What is the social economy?
Contested ground or alternative lenses?
‘Social economy’ precedents

• Significantly wider use and familiarity internationally, particularly in Europe and Latin America
• 1947 – CIRIEC - International Centre of Research and Information on the Collective Economy
  • the public, social and co-operative economies
• Quebec – 1990s economic crisis and tripartite engagement/recognition Summit on the Social Economy and subsequent developments in Quebec
  • Le Chantier de l’économie sociale
  • Public policy and funding
  • Movement building and programs
Precedents

• Interest beyond Quebec in the Quebec model, but little adoption of the language or the realities – some pushback as well
• Little consciousness of a ‘social economy’ and membership therein, though other language and consciousness is widespread by now – non-profit sector, voluntary sector, third sector, civil society, etc.
The Social Economy Suite – a program of research with wider missions

- Martin Government’s Social Economy Initiative
- Civil society responses – e.g. B.C. Social Economy Roundtable
- Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) – Social Economy Suite
- Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERP) – National Hub and six regional nodes
  - 2005-2010 – Atlantic, Quebec, Southern Ontario, Saskatchewan. Manitoba/Northern Ontario
  - 2006-2011 – BALTA and SERNNoCa (Social Economy Research Network of Northern Canada)
The social economy and social enterprise
Conflated identities

• Emergence of social enterprise as a recognized model – using business models to achieve social goals
• To some degree a recognition of what already existed in some degree
• But very significant emergence and growth of a model
  • New approaches to achieving mandates and program goals
  • Reduced or constrained revenues versus ever increasing demands and new mandates
• Enterprising Non-Profits
• U.K. developments
The social economy and social enterprise
Conflated identities

• To a very significant degree, both internationally and in Canada, the emergence of social enterprise as a recognized approach and field around the same time as debates around clarifying conceptually ‘what is the social economy’ have made that a major part of the debate
The social economy – contested ground

• Many views and nuances of definition and conception, but two broad views in some degree of contention

• The broad view – the social economy as essentially equivalent to civil society, the non-profit and cooperative sectors, the ‘third sector’, the voluntary sector, etc. – simply bringing a somewhat economic perspective to an existing frame

• A somewhat narrower view – the social economy is that part of civil society which uses business practices to achieve social ends – i.e. social enterprise and co-operative enterprise and mutual societies
The broad view

The Market

State (Public Sector)
- state-owned or administered enterprises or services

Private Sector
- sole proprietorships
- partnerships
- joint stock companies

Social Economy (SE)
- Co-ops & credit unions
- Other forms of SE
  - Non-profits
  - Charities & foundations
  - Volunteer associations
  - Service associations
  - Social enterprises

reciprocity

equality

efficiency
The somewhat narrower view – John Pearse

Three Systems of the Economy

First System
Private Profit-Oriented

Market-driven Trading

Second System
PUBLIC SERVICE
Planned Provision

Planned Economy Non-trading

Third System
Self-help Mutual Social Purpose
In Quebec, ‘social economy enterprises’ are characterized as manifesting the following:

• aim to serve their members or the community as a whole, instead of striving for financial profit alone;
• are neither private businesses nor public agencies;
• establish a democratic decision-making process that involves the participation of users and workers;
• give priority to people and work rather than to capital in the distribution of revenue and surplus;
• are based on principles of participation, empowerment, and individual and collective responsibility.
BALTA initially (derived from Pearse)
Reciprocity combined with business

• SEs have a social purpose or purposes.
• SEs achieve the social purposes, at least in part, by engaging in trade in the marketplace.
• SEs do not distribute profits to individuals.
• SEs hold assets and wealth in trust for community benefit.
• SEs democratically involve members of its constituency in the governance of the organisation.
• SEs are independent organisations accountable to a defined constituency and to the wider community.
Does it matter?

Why choose one definition or another?
The CED – Social Economy Linkage

Environmental Stewardship

CED
Territorial Emphasis

Community Development

SOCIAL ECONOMY
Enterprise Focus

Strengthening Citizen Engagement & Social Interconnectedness

KEY ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS

KEY SOCIAL FUNCTIONS
A third perspective – the solidarity or social solidarity economy

The Solidarity Economy - Reframing the Agenda

- Market-driven Trading
- Planned Economy Non-trading

First System
- Private
- Profit Oriented

Second System
- Public Service
- Planned Provision

Third System
- Self-help
- Reciprocity
- Social Purpose

Solidarity Economy

Social Enterprises
Voluntary Organisations
Family Economy

BALTA
Mapping the Social Economy from the Ground Up: A Calgary Neighbourhood Study

• Structurally (e.g. re legal status), the sectors are reasonably distinct
• Functionally, the boundaries become blurrier
• In terms of ethos, values, broader goals and role in community, the boundaries blur further
• Experientially, ideologically and even recreationally, there exists the distinct sectors, but there also exists significant overlap and a class of entities at the nexus that blend characteristics and aims to some degree
A different way of seeing – Three lenses for viewing society

- Social economy as the third sector, civil society, etc.
- Social economy as the part of the third sector that uses business means to pursue social ends
- Social economy as an ethos, set of values, and approach to practice that can ‘socialize’ the mainstream economy and build a ‘new economy’ (the solidarity economy)
Adding a third leg to the economic and social
The SEE Change

• *Increasingly, a third pillar is being added to the blending of economic and social goals that has been the hallmark of the social economy, that of the ecological.*

• *Increasingly, social and ecological economists refer to a triple bottom line in defining the aims both of the sector and of aspirations for broader economic activity by all sectors of the economy.*

• *Sustainability and the social economy*

• *The SEE Change – relocalization in the face of climate change and peak oil*