs, alternative energies, and the planned growth of local as well as global economies (Gismondi, Ikeda, Lock, 2005).

Traveling Concepts

Our analysis of these two literatures revealed considerable overlap in values, as well as in the social and political agendas of the social economy and the sustainability movements. Several key concepts appear to be either shared or to travel between the two fields. As can be seen from the preceding discussion, there are significant overlaps in ethos and orientation, values and definitions between the social economy and sustainability fields. Concepts such as democracy, cooperation, mutualism, decentralization, and progressive sense of place travel between the two bodies of literature. We are attracted to the "recognition that ideas or 'concepts' alter their meaning as they travel across fields of inquiry, and that these shifts in emphasis and meaning reveal new opportunities or ways of seeing" (see: Travelling Concepts in Feminist Pedagogy at <http://www.travellingconcepts.net/>). Bal (2002: 29) also explores the idea of traveling concepts:

Concepts are hardly ever used in exactly the same sense. Hence their usages can be debated and referred back to the different traditions and schools from which they emerged, thus allowing as assessment of the validity of their implications....Precisely because they travel between ordinary words and

condensed theories, concepts can trigger and facilitate reflection and debate on all levels...

The concept of democracy, for example, as discussed in the sustainability literature often refers to participatory decision making and an informed and engaged voting populace. Within the social economy literature, democracy is not just a value but an explicit operating principle that is embedded into organizational structures such as self-governance and equity. Decentralization and sensitivity to place are also concepts that travel between the two fields. From a sustainability perspective, decentralized economies based on the principle of proximity are designed to maximize ecological and economic health and benefits for communities. Decentralization from a social economy perspective refers to a capitalism with social purpose and more 'patient timelines', as well as community ownership and local control of resources. The concepts of co-operation and mutualism can also have subtle interpretational differences. Sustainability emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of systems and calls for co-operative approaches to problem solving and decision making within communities. Co-operation and mutualism are core operating principles within the social economy too and have been institutionalized in organizational structures and practices such as distributing of profits, voluntarism, and the solidarity economy.

The purpose of this discussion is not to dissect these concepts fully, but rather to identify their common usage and recognize their subtle differences. It is our intention that this understanding will help in the integration of the two fields for an integrated approach to the eco-social crisis. The next section of the paper explores further how these fields can learn from each other.

Bridging and Building

The social dimensions of sustainability have always had a strong presence in the literature, but seem to have failed to maintain prominence with the evolving eco-social crisis and the trend towards a more eco-efficient economy. A great deal of emphasis has been put on ecological modernization and the development of ecological efficiencies in an effort to find 'greener' ways of conducting ourselves in the context of current socio-economic organizational structures and political systems. Technological innovations (such as hybrid cars, bio-fuels and renewable energy production systems) play an important role in the transition towards a more sustainable society, and in some cases represent the integration of the ecological and economic imperatives of sustainable development. Dale (2001:7) observes that, "there is growing consensus that sustainable development implies the integration of the environment and the economy, but there is little consensus with regard to what this implies in terms of social dimensions". Gertler (2006:6) acknowledges the social gap as well,

While some problems are amenable to technical intervention, the barriers to effective resolution often turn out to be social, cultural, political, psychological, organizational and institutional. We lack arrangements that facilitate consensus building and collective action, and, therefore, seemingly cannot adequately address the preservation of the commons and the stewardship of the collective goods.

If we recognize the social nature of the ecological crisis, bringing the social challenges of sustainability to the forefront becomes crucial in the movement toward a more sustainable society. Dale (2005) argues that the social dimension is the most critical because it is the collective mobilization of people in communities worldwide that will bring about the magnitude of change required to realize sustainability.

We see the operational practices of co-operation, mutuality, and trust at play in coops, social enterprises, and non-profits as key components in the actualization of eco-social sustainability. The social economy provides an approach to socio-economic activity that is not only consistent with sustainability, but that can also provide alternative ownership and control models for animating the values of democracy, participation and co-operation, while engaging and involving people in the processes of local social change and community building (Cannan 2000). Furthermore, because the social economy works to mobilize people in the interests of social justice and the development of relationships based on reciprocity and co-operation, it plays an integral role in the process of community mobilization for the building of community capital.

The social economy can also serve to reinforce the notion that sustainability is a process and not a fixed outcome. As Cannan (2000: 371) points out, the social economy “tends to see some of its processes as goals – participation is both a means and end, for the participative society is one in which all can have a voice, where discrimination has been addressed, and where the capacities associated with effective participation continue to develop.”. Finally, the social economy can contribute to the transition to a more sustainable society by forging associative links and facilitating co-operation and democratic participation for local strategies to address environmental problems (Cannan 2000).

Gertler (2006: 11) also recognizes the value of engaging the social economy for sustainability and argues that co-operatives, as prominent organizations within the social economy, have the potential to act as sites for transformative change,

The financial organization and economic principles of co-operatives provide them with some room for maneuvering with respect to mobilizing capital and valorizing investments in more sustainable practices. The social relations in and around

co-operatives provide opportunities to address collective needs and concerns in ways that preserve the resilience and integrity of natural and human communities.

However, as Dobrohoczki (2006) argues, large coops do not *necessarily* promote democratic alternatives to global capitalism – some look and act more like corporations. Here it may be the application of sustainability principles that will challenge larger social economy organizations (with global ecological footprints, commodity chains, and financial flows) to constrain global profits and unsustainable practices with a new kind of local to local self-consciousness or solidarity.

The social economy is often discussed in terms of re-embedding social goals into the heart of economic life. In attempts to address the eco-social crisis, we argue that there is a need to re-embed the social economy within the context of sustainability, recognizing the theoretical linkages, common values and shared vision for a more socially and ecologically just society. As Pearce (2003:43) states, “it should be axiomatic that an enterprise which has social purpose will have a clear positive environmental policy, for to be environmentally irresponsible is to be socially irresponsible”.

Just as the eco-social crisis is a global phenomenon, so too are the social economy and sustainability movements. Neamtan (2002) points out that around the world, the social economy movement is becoming more dynamic and increasingly recognized, particularly in Europe, Latin America and Africa. The sustainability movement is also growing at a phenomenal rate. Paul Hawken (2008), in his most recent book *Blessed Unrest*, identifies hundreds of thousands of organizations around the world engaged in sustainability issues and working towards social and environmental justice.

Challenges to Bridging and Building

At this point, however, it is worth noting that there are several obstacles, or areas of ‘contrary-ness’ that present challenges to bridging the fields of sustainability and the social economy. First, each field has its own sense of immediacy and urgency around the issues that it chooses to address. For example, in the area of sustainability, the current focus on climate change and peak oil requires drastic and immediate reductions in fossil fuel consumption and CO2 emissions. This has resulted in an immediate emphasis on technological innovation and eco-efficiencies. Similarly, as the social economy often focuses on marginalized communities and the meeting of basic human needs, a common retort is heard when asked to incorporate sustainability into programming: ...it is too much to talk about whether or not the food is organic or the lightbulbs are efficient...people just need food and shelter!

In both of these fields there are also class issues that need to be addressed and that run contrary to one another. As mentioned, the social economy often deals with marginalized communities and

disadvantaged populations, whereas the sustainability movement is increasingly being perceived as an elitist movement with only the wealthy able to afford the luxuries of 'green' lifestyles, such as organic food and hybrid cars. Related to the sense of immediacy, there is a tension between idealism and realism in both fields, particularly where funding and resources are concerned. Finally, there is the contradiction of consumerism in both fields. To a certain extent, both sides are wondering if we can consume our way out of this problem and are turning to market-based approaches without necessarily questioning our current patterns of consumption.

Research Directions

As mentioned previously, this research is part of a larger research agenda within BALTA focusing on sustainability and the social economy in a rural context. The case study research is ongoing and across several sectors, three are listed here that explicitly exploring the cross-over sustainability and SE in the context of rural sustainability- shared equity land tenure, farmers markets, and the adaptive re-use of heritage buildings and other building infrastructures.

Controlling Land

We plan a general analysis of land banking, the control of lands, and shared equity land tenure models and its role in the social economy. We are starting this work with a series of sector-specific reviews on conservation land trusts, agricultural land tenure/trust issues, and land control as it relates to affordable housing issues and land and cluster-based social enterprise models.

Land banking and trusts in urban areas can cut costs of housing in half in some hot real estate markets. As well, low or no cost lands in municipalities can be targeted for affordable housing. For those who have concerns about the dramatic loss and degradation of habitat in cities or countryside, and the conversion of rural land into non-agricultural uses, land trusts and the use of conservation easements seem to offer some solutions. In the agricultural sector, some lands held privately have been protected using trusts and heritage farm easements on title to affirm their future in agriculture, protecting quality agricultural land against encroachment by the real estate market. Some of these agricultural trusts are also linked to sustainable agriculture practices and organic marketing initiatives. What are the tenure models? What are the organizational models of these groups? Can we identify specific efficiencies and models of effectiveness that at least can be borrowed? What are the capacity issues?

Farmer Markets as Social Economy Enterprises

This project contrasts case studies of farmers markets and the localization of food and goods production in the two provinces. The initial stage will compare previous work on the Vancouver Farmers Market and the Lower Mainland with Alberta cases. As the research team argues, "farmer's markets are important and increasingly prevalent sites of economic and social exchange in the development of local food

systems in Canada.” (Bogdan, 2008 unpublished.), and significant sites for the application of social economy-based organizational models and the movement towards community sustainability. Particular focus on leadership, and places of exchange – physical spaces (also linked to land banking and control of land), and increasing the ecological proximity of food-scapes.

Heritage Buildings and Sheltering the Social Economy

This particular research project started with the simple observation that many social economy organizations either operate out of, or own and manage, heritage buildings in urban and rural places. These heritage buildings provide a variety of functions from the provision of affordable housing, and safe-houses to artist co-operatives and studio space for cultural groups. Others house social and human services organizations, treatment centres, retail co-operatives, and office space for the non-profit sector.

In the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia the stories of these buildings reveal existing or potential alliances between social economy activists and social and heritage preservation entrepreneurs. As Canada moves towards a national municipal heritage program, we analyze the dialogue around heritage, social economy and the built environment – that is, the innovative and well-considered use or adaptive re-use of heritage architecture not only in terms of SE assets or the sustainability benefits of reuse and embedded energy, but also in terms of conserving a ‘built’ heritage of social democracy in the contemporary urban fabric - an architecture of the social commons, and social solidarity.

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