

Business as Usual or Economic Innovation?: Work, Markets and Growth in Community and Social Enterprises

Jenny Cameron
Centre for Urban and Regional Studies,
University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW, 2308.

Jenny.Cameron@newcastle.edu.au

Please cite as:

Cameron, Jenny, (2010, forthcoming) “Business as Usual or Economic Innovation?: Work, Markets and Growth in Community and Social Enterprises”, *Third Sector Review*, Special Issue on Social Enterprise and Social Innovation, 16(2).

Abstract

In the Western world, social enterprises are increasingly seen by governments and non-government agencies as important for addressing social and economic exclusion, and providing much-needed services to disadvantaged people and places. But in order to fulfil expectations, social enterprises seem to be turning more and more to mainstream business practices thereby putting at risk the very characteristics that distinguish them from conventional businesses. In this paper, I ask whether social enterprises have to follow a business-as-usual approach or whether there are other economic practices that social enterprises can draw on to achieve their social (and environmental) ambitions. To do this, I examine two Australian initiatives that operate in economically novel ways, and I argue that these enterprises demonstrate the variety of largely untapped economic innovations that can be used to build viable social enterprises.

Introduction

In the Australian context, there is growing interest in the potential of social enterprises to address social and economic exclusion by providing training and jobs, and delivering services for marginalised groups. As a result, governments, non-government organisations, philanthropic trusts and others have developed a range of innovative programs to initiate and support social enterprises.ⁱ This strong interest in social enterprise mirrors what has happened in Europe where social enterprises are seen as having a central role to play in reintegrating the economically and socially marginalised back into mainstream economy and society.ⁱⁱ

Social enterprises have their roots in community enterprises, initiatives that developed through local community activism and engaged in business activities only as a means of achieving community goals, and addressing community needs and concerns (Pearce 2009; see also Smith 2009). These community enterprises generally developed as alternatives or in opposition to the state and private sector. However, the social enterprises that are currently on the policy and political table are very different. Writing in the UK context, practitioner and researcher John Pearce notes that

[w]hereas community enterprises are very much the agent of the people by whom and for whom they have been established, social enterprises can easily become and be seen as the tool of the state as they lobby for more of the procurement cake and are courted by all the major political parties as a means of delivering welfare and other services. (2009: 30)

Neil Smith similarly observes in the Australian context that social enterprises are being seen by senior politicians ‘as a social welfare intervention to “help” “disadvantaged” people and communities’ (2009: 1), and are therefore very different from locally owned and embedded community enterprises.

Along with the differences in ownership, scale and political impetus noted by Pearce (2009) and Smith (2009), an emerging area of difference is economic. In order to deliver the employment and training opportunities and social services that are now expected of them, social enterprises are more and more drawing on mainstream business practices. For example, the Australian government describes social enterprises as ‘using traditional business principles’ (Australian Government 2010: 1), and the various support agencies overwhelmingly characterise social enterprise as a form of business (e.g. Brookes in Hollosy 2010; Social Ventures Australia 2010) (see also Pearce 2009: 29-30). Indeed, Raymond Dart (2004) argues that social enterprises have gained legitimacy precisely because they have become more commercial and business-like.

It is important that employment and service focused social enterprises are economically viable. However, current policy and political interest in the business end of the social and community enterprise spectrum has perhaps overshadowed the economic innovations that have been developed—and continue to be developed—by community enterprises. This paper attends to some of these economic innovations with the aim of shedding light on the array of economic practices that are available to both community and social enterprises.

The paper examines two case study enterprises that are strongly associated with the community enterprise tradition of community activism and community development. Instead of a mainstream business focus on market transactions and paid labour, these two community enterprises are characterised by a diversity of labour arrangements and market relationships that enable them to enact the social, environmental and economic commitments they hold dear. Instead of a mainstream business focus on growth by expansion as a necessary dynamic

for generating surplus (or profit), these two community enterprises are innovating with very different approaches to growth that are shaped by their ethical commitments. Overall, I argue that the two case studies teach us that business as usual may not always be necessary for building viable community and social enterprises, and that community and social enterprises can innovate with diverse economic practices to reflect their ethical commitments.

Background

The two case study community enterprises are based on Community Supported Agriculture, an approach to farming that directly links producers and consumers. In its most basic (and some argue, pure) form, a small group of consumers connect to an individual farmer, and they pay the farmer in advance for shares of the farmer's produce. This provides the farmer with a guaranteed income and the finance they need early in the growing season; while consumer-subscribers benefit with fresh, seasonal produce. Through this arrangement, CSA makes the interrelationship between producer and consumer transparent: if the farmer has a bumper crop, subscribers gain with large shares of produce; but if crops fail or are damaged, subscribers also lose out. Once there are more producers and consumer-subscribers this basic (or pure) form of CSA has to be modified (as happens with the two enterprises that are the focus of this paper). Some might argue that these larger initiatives are more precisely a hybrid between CSA and Subscription (or Vegetable) Box Schemes.ⁱⁱⁱ However, in this paper I use the term CSA in a broad sense, and I identify the two case study enterprises schemes as CSA initiatives because they adhere to the CSA principle of linking producers and consumer-subscribers in ways that make the interconnections between producer and consumer, rural and urban, more transparent. In so doing, these CSA initiatives are examples of the community economy discussed by Gibson-Graham (2006: chapter 4) where people negotiate and explore their interdependencies, and develop economic arrangements that reflect these interdependencies and our economic-being-in-common.

The Beanstalk Organic Food is based in Newcastle, New South Wales. It was started in 2004 by a small group of friends who saw a need for affordable organic food in Newcastle. As such Beanstalk fits with John Pearce's characterisation of community enterprises as grassroots initiatives that arise from local actions. It aims to build direct and supportive relationships with farmers who are within the Newcastle-Hunter region, and to foster community involvement and community development. From these beginnings, Beanstalk currently has around 150 members. Each week it provides around 100 boxes of fruit and vegetables (and other produce) to members who come to a central pick-up spot where they pack their own box. Members order and pay a week in advance for their box (for more information see www.beanstalk.org.au).

Food Connect is based in Brisbane, Queensland. It was started in 2004 by a farmer, Robert Pekin, who had experience in smaller CSA initiatives but wanted to develop a large scale CSA enterprise and a local-regional food system that offered farmers a viable and dignified alternative to conventional markets. Like Beanstalk, Food Connect can be likened to John Pearce's characterisation of community enterprises. The founder describes himself as a farmer activist who wanted to 'completely reinvent ... the business of food', an ambition that comes from a deep concern with the detrimental impact of the prevailing food system on farmers, farm families, towns and communities, and environments. Food Connect currently has around 1,500 members who purchase around 900 boxes of produce each week. There are 80 city cousins who are spread across the city of Brisbane, and act as drop off points for the boxes of produce and pick up points for consumer-subscribers. Food Connect has 32 paid staff, and around 64 supplier farmers (with around 7 growing solely for Food Connect). To build this

local-regional food system, participating farmers are within a 5 hour radius of Brisbane. Members take out subscriptions ranging from four to fifty-two weeks (for more information see www.foodconnect.com.au).

The case study material drawn on in this paper comes from a small discussion workshop on food-based community enterprises run at the University of Newcastle in 2008 (see Cameron 2008 for more details). Additional interviews with two of the representatives who attended the workshop (Rhyall Gordon from Beanstalk and Robert Pekin from Food Connect) were conducted in 2009, as well as visits in 2008 and 2009 to Beanstalk and Food Connect (where there were informal conversations with members and staff).^{iv}

Economic Practices: Workers and Markets

Even though Beanstalk and Food Connect are committed to the CSA principle of connecting producers and consumers, they have organised their economic practices in different ways to reflect their ethical commitments. This is particularly evident in their labour arrangements and market relationships.

Labour Arrangements

Because of Beanstalk's commitment to community involvement and community development it has only one paid part-time coordinator. All other workers are "volunteers" who are "paid" in-kind with boxes of fruit and vegetables. For example, the volunteer who coordinates and orders the produce works around four hours each week and in return receives a weekly box of organic fruit and vegetables. The volunteers who spend about an hour each Tuesday either setting up the produce or packing it away at the end of the evening receive one box each month (as four hours work is valued at the rate of one box of produce). For Beanstalk, this form of "volunteering" (or, more precisely, in-kind work) is a way for members to contribute their skills, learn new skills, and connect with other members and farmers. It is also a way of highlighting to members that they are more than just consumers—they are an integral part of the enterprise, and without their contribution the enterprise could not operate. One of the other benefits of this economic practice is that Beanstalk is able to keep the cost of a weekly box of organic fruit and vegetables affordable (\$21 a box, or \$19 concession), and therefore accessible to people on low incomes. Beanstalk may not fit the prevailing model of a social enterprise that provides jobs or a job pathway for marginalised groups, but it does benefit people on low incomes as they can either do purposeful work that is paid in-kind with boxes of fruit and vegetables or they can indirectly benefit from other people's in-kind contribution by having access to affordable organic fruit and vegetables.

In Food Connect all thirty-two workers are paid an hourly wage, an arrangement that is probably necessary if the enterprise is to achieve its ambition of being a large scale CSA initiative. But just as the members in Beanstalk are more than just consumers, in Food Connect the workers are more than just employees, and Food Connect uses a range of labour practices that reflect this. For example, at the moment there are only two pay rates—\$17 or \$19 per hour. Workers who do the more mundane tasks of packing the boxes of fruit and vegetables, and delivering the boxes to the city cousins are on \$17 an hour. The higher rate is for workers with more responsibilities, such as the farmer coordinator, IT staff—and the CEO. For the \$17-an-hour worker (many who could be classified as marginalised) this wage system signals that their contribution to the enterprise is commensurate with the contribution of others (including the CEO). For the workers with more specialised skills and responsibilities, the wage level may be less than they could earn in the public or private

sector, but this serves as a way of attracting workers who share the Food Connect ethos, as the CEO describes:

We can attract really good people, so they can sort of say “Ok, you might be getting ten or fifteen thousand dollars less over there [with Food Connect], but I can manage on that and there’s a whole heap of benefits with that”. So it doesn’t lose our ability to attract brilliant people who want to come into this space. (Robert Pekin)

This ability to draw high quality and committed staff, even though the financial rewards may not be as great as other sectors, seems characteristic (Amin 2009a).

Food Connect also has an ethos of worker participation, and has experimented with various practices to refine how workers participate. Initially, all workers participated in all decisions; however, this proved unwieldy, particularly for an enterprise that was rapidly expanding and where decisions needed to be made quickly. Currently the practice is that all employees participate in three monthly (seasonal) reviews of Food Connect. Every three months workers also evaluate their coordinator, and the aim is not just to provide feedback to the coordinators but to make explicit the values that Food Connect want to see in their staff (for example, the survey form asks about how coordinators respond to a worker’s mistake, how coordinators respond to ideas and opinions from workers, how well the coordinator knows the area they are responsible for, how the coordinator manages a crisis).^v Currently, Food Connect is also in the process of becoming a not-for-profit company. However, unlike other companies only employees will be shareholders, and when they leave employees will sell their shares back to the Food Connect company.

These labour arrangements that reflect Food Connect’s participatory ethos will continue to develop as the enterprise consolidates and grows. For example, as part of its three-monthly reviews Food Connect is reassessing wages, with the possibility of moving to three levels (\$18 an hour for general workers; \$20 an hour for coordinators and \$22 or \$23 an hour for managers and CEO). In some community enterprises, such as the Mondragon group of cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain, increases in senior wages have been necessary to attract high quality workers (Gibson-Graham 2006: chapter 5). In Food Connect, the increase in senior wages reflects the growing national interest in Food Connect and the demands and responsibilities that this places on senior staff. At the same, the enterprise is committed to increasing the wages of general workers to keep the wage differential as small as possible.

Beanstalk and Food Connect exemplify how community enterprises can develop diverse labour arrangements to reflect ethical commitments. In the case of Beanstalk, commitment to community involvement and community development means that workers are primarily paid in-kind. As a result, the enterprise offers not paid but purposeful work that keeps the enterprise operating and keeps the price of organic fruit and vegetables affordable. In Food Connect, on the other hand, the goal of developing a large-scale CSA initiative means that all workers are paid, while a commitment to participation shapes the conditions of employment for workers (i.e., a small wage differential between different types of workers; worker involvement in decision-making; and a worker-shareholder company). These two enterprises illustrate some work innovations that are open to community and social enterprises, beyond the standard practice of simply targeting marginalised groups as paid employees. They demonstrate how community and social enterprises can be viable while still using a range of novel work practices that reflect their ethical commitments.

Market Relationships

As CSA initiatives, Beanstalk and Food Connect are innovating with market arrangements that are characterised by relationships of trust and connectedness between producer and consumer. In Beanstalk, members order and generally pay for their boxes of fruit and vegetables a week in advance. Once the produce coordinator knows how many boxes have been ordered, they contact farmers to see what is available and the price the farmer wants. The produce coordinator then orders based on what's available and what will give boxes a good range of fruit and vegetables. Farmers deliver the produce to Beanstalk each Tuesday afternoon and they are paid when they deliver. In Food Connect, members order and pay for their boxes anywhere from four to fifty-two weeks in advance. Food Connect can then project what they will need well in advance and so the farm coordinator can work with farmers to help plan what crops should be planted. At this point, as the farmer is planning the crop, they set the price that Food Connect will pay, and then once they deliver the produce to Food Connect they are paid that set price.

These market relationships that Beanstalk and Food Connect are building with farmers differ from the mainstream fruit and vegetable markets where farmers have to find a wholesaler who will take their produce; negotiate the price (which will vary depending on the quality of the produce and the quantity of the produce that is flowing into the markets); and are paid sixty to ninety days after delivery. By contrast, Beanstalk and Food Connect will take produce that has irregularities in size and shape, or some leaf or hail damage. In return, Beanstalk and Food Connect expect farmers to provide them with produce that consumers will accept. Beanstalk and Food Connect are committed to providing farmers with a fair price for their produce, and they ask farmers to set the price.^{vi} In return, Beanstalk and Food Connect expect that farmers will take into account the reduced costs of packing, sorting and wastage that come from being a CSA farmer. Where the quality seems too low or the cost too high, Beanstalk and Food Connect will talk with farmers to find out what might be going on, and to try and resolve the situation, rather than simply switching to other producers. Beanstalk's and Food Connect's commitment to farmers also carries through into the hard times. For example, when one farmer's fields were flooded and the crops lost, Beanstalk continued to pay the average weekly income he would have received. Likewise, Food Connect is currently establishing a scheme to set aside money to pay farmers who unavoidably lose crops. During these times of hardship, consumers may also lose out with a slightly smaller or less varied box of produce, but this relationship of mutuality between producer and consumer is the foundation of CSA. Beanstalk and Food Connect also encourage producers and consumers to connect through other sorts of relationships. For example, farmers sometimes stay on at Beanstalk on a Tuesday afternoon to chat to members; and members have participated in working bees on farms for activities such as planting garlic. Food Connect runs farm visits and farm stays so subscribers can meet farmers and see how they operate; and farmers sometimes visit city cousins to meet subscribers when they come to pick up their box.

All of these activities are redefining markets as something very different than an instrumental relationship in which the producer tries to extract the highest price for their product, while the purchaser tries for the lowest price. For Beanstalk and Food Connect, the market involves committed and long-term relationships that are fair to all involved—fair to farmers so they have secure markets that offer them a reasonable income; fair to members-subscribers so they reliably receive quality (and largely organic) produce; and fair to the environment by providing markets for farmers who farm in an environmentally responsible way (e.g., farming without harmful pesticides and herbicides, and using methods like crop rotation). For Food

Connect, a community enterprise that was specifically driven by farmer activism, developing a different type of market has been a central concern, as the founder and CEO explains:

[T]here was no market for farmers that treated them with dignity. So we have to create a new business model that gives farmers a market and gives them a sense of hope. (Robert Pekin)

In creating such a market for farmers, Food Connect and Beanstalk show how trust and fairness can be the principles that guide the practice.

Economic Dynamics: Expansionary Growth or Ethical Growth

While Beanstalk and Food Connect have labour arrangements and market relationships that distinguish them from a business as usual approach, they have also responded to change in a way that is governed by their ethical commitments. This is perhaps best exemplified through their approach to growth. Where a business-as-usual approach sees growth in terms of expansion, Beanstalk and Food Connect take a different tack.

In 2008, Beanstalk grew at a rapid rate, and there was a waiting list of people wanting to join. Most enterprises would celebrate this as a success; however, for Beanstalk this growth was unsettling, so much so that Beanstalk even considered a no-growth option, as one member of the Committee of Management described, “We have to decide how we want to grow, and even if it’s appropriate for us to grow” (Rhyall Gordon). One of the challenges of Beanstalk’s growth was sourcing enough produce from farmers, but perhaps an even bigger challenge was transmitting the values on which Beanstalk is founded, as two members of the Committee of Management discuss:

Rhyall Gordon: *[A]s we’ve grown we’ve had a lot of people come in that are just there to take advantage of the cheap food and aren’t volunteering so it’s that matter of “Do we reward the volunteers more? Do we have more paid employees?”, that type of thing. And promoting the whole aspect of community development, which is very important to us, and how that fits.*

Kristina Gluschke: *Sometimes I think that the challenge is that people don’t want to understand that it’s a community enterprise project. They would rather that it was a business and then they wouldn’t have to contribute anything more than money.*

These periods of growth and change present pivotal moments for community enterprises, with ethical foundations having to be reviewed and reconsidered. For Beanstalk, options ranged from no-growth to adopting mainstream business practices by expanding paid employment to service the growing market. For the moment, Beanstalk has decided to maintain their commitment to volunteering as a form of community development, and to try to instill these values in new members, as one member of the Committee of Management explains, ‘We never turn people away because they say they just want cheap organic food. It’s a role we see ourselves as fulfilling about educational awareness’ (Rhyall Gordon). To make the values of Beanstalk more explicit, Beanstalk is reconsidering its annual membership. At the moment, annual membership is \$40 and \$25 (concession), and there is a proposal that volunteers also be eligible for concession membership.

Food Connect has also recently experienced rapid growth. Certainly there has been growth in the number of subscribers, but there has also been growth in terms of interest from groups in other parts of Australia who want to use the Food Connect “model”. As a result Food Connect has developed a national growth strategy based on the idea of replication. Each new Food Connect is autonomous so they can adapt and respond to their regional context. But each also signs an Agreement of Principles and commits to monthly Skype conversations with Food

Connect Brisbane so that the Food Connect principles and values continue to inform how each develops. Through this replication approach Food Connects have started in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, and, shortly, Hobart.^{vii}

The second approach to growth that Food Connect (Brisbane) uses is “growing by deepening”. This primarily means that Food Connect works with farmers to strengthen—or deepen—farming practices. One of the growing by deepening initiatives is Participatory Farmer Assessment (PFA). In this scheme, farmers jointly evaluate their own and each other’s farms, with the aim of encouraging and assisting each other to move along the continuum from a C rated farm (farms that are transitioning to meet Food Connect’s standards) to an AA rating (exemplary farms). The use of organic farming methods is a component of the assessment, but farmers are also evaluated on other features including energy use, water use and use of practices to encourage biodiversity (such as leaving or establishing wildlife corridors). So one overarching aim is to support and encourage farmers to develop and maintain ecologically responsible agricultural systems. At Food Connect this support and encouragement is economic (through the CSA “market”) and also personal, as the CEO explains:

***Robert Pekin:** Restoring the ecological biodiversity back into our farming landscapes is all for nought unless we can find a marketplace that actually separates out good farmers that says, “Here’s a market that is going to respect the work that is done by them” Otherwise it’s all for nought.*

***Jenny Cameron:** But also, here’s a market that enables farmers to produce in a way that is much more environmentally sustainable.*

***Robert Pekin:** That’s right and they get recognised and acknowledged for it, and that encourages them to do more of it and encourages more farmers to do more of it. Whereas if it’s just government saying “You have to do this and we’re going to provide some money for it”, there’s no real incentive. The real incentive is a farmer being rung up or having contact with someone that says “I love what you’re doing to your land. I love the fact that you’ve got that nature strip there, and you preserve this, and you’ve got that happening over there and you’re doing it all without chemicals”.*

A second growing by deepening initiative is the New Farmers Pathway, a scheme to support new and particularly younger farmers. As part of the initiative Food Connect is in the process of establishing a Land Trust that will purchase farmland to lease to new farmers. These growing by deepening initiatives recognise that farming is the foundation not just of Food Connect but of society more generally, and that the foundation of farming is the environment. This involves a whole new vision of an enterprise and its development pathway. Where most businesses have a vision of growth as involving an expansionary dynamic, Food Connect articulates a very different economic dynamic, one that acknowledges the interdependencies and interconnections that exist between people (in this case, farm producers and urban consumers) and between people and the environment (in this case, producers and consumers, and agricultural and natural environments). In Food Connect’s vision a business “grows”—or deepens—by attending to and caring for these interconnections.

Both Beanstalk and Food Connect have an approach to growth that is governed by their ethical commitments. Faced with the challenge of managing rapid growth in membership, Beanstalk considered options that include not growing (by limiting membership); using the growth to fund more paid positions and reducing the use of volunteers; or continuing with their current practice of using primarily volunteer workers. The first two options would have meant a shift in ethical commitments (not growing would mean limiting the number of people

who can access to affordable organic fruit and vegetables, and switching to paid work would mean moving away from the community development role). Whereas the third option, and the option that Beanstalk decided on, meant staying with their founding ethical commitment. Likewise, in Food Connect ethical commitments have guided the approach to growth. Instead of expansion, Food Connect uses a replication approach to help other groups develop their own version of Food Connect, and growing by deepening has meant that Food Connect has developed strategies to strengthen the very things on which it depends (and which are interdependent)—farmers and consumers-subscribers, and agricultural and natural environments.

Policy Implications

Based on recent empirical research into social enterprises in Bristol in the UK, the geographer Ash Amin concludes that the current policy focus on social enterprises as a pathway into formal paid employment is ‘unrealistic’ (2009a: 46, see also Hudson 2009, Burkett 2010). Instead he found that the real value of social enterprises is their difference from the private and public sectors:

Repeatedly, leaders, employees and volunteers spoke of an ethic of care and social participation that underpinned the ventures they were involved in or that motivated them to be involved in the social economy; an ethic of care that they considered to be lacking or secondary in the private and public sectors.
(2009: 46-7)

If, as Amin claims, social enterprises have ‘values and motivations [that] are neither reducible to, nor commensurate with, those that prevail in the market economy or in bureaucratic organisations’ (2009a: 47, see also Gibson-Graham and Cameron 2007: 23-4), then it is important that social enterprises are able to work in their distinctive way. With policy and political interest currently focussed on the business end of the community and social enterprise spectrum, one risk is that mainstream business practices are being overvalued, thereby potentially undermining other features that may well be the very strength of community and social enterprises (for example, the ethic of care and social participation that Amin refers to).

The findings of research such as Amin’s and the two case studies presented in this paper suggest that social enterprise policies and programs may need to be reconsidered in order for these enterprises to maintain their distinctive strengths. If the real strength of community and social enterprises is to provide a third way—a legitimate alternative to the private and public sectors that is distinguished by commitments such as the ethic of care and participation that Amin identifies, or the community development focus of Beanstalk, or the nurturing of interdependencies between people, and people and environments, that characterises Food Connect—then start-up and ongoing support could target more diverse economic practices than those that are currently on the policy radar.

In terms of start-up, Neil Smith (2009) identifies that community workers are critical for working with local groups to help them develop appropriate enterprise (and other) responses to issues of concern (see also Cameron and Gibson 2005, Pearce 2009: 29). Such community workers need to be able to work in open-ended ways with groups, and not be constrained by having to deliver specific programs or generate specific and pre-determined outcomes (such as paid employment outcomes). Along with the sort of business-oriented start-up advice that is currently being made available for social enterprises (e.g. Social Ventures Australia 2010), there is room for advice related to the unique features of community and social enterprises, e.g. the diversity of innovative economic practices, the matching of ethics and economics and

participatory decision-making. Along with the mainstream business mentors that are currently available to advise start-up social enterprises (through schemes such as those currently offered by the Social Enterprise Hubs run through Social Ventures Australia), there is scope for mentoring and placements with more established community and social enterprises to help make explicit and reproduce the distinctive features of community and social enterprises. Community and social enterprises can sometimes access grant funding to help with start-up, but there is also scope for other forms of resourcing. For example, in the Latrobe Valley (Victoria), Santa's Workshop was able to start (and continue) without grant funding because Latrobe City Council provided access to a disused pre-school building, and covered insurance and electricity (and ten years on, this arrangement enables the enterprise to operate throughout the year) (see Cameron and Gibson 2005). This enterprise was one outcome of a local council and University partnership and points to the role that academic institutions can play. Indeed, in Brazil, the national government funds university based incubators to provide not just technical and scientific support for community and social enterprises but training 'for a different ideal' (Lechat 2009: 164).

In terms of ongoing operations, there could be community and social enterprise advisory centres that provide training that relates to the distinctive strengths of community and social enterprises. Along with the topics identified in the previous paragraph, there could be training in topics such as "growing" ethically, and matching legal entity with ethical commitment. Such advisory centres could also help broker the sorts of non-cash resources that community and social enterprises need as they grow and develop. For example, Beanstalk currently has use of a building in the central business district of Newcastle provided through the Renew Newcastle initiative (which itself is run by a not for profit company, see <http://renewnewcastle.org/about>). Food Connect, for example, could receive support in terms of access to land in order to establish its Land Trust as part of the New Farmers Pathway program. Community and social enterprise advisory centres could also help develop peer-to-peer networks so community and social enterprises could learn from each other about the ways they are innovating with their economic, legal and operational arrangements, and adapting these to reflect their ethical commitments (see also Lechat 2009). Academics could lend their research expertise to such networks to help articulate the various "models" of development that community and social enterprises are formulating and practicing (see, for example, Cameron 2009, Community Economies Collective and Gibson 2009, Graham and Cornwell 2009). Out of such networks of community and social enterprises and academic and other supporters there is an opportunity to grow a next level organisation to represent and advocate on behalf of community and social enterprises (along the lines of the Chantier de l'économie sociale in Quebec (see Mendell 2009)).

Conclusion

Community enterprises like Beanstalk and Food Connect challenge a business-as-usual approach. They demonstrate the economic diversity and economic innovation that is possible and viable: how work is not just about a pay check at the end of the week, but can involve in-kind work and participatory work practices; how markets are not just about negotiations between faceless buyers and sellers, but can foster long-term relationships based on trust and governed by the desire to make markets serve social and environmental goals; how growth is not just about getting bigger nor necessarily better, but can be rethought and redefined in novel ways in light of ethical commitments. From such community enterprises, a more enlarged policy agenda emerges, an agenda that would help strengthen the distinctive contribution of community and social enterprises and contribute to building more ethical economies.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Rhyall Gordon and other Beanstalk members, and Robert Pekin and other Food Connect staff for their time and input. Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham (aka J.K. Gibson-Graham) provided invaluable comments on a final version of this paper, as did two anonymous reviewers. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the Institute of Australia Geographers Annual Conference in September 2009.

References

- Amin, A. (2009a) Extraordinarily Ordinary: Working in the Social Economy. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 5(1): 30-49
- Amin, A. (ed.) (2009b) *The Social Economy: International Perspectives on Economic Solidarity*, London: Zed
- Australian Government (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) (2010) *Supporting Social Enterprise*, website, <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Initiatives/Pages/SupSocEnterprise.aspx>, viewed 15 July 2010
- Burkett, I. (2010) Sustainable Social Enterprise: What does this Really Mean? Opinion Piece, Social Traders, <http://www.socialtraders.com.au/sites/www.socialtraders.com.au/files/Sustainable%20Social%20Enterprise%20-%20Ingrid%20Burkett.pdf>, viewed 17 February 2010
- Cameron, J. (with J. Gerrard) (2008) Thinking and Practising Values: Community Enterprises in the Food Sector. Report on Community Enterprises in the Food Sector Workshop, 29 August 2008. Newcastle: Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, The University of Newcastle, <http://www.communityeconomies.org/papers/comecon/jcameron01.pdf>, viewed 21 February 2009
- Cameron, J. (2009) Experimenting with Economic Possibilities: Ethical Economic Decision-Making in Two Australian Community Enterprises. In A. Amin (ed.) 92-115
- Cameron, J. and Gibson, K. (2005) Alternative Pathways to Community and Economic Development: The Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project. *Geographical Research*, 43(3): 274-285
- Community Economies Collective and Gibson, K. (2009) Building Community-Based Social Enterprises in the Philippines: Diverse Development Pathways. in A. Amin (ed.) 116-138
- Dart, R. (2004) The Legitimacy of Social Enterprise. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 14(4): 411-24
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2006) *A Postcapitalist Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Gibson-Graham, J.K. and Cameron, J. (2007) Community Enterprises: Imagining and Enacting Alternatives to Capitalism. *Social Alternatives*, 26(1): 20-5
- Graham, J. and Cornwell, J. (2009) Building Community Economies in Massachusetts: An Emerging Model of Economic Development? In A. Amin (ed.) 37-65
- Hollosy, E. (2010) When Business Equals Community Benefit. *Third Sector*, April, http://thirdsectormagazine.com.au/news/when_business_equals_community_benefit/040430/, viewed 15 July 2010
- Hudson, R. (2009) Life of the Edge: Navigating the Competitive Tensions between the 'Social' and the 'Economic' in the Social Economy and its Relations to the Mainstream. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 9: 493-510
- Lechat, N. (2009) Organizing for the Solidarity Economy in South Brazil. In A. Amin (ed.) 159-175
- Mendell, M. (2009) The Three Pillars of the Social Economy: The Quebec Experience. In A. Amin (ed.) 176-207
- Pearce, J. (2009) Social Economy: Engaging as a Third System? In A. Amin (ed.) 22-38
- Kernot, C. (2009) 'Social Enterprise: A Powerful Path to Social Inclusion', Sydney: Centre for Social Impact, University of New South Wales, http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Documents/SocialEnterprise_PowerfulPath.pdf, viewed 17 February 2010
- Smith, N. (2009) Community Enterprise or Social Enterprise—What's in a Name? Opinion Piece, Social Traders, <http://www.socialtraders.com.au/sites/www.socialtraders.com.au/files/What%27s%20in%20a%20name%20-%20Neil%20Smith.pdf>, viewed 17 February 2010
- Social Ventures Australia (in conjunction with Parramatta City Council) (2010) *Putting the Pieces Together: A Business Planning Guide for Social Enterprises*, SVA, Sydney, http://www.parracity.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/67939/BusinessPlanningGuideForSocialEnterprise.pdf, viewed 1 July 2010
- Stephens, U. (Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion) (2010) Government Invests Further in Social Enterprise, media release, Parliament House, Canberra, 13 July, http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Stephens/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100713_150601.aspx, viewed 15 July 2010

Endnotes

ⁱ For example, governments and non-government organisations have been running programs to facilitate the formation of social enterprises (e.g. the Community Enterprise Strategy of the Department for Victorian Communities and the Community Enterprise Development Initiative of the Brotherhood of St Laurence). Innovative partnerships have developed between a range of entities to fund various initiatives to assist social enterprises (e.g. the Social Traders initiative is funded through a government and foundation partnership; Social Enterprise Hubs Australia is the result of government, private corporation and non-profit organisation partnerships; Social Ventures Australia and the School for Social Entrepreneurs are non-profit organisations funded by non-profit and philanthropic organisations). As a form of further support, the Commonwealth government has just announced two new social enterprise initiatives—the Social Enterprise Development and Investment Fund and the Professional Partnership Project (Stephens 2010).

ⁱⁱ Much current thinking about social enterprises in Australia draws from European, particularly UK, experience (e.g. Kernot 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ One of the enterprises, Food Connect, describes itself as a hybrid CSA/Subscription Box Scheme.

^{iv} A draft of the paper was sent to Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk) and Robert Pekin (Food Connect), and changes were made in response to their feedback.

^v The questions in the evaluation survey itself were developed through a participatory process.

^{vi} Here is one example of how the set price works. In November 2009, a farmer was delivering zucchinis to Food Connect for the set price of \$25 a box. This was also the price he was achieving at the markets, but he expected that once more zucchinis came onto the market in a few weeks market prices would drop to around \$10 a box (but for his Food Connect zucchinis he would still receive the set price of \$25 a box). Around the same time another farmer was selling part of his avocado crop to the markets and the market price kept falling until he was sent a bill for the dumping of his avocados.

^{vii} A very recent development for Food Connect Brisbane has been that one of its farmers has set up his own CSA in the regional centre where he is located. Where most businesses would try to counter this “competition”, Food Connect has been delighted and has responded by “handing over” the subscribers in this town to the break-away farmer.