



International Comparative Social Enterprise Models

## Social Enterprise in Australia: Concepts and Classifications

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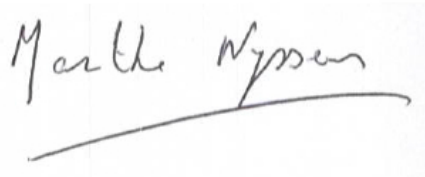
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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a first attempt to document the context and nature of social enterprise models in Australia as part of the International Comparative Social Enterprise Models (ICSEM) project. The paper has been prepared by the authors, with input from a number of key informants (see acknowledgements) with historical knowledge of social enterprise developments in Australia. The following analysis thus represents a joint effort to document the evolution of social enterprise in this country.

In presenting this analysis, we acknowledge the limitations of constructing a universally true account of social enterprises in Australia. As Teasdale (2012) observes, “social enterprise” is a fluid and contested concept, constructed in and through a diversity of discourses by different actors. While we seek to explicate dominant discourses of social enterprises in Australia in the proceeding discussion, we recognise that, in doing so, we are participating in the discursive construction of the field we hope to describe.

## PART A: UNDERSTANDING CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

### 1. Definitions and use of terminology

The terms “social enterprise” and “community enterprise” have been used in Australia since the late 1970s. With a focus on work integration and worker empowerment, early iterations of the community enterprise movement looked particularly to cooperative and mutual forms of organising. From the late 1980s, community enterprise was also being explored as a mechanism by which non-profit organisations could fulfil their missions and gain a greater degree of financial independence from governments (see Bullen et al. 1997). Commentators on this early work (Bullen et al. 1997) noted a lack of shared language to describe practice amongst movement actors. These commentators sought to define community enterprise as activity that:

- *recognises itself as enterprising;*
- *has social benefit as a primary purpose of the parent body;*
- *produces goods and/or service;*
- *generates revenue from this activity;*
- *does not distribute profits to shareholders.* (Bullen et al. 1997)

The concepts of “social enterprise” and “social entrepreneurship” were first popularised in Australia by civil society actors, who formed the Social Entrepreneurs’ Network (SEN) in 1999.

There is no singly agreed definition of social enterprise in Australia. An early definition of social enterprise published in Australia by a SEN partner organisation defined social enterprise as:

*...a means by which people come together and use market-based ventures to achieve agreed social ends. It is characterised by creativity, entrepreneurship, and a focus on community rather than individual profit. It is a creative endeavour that results in social, financial, service, educational, employment, or other community benefits.*

(Talbot et al. 2002: 2)

A more recent definition, which has been adopted by an informal national network of intermediary organisations, the Social Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Enterprise (SIEE) Alliance, identifies social enterprise as having the following characteristics:

- they are driven by an economic, social, cultural or environmental mission for public benefit;
- they place people at the centre of their business;
- they trade profitably to fulfil their mission;
- they reinvest profits or surpluses in the fulfilment of their mission;
- they engage a wide group of stakeholders in governance and decision-making; and
- they operate with transparency (SIEE Alliance 2014).

Definitions of social enterprise in Australian public policy documents vary. The definition utilised in the most substantial public policy investments to date is derived from the 2010 Finding Australia's Social Enterprise Sector (FASES) study, in which social enterprises were defined as organisations that:

- are led by an economic, social, cultural, or environmental mission consistent with a public or community benefit;
- trade to fulfil their mission;
- derive a substantial portion of their income from trade; and
- reinvest the majority of their profit/surplus in the fulfilment of their mission (Barraket et al. 2010).

This definition was developed inductively through a national mapping study led by university researchers in partnership with social enterprise intermediary organisation, Social Traders. Subsequent definitions of social enterprise emerged through policy research in different Australian states, reflecting context-specific understandings of the field in different jurisdictions. The Tasmanian Social Enterprise Study (Eversole and Eastley 2011), for instance, used a simplified variant of this definition, defining social enterprises as organisations with a mission to generate social and community benefit using trading activities to fulfil that mission; while data were collected on trade-based earnings, these were not included in the definition. The Tasmanian study also sought to identify the extent to which organisations were self-identifying with the label "social enterprise". In scholarly research, early Australian definitions of social—or community—enterprise stressed a broad definition of social enterprise, including organisations trading through non-market exchange (see Gibson-Graham and Cameron 2007; Cameron and Gibson 2005). Australian researchers also made an early leading contribution to conceptualising the process of social entrepreneurship and its implications for policy and practice in the scholarly literature (see Sullivan Mort et al. 2003). This conceptualisation stressed the multi-dimensional nature of social entrepreneurship and constructed its key characteristics as being innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking (Sullivan Mort et al. 2003).

Due in part to cultural expectations regarding the role of government to provide social services (Cook et al. 2003), Australians engaged rather slowly with the concept of social enterprise. Scholarly commentary in this domain appeared early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century largely as a functional analysis (Brown 2001; Stewart-Weeks 2001), and social enterprise continues to be a rather opaque and ambiguous concept. While there is some recognition that social entrepreneurship and social enterprise differ conceptually and as a practice, Douglas and Grant (2014) suggest there is little attempt to distinguish between the two terms in research and practice in the Oceania region. Writing in an Australian context, Weerawardena and Sullivan Mort (2006), for

example, refer to social entrepreneurship without distinguishing the concept from social enterprise. Case research in Australia has also suggested that practitioners tend not to distinguish between a social enterprise and a community benefit non-profit organisation (Cameron 2010). Thus, the terminology of social enterprise and its use in Australia seem less settled than in some other jurisdictions—particularly in those countries where social enterprise plays a more explicitly recognised role in governmental service reform (Teasdale 2012; Mason 2012) and in collective responses to social disadvantage (Borzaga and Defourny 2001; Nyssens 2006).

## 2. Political economy and institutional context(s)

In this section, we consider the institutional frameworks that have shaped social enterprise practice in Australia, using a neoinstitutional lens. For the purposes of this paper, we consider institutions—in terms of sociological conceptions of neoinstitutionalism (see DiMaggio and Powell 1983)—to be the normative frames and related isomorphic pressures through which organisational fields stabilise and homogenise. We focus here particularly on the institutional influences inscribed through public policy and regulation, and civil society, including philanthropy. This focus is based on our understanding of key institutional factors that have shaped the Australian social enterprise field to date.

Australia has a federated political system involving three levels of government: federal; state; and local. With a liberal model of civil society (Salamon and Sokolowski 2010), Australia's nonprofit sector has historically played a relatively significant role in social support and service delivery. The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit project also suggests that, in relative terms, Australia's non-profit sector is highly enterprising in terms of generating revenue via commercial means, although it has dropped from second to fifth place internationally on this indicator in recent years (Salamon et al. 2013).

Australia has a reasonably strong cultural history of cooperative and mutual models of doing business, particularly in support of the country's historically agricultural economy (Lewis 2006), and in provision of financial, housing and other services during the post-war era (Lyons 2001). The country's large land mass, combined with a relatively small population, has also driven community and cooperative ownership of essential services in some rural and remote communities. However, Australia's cultural experience of both cooperative and mutual forms of business association was eroded by a sustained period of demutualisation in the 1980s and 1990s which was, in part, enabled by a growing neoliberal political agenda during this period (see Lyons 2001). This agenda informed deregulation of financial and other markets, and supported the growth of international markets and the mobility of capital through the floating of the Australian dollar, which stimulated competitive entry into domestic markets and provided new incentives for profit maximisation through private for-profit business forms.

### *Federal and state public policies*

Relatively early adopters of New Public Management (Hood 1995) and subsequent developments in New Public Governance (Osborne 2006), Australian governments have experience in working with both private sector and civil society actors using a range of grant, contractual and partnership instruments. Contractual or market models of governance (Considine 2001) produced new conditions for government-civil society relations, which have been variously characterised as creating productive market opportunities for those parts of the

social economy<sup>1</sup> that trade (cf. Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Eikenberry 2009) or as eroding relations of trust and associated social capital within civil society by creating competitive tensions between organisations (Carmel and Harlock 2008).

While there is a range of ways in which governments routinely interact with the social economy through service purchasing, explicit public sector interest in advancing the social economy in general and social enterprise in particular in Australia has been largely characterised by marginal investment and small-scale policy developments (Lyons and Passey 2006; Barraket 2008). Public policy with an explicit focus on supporting social enterprise growth was initiated first by the Victorian state government in 2004, with the establishment of an A\$4 million Volunteering and Community Enterprise Strategy (Barraket 2008). The strategy was initiated by the then Deputy Premier of Victoria, partly as a result of his exposure to developments in social entrepreneurship in the UK, and was consistent with Third Way policy logics (see Giddens 2003) that emphasised the importance of “people and place” as the site of social policy interventions (Reddel 2004). The Victorian Government’s 2004 strategy positioned social enterprise as a contributor to strengthening geographic communities, with a particular focus on work integration—specifically, through intermediate labour market development. It resourced three intermediary organisations via a competitive tender process to provide capacity building support for social enterprise, particularly in areas experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. While this initial investment produced mixed outcomes, it was successful in establishing symbolic legitimacy of the role of intermediaries in supporting social enterprise development, leading to further government and philanthropic investment in the establishment of a social enterprise development company, Social Traders, in 2008.

Subsequent to developments in Victoria and those at the federal level—discussed below—a number of state governments have developed policy support for social enterprise. In Tasmania, social inclusion and economic development arms of the state government sponsored a state-wide baseline study of social enterprise activity in 2011. That year, the Tasmanian government also established a Social Enterprise Loan Fund based on the recommendations of an earlier report by the Social Inclusion Commissioner (Adams 2009). The publication of the *Tasmanian Social Enterprise Study* (Eversole and Eastley 2011) was followed by a series of multi-stakeholder activities and events to profile and support Tasmanian social enterprises (Eversole 2013). The Tasmanian state government has continued to be involved in support activities and hosts the Tasmanian Social Enterprise Network (TSEN), established in 2012. In 2010, the Western Australian government announced an A\$10 million social enterprise fund to increase the number, effectiveness and efficiency of social enterprises in that state. A consortium of social enterprise and community service intermediaries was commissioned as part of the fund establishment to support capability development in the field to take up the opportunities presented by the fund. Since the mid-2000s, the Queensland government has initiated a number of pilots involving the development of work integration social enterprises and social firms, and providing developmental support through social enterprise hubs delivered by Social Ventures Australia. The South Australian government, influenced in part by the work of 2007-2008 “Adelaide Thinker in Residence”,<sup>2</sup> Geoff Mulgan, has supported social enterprise development indirectly through its social innovation policy framework. This included the establishment of The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) in 2009. Shaped by

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<sup>1</sup> “Social economy” is utilized in Australia to describe the third sector, or the combined activity of the not-for-profit, mutual and cooperative sectors (Lyons 2001).

<sup>2</sup> “Thinkers in Residence” was a program in Adelaide (South Australia) that brought leaders in their fields to work with the South Australian community and government in developing new ideas and approaches to problem solving, and to promote South Australia.

conceptual and design thinking arising from the social innovation movement, TACSI's early focus has been principally on people-centred and co-designed services rather than social enterprise models.

The government of New South Wales (NSW)—the most populous state in Australia and usually a very active state in terms of policy development—has provided relatively little direct support for social enterprise development. Its direct financing activity to date has been the allocation of grant funding to a small number of early-stage social enterprises, and to support the establishment of the intermediary organization, Social Enterprises Sydney over three years and in two localities (Western Sydney and the Central Coast region), through its Community Builders program (1999-2014) and earlier Area Assistance Scheme. Each of these approaches has positioned social enterprise within the domain of “people and place”-based policy interventions, consistent with the Victorian experience discussed above. Through its Department of Family & Community Services and Department of Housing, the NSW government was also involved in the development of “*Social Procurement in NSW: A guide to achieving social value through public sector procurement*” (Newman and Burkett nd). This project was delivered by an unincorporated collaboration of 14 local, state (NSW) and federal government representatives to assist with developing markets for social enterprises. The NSW government was also the first in Australia, and an early leader globally, to trial a “social benefit bond” (SBB) as an innovative public service financing instrument, in which social enterprises play a central delivery role. The contract for the first SBB was signed in March 2013, a second was signed in June 2013, and a third was planned but did not go ahead (NSW Government nd).

At the federal government level, early interest in social enterprise as a mechanism for community self-help and a challenge to traditions of welfare dependence was sparked in the early 2000s within the conservative Howard Government as a result of advocacy by Indigenous leaders, Noel Pearson and Richie Ah Mat (Hughes 2003). This led to the establishment of a number of pilot initiatives within the Cape York Peninsula, in northern Queensland, that incorporated the establishment of social enterprises to enable Indigenous community self-reliance in that locale. While these early initiatives commanded substantial media attention and developed significant symbolic currency in challenging traditional ideological conventions of welfare delivery (Hughes 2003), formal policy support did not extend beyond pilots, and social enterprise did not substantially penetrate the public policy lexicon at this time.

Federal government support for social enterprise was rendered explicit in public policy frameworks in 2007, with the creation of a Social Inclusion portfolio and the subsequent establishment of the Jobs Fund under the Labour Rudd-Gillard governments. Through the structuring of government departments and ministerial responsibilities, social enterprise was positioned squarely by this government within a social welfare domain and linked to the reform of the non-profit sector. Part of the government's stimulus response to the 2008 global financial crisis, the Jobs Fund was established to stimulate employment for people disadvantaged in the labour market, with social enterprise prioritised as a vehicle for meeting these objectives. Similarly to early state government policy development, the dominant focus of early federal government policy was thus on social enterprise as a mechanism for work integration. Subsequent to this early development, the Rudd-Gillard federal government developed a wider conceptualisation of social enterprise, with the establishment of the Social Enterprise Development and Investment Funds (SEDIF). Through SEDIF, the Rudd Labour government provided co-investment of A\$ 20 million on the condition of fund matching to support business development of eligible social enterprises. The short-term aims of SEDIF were to provide direct funds support for social enterprise development, while the longer-term goals were to establish infrastructure for wider impact investing in Australia. SEDIF funds were granted to three fund



managers—Foresters Community Finance, Social Enterprise Finance Australia and Social Ventures Australia—based on a competitive tender process. The tender process for SEDIF used the broad definition of social enterprise developed through the FASES study.

At the local government level, there was some early governmental leadership in supporting social enterprise development through investment in capacity building (for example, by the Parramatta City Council) and developing markets for social enterprise through social procurement (for example, by the Brisbane and Parramatta City Councils) (see Barraket and Weissman 2009).

Beyond explicit investment in social enterprise development, the nature and scope of regulation is another policy lever that substantially affects the shape of the social economy. Australia has a mixed economy of social enterprise, incorporated under a variety of legal forms that are regulated by different levels of government. Federalism poses a significant challenge to Australian social enterprises that wish to use legal cooperative structures, as capitalisation, trading and registration limits have differed from one state to another, but this problem is currently being addressed by national legislation. More often than not, the federal government's regulatory role in relation to social enterprise is one of controlling rather than enabling. This has been recently demonstrated in relation to the enabling of new sources of finance for social enterprise as illustrated by federal government's recent legislative reform permitting crowd-sourced equity funding in Australia, including through the use of online platforms. The legislation is more restrictive than many stakeholders had wished for, and effectively mandates a strong regulatory "quid pro quo" including the mandatory adoption of a particular legal form (an "exempt public company") that would be unlikely to be used otherwise. As a result, it is currently perceived, as was feared (Morgan et al. 2013), to be unlikely to help foster the growth of cause-related business start-ups and local investments into small/green business and sustainable local economy initiatives (see <http://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2016/03/crowdfunding-bill-falls-short/>).

As suggested in the summary of public policy experience above, intermediaries—including social enterprise development organisations and social finance brokers—have played a substantial role in operationalizing public policy support for social enterprise in Australia, as well as in advocating for this support. With regard to government support for work integration social enterprise models specifically, several large welfare agencies—particularly Mission Australia and the Brotherhood of St Laurence—were influential in advocating for government investment in this type of social enterprise. More broadly, there has been significant growth in the number and types of intermediaries that support social enterprise development. This growth has included: the establishment of "home-grown" intermediaries, such as Foresters Community Finance, Social Ventures Australia, Social Traders, and The Australian Centre for Social Innovation; the importation of international models, including School for Social Entrepreneurs and Social Enterprise Academy; and the replication of international models, including Social Enterprises Sydney. A recent Australian study of the role of intermediaries in facilitating the financial inclusion of social enterprises found that their three key functions in this regard were: building investment-readiness; providing demand-led finance opportunities; and growing and balancing the supply of capital aimed towards social enterprise (Burkett 2013). While some governmental initiatives—such as SEDIF and the West Australian Social Enterprise Fund—have funded certain intermediary functions through tied funding agreements, there has been minimal untied government and philanthropic funding outside Victoria directed to developing intermediaries that seek to grow social enterprise.

Across each of the states and federal jurisdiction of Australia, varying conceptions of social enterprise have underpinned policy responses. In broad terms, state and local government investments in social enterprise have been consistent in supporting those forms of social enterprise that are non-profit-distributing, while federal contributions have allowed for inclusion of “profit-for-purpose” forms. While a variety of policy levers indirectly affect all kinds of social enterprises, there has been a dominant focus on supporting work integration social enterprises in those policy initiatives that directly support social enterprise development.

### *The role of philanthropy*

Culturally, philanthropy in Australia is conducted largely as private activity; as such, the full extent of philanthropy’s involvement in social enterprise development is not a matter of public record. In terms of visible leadership, philanthropy has to date played a relatively minimal role both in shaping and in investing in social enterprise in Australia. Evidence from the FASES study suggested that philanthropic grants constituted less than 10% of social enterprise income in 2010, although this proportion rose to more than 15% for organisations fewer than five years old (Barraket et al. 2010). In terms of leading debate and engagement with new ideas about social enterprise and social entrepreneurship, a small number of corporate and family foundations has to date been active, including the Westpac Foundation, the Wise Foundation, the Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation (Melbourne) and the English Family Foundation.

Philanthropy in Australia has perhaps been most influential in two areas that inform social enterprise development. The first of these is in impact investing, where philanthropy has to date played a small role as an institutional investor in social economy innovations (Charlton et al. 2014). The second domain in which philanthropy has played a notable role is in raising debate about measuring social impacts (Barraket and Yousefpour 2013). In the context of social enterprise development, social impact measurement has been viewed by practice leaders as essential to building markets for social enterprise and mobilising diverse forms of capital (Nicholls 2006). Whilst empirical evidence of the impact on social enterprises of measuring social impact remains scant (Barraket and Yousefpour 2013), social economy actors, governments and philanthropy have been active in promoting social impact measurement in Australia over the last decade.

## **PART B: IDENTIFICATION OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MODELS**

Reflecting the diversity of civil society itself, Australian social enterprises serve a wide variety of missions. A first attempt at scoping social enterprise in Australia found that:

- social enterprises operate in every industry of the Australian economy, based on Australian and New Zealand Industry Codes (ANZIC);
- the field is mature and diverse;
- the substantial majority of social enterprises are non-profit-distributing, and association is the dominant form of incorporation;
- social enterprises serve a variety of geographical markets, with a dominant focus on serving local and regional markets;
- social enterprises produce both goods and services, but are more prevalent in the services economy; and

- Australian social enterprises exist primarily to generate opportunities for people to participate in their communities, and to find solutions to complex social, environmental, cultural and economic problems (Barraket et al. 2010).

From a comparative perspective, there are several measures that indicate Australia's economic and social conditions that inform social enterprise development. Based on Kerlin's (2013) analytical approach, which utilises existing data sets and indices from the World Bank, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor and UNESCO, Australia's socioeconomic measures include information about the welfare state, governance, economy, and civil society. Australia's welfare state characteristics, measured in terms of health (9.0<sup>3</sup>) and education (5.1), show a retrenched level of fiscal spending in the years following the global financial crisis. In terms of governance, which is measured by regulatory quality (97.1/+ 1.8), rule of law (94.8/+ 1.7), and control of corruption (95.7/+ 2.0), Australia is on a par with other developed economies with robust systems of governance, such as Sweden. Australia's economy is considered to be in the "innovation" stage of development and has a global competitiveness index of 5.1—which perhaps reflects the maturity of Australia's governance regime. The model of civil society in Australia, based on Salamon and Sokolowski (2010), is considered as "liberal", because welfare spending is low compared against the size of the non-profit sector. Consequently, civil society organisations are relatively oriented to revenue-raising activities, without reliance on government funding streams, although this varies across industry sub-sectors of the non-profit sector.<sup>4</sup>

At the meso-level, identifying models of social enterprise is challenging both because of the contingent nature of classification itself, and the hybrid nature of these particular organisations. As Woo et al. (1991: 96) note in relation to typology development, the value of classification is its capacity to "illuminate the essential differences or major sources of variance across subjects (...) around which data interpretation can be undertaken". However, the nature of classification is in part determined by those sources of variance that are privileged in the determination of classes for analysis. Classification systems that begin with the economic objective of social enterprise will, for example, advance different conceptions of the nature and scope of social enterprise models than those that start with the social mission, the governance structure, or the intended beneficiary groups. Further, effective classification presumes the "knowability" of the phenomenon being analysed. As an emergent, diverse and hybrid field of activity, social enterprise in Australia cannot be comprehensively classified, as the full scope of activity remains unknown. Our presentation of "models" is thus offered tentatively, recognising both the potential for omission and the possibilities for distorting the "reality" of the field through this process.

We expect that determination of variables against which models of social enterprise in Australia are classified will be an iterative process, which will be informed by local and international deliberations afforded by the ICSEM project. As a starting point, we have loosely identified common models of social enterprise in Australia based on mission, or the EMES social indicator of "an explicit aim to benefit the community" (Defourny 2001: 17). We have used mission/community benefit as our classificatory starting point as all Australian definitions of social enterprise currently in use are common in their central assumption that social enterprises exist to create some kind of social or community benefit. Because of the mixed economy of social

<sup>3</sup> For the meaning of the figures in parentheses, we refer to Kerlin (2013).

<sup>4</sup> As discussed further below, Australian welfare was historically delivered primarily via charitable organisations with government subsidy. Increasing residualisation of the welfare state is driving social sector reforms that substantially disrupt this tradition and have a significant impact on the operations of welfare or community services organisations of the nonprofit sector.

enterprise in Australia, classifying social enterprise by legal and governance models, or by economic activity, is challenging. Table 1 presents a preliminary analysis of our identified models according to their most typical legal structures and to the economic activities with which they are engaged.

**Table 1: Social enterprise models, legal forms and economic activity**

| Model   | Dominant legal structure(s)   | Dominant economic activity  |
|---|---|---|
| Meeting unmet consumer needs of excluded groups or locales          | Cooperative<br>Company limited by guarantee<br>Company limited by shares<br>Proprietary limited (Pty Ltd) company<br>Incorporated association                 | Goods and services retail   |
| Advancing charitable or community purpose                           | Legislation, royal charter or patents letter (charity)<br>Company limited by guarantee<br>Partnership<br>Sole proprietorship                                  | Goods and services retail   |
| Creating opportunities for community participation                  | Incorporated association<br>Unincorporated association  | Goods and services trade between citizens                               |
| Providing work integration opportunities for disadvantaged groups   | Company limited by guarantee<br>Cooperative<br>Pty Ltd company<br>Cooperative   | Primary production<br>Manufacturing<br>Goods and services retail        |
| Promoting ethical consumption through ethical production and supply | Company limited by guarantee<br>Company limited by shares<br>Pty Ltd company<br>Cooperative<br>Incorporated association<br>Partnership<br>Sole proprietorship | Primary production<br>Secondary production<br>Goods and services retail |
| Strengthening the social economy                                    | Company limited by guarantee<br>Incorporated association  | Services retail   |
| Social and environmental innovation                                 | Company limited by guarantee<br>Company limited by shares<br>Pty Ltd company<br>Incorporated association<br>Cooperative<br>Partnership<br>Sole proprietorship | Primary production<br>Secondary production<br>Goods and services retail |

In grouping our models, we link their emergence to the key “historical moments” in social enterprise development in Australia that we have discussed above. In so doing, however, we recognise two limitations to this historical analysis. First, the preceding discussion does not give equal attention to all institutional drivers of social enterprise development. Policy and regulation, for example, are discussed in more detail than is the influence of the economic system. Secondly, while we observe the emergence of many forms of social enterprise as being shaped by institutional forces (see Dart 2004), the purposeful approach of some forms of social enterprise to disrupting institutional norms (Morgan and Seshadri 2014) suggests that relationships between institutional trajectories and social enterprise development are iterative rather than linear. In this sense, chronological depictions lack salience in that we observe some models of social enterprise losing and (re)gaining prominence over time.

## 1. Early developments: Social economy and collective self-help

The early years of colonisation in Australia brought with them the importation of ideas and institutions primarily from the UK, including a strong working class tradition of mutual association and a cultural commitment to the middle classes providing charitable support to those in need. While early Australian governments provided direct support for education, other areas of what we would now understand to be social policy were typically delivered by so-called “public charities”, which were subsidised by governments (Lyons 2000). These early practices contributed to shaping both the organisational structures and dominant functions of Australian civil society, including the social enterprise field.

### *Meeting unmet consumer needs of excluded groups or locales*

The primary community benefit of this model of social enterprise is to provide goods or services that have been ignored by mainstream market and/or government providers or from which these actors have withdrawn. This model includes community-owned businesses that provide essential and non-essential services to communities of place, often in response to the withdrawal of the private sector or the government, or in response to emerging needs and opportunities. Examples of such “responses to withdrawal” include community-owned stores in remote Aboriginal communities, and community- and cooperatively-owned petrol stations, banks, medical services, post offices and theatres in regional and rural towns and in under-served metropolitan fringe locales. Examples of “responses to emerging needs and opportunities” include community-owned energy companies and community-owned Internet service providers. Another iteration of this model is non-profit or community-owned businesses that respond to unmet needs within new or emerging ethno-cultural groups. Examples of this include bakeries and community gardens that support food security for newly arrived migrants and driving schools designed to provide culturally- and linguistically-sensitive driving instruction to recently resettled refugees.

### *Advancing charitable or community purpose*

The primary community benefit of this model of social enterprise is to generate revenue that can be reinvested in charitable endeavours or community development activities. The most common iteration of this model is charitable trading ventures; that is, businesses owned and operated by charities. The goods and services produced by ventures in this category may be aligned or unaligned with the intended community benefit. Examples where there is alignment between mission and economic activity is the prevalence of used goods stores—known as “opportunity

shops”—run by welfare charities such as St Vincent de Paul, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Lifeline and Mission Australia. These social enterprises raise income to progress their organisations’ charitable purpose, while playing a substantial role in post-consumer waste reuse and providing low-cost clothing and household products to people they seek to serve, as well as to the wider public (see NACRO 2010). An example of non-alignment between economic activity and charitable purpose as determined by Australian case law is a religious charity whose main source of revenue derived from running a funeral service, while its core charitable purpose was to support translation of the Bible (Commissioner of Taxation of the Commonwealth of Australia v Word Investments Ltd 2008).

In more recent developments of this model, Australia is seeing a growing number of “profit-for-purpose” social enterprises—often incorporated as private for-profit firms—that reinvest a proportion of their profits in charitable or community development purposes. Examples include cafes, and companies with consumer product lines that contribute 50% or more of their company profits to charitable organisations. In some cases, the destination of the donation is also determined by the consumer.

### ***Creating opportunities for community participation***

The primary community purpose of this model of social enterprises is to create opportunities for people to build relationships and participate actively<sup>5</sup> in their communities of place or identity. Including both market and non-market forms of exchange, these forms of social enterprise are typically referred to as “community enterprise” (Gibson-Graham and Cameron 2007). They include community gardens, men’s sheds and local energy transfer systems (LETS) that are involved in systematic exchanges of goods and services between citizens. The model also includes social enterprises operating within bounded communities, such as public housing estates, which have community participation as a primary goal.

## **2. Responding to shifts in governance and welfare**

In scholarly typologies, Australia’s welfare state regime is characterised as a residual model (see Esping-Andersen 1990). With its origins in the Harvester Judgement of 1907—which established Australia’s use of the minimum wage—Australia’s early welfare approach was linked to guaranteed income standards for male workers, which led to a relatively strong focus on wage security (Mendes 2008). Shifts in the 1980s towards neoliberalism and later trends towards individualised approaches to social service delivery have produced a service delivery framework consistent with the public-private repertoire of new public governance (Osborne 2006). Within this context, some forms of social enterprise have become vehicles for the delivery of services on behalf of the state or in response to gaps produced by welfare contraction.

### ***Providing work integration opportunities for disadvantaged groups***

The primary community benefit of this model of social enterprise is to provide employment, or pathways to employment, for people who are highly disadvantaged in the labour market. This includes social enterprises involved in creation of intermediate (or transitional) and permanent employment opportunities. Labour market disadvantage may be social and/or locational;

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<sup>5</sup> Where participation does not include formal labour market participation, which is addressed by the work integration model.

Australia's large geography and relatively sparse population produces particular experiences of geographic disadvantage in a globalising economy.

This model includes intermediate labour market businesses owned by charities or community organisations; employee-owned firms; social firms; Australian Disability Enterprises;<sup>6</sup> and community recycling enterprises (CREs).<sup>7</sup>

### 3. New social movements and a globalising society

The rise of new social movements (Melucci 1989) in the late 1960s gave expression to new forms of collective action characterised by democratic values.<sup>8</sup> More recently, the economic and environmental effects of globalisation have generated both new problems and new possibilities for socially-driven business forms in the world risk society (Beck 1992). These trends have given rise to social enterprise models that are characterised by explicit recognition of the sociality of economics and the role of the social economy in mediating the excesses of late-stage capitalism.

#### *Promoting ethical consumption through ethical production and supply*

The primary community purpose of this model of social enterprise is to respond to social and environmental injustices produced by market economies, by improving the ethics of production and supply. These improvements may be realised through the nature of the social business model itself, including its ownership and governance arrangement. They may also be realised through the location, length and quality of supply chain relationships and through improved ethical practice within production processes. Examples of Australian social enterprise that are consistent with this model include: non-profit and cooperatively owned farmers' markets; cultural tourism enterprises owned by communities and collectives; community supported agriculture enterprises; urban beekeeping enterprises; and fair trade retail businesses.

#### *Strengthening the social economy*

The dominant social mission of this model is to strengthen social economy organisations and networks. Often referred to as intermediary or second-tier social enterprises, organisations within this model provide expert advisory services, technical support, access to finance and/or advocacy for or on behalf of social enterprises. These organisations provide support within particular industry subsectors, including housing, financial services, and education and training and/or special support services to particular social groups, including Indigenous people, women returning to work, and refugees. Some intermediaries also play a more generalist role in developing social enterprise and social entrepreneurs; however, many of these are predominately grant- and donor-funded and thus may not be entirely consistent with the EMES economic indicators for social enterprise.

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<sup>6</sup> Not all DSEs can be characterised as social enterprises, due to their reliance on grant income and/or their limited economic inclusion of participants.

<sup>7</sup> Although their primary economic activity appears to be aligned with environmental purpose, a recent baseline study found that work integration was the primary intended community benefit of CREs (Yousefpour et al. 2012).

<sup>8</sup> In social movement theory, "new" and "old" social movements are distinguished in part by the prevalence of democratic consciousness in new social movements. It should be noted that the cooperative movement, which is an "old" movement founded on participatory democratic principles, has not been traditionally recognised as a social movement within social movement theory.

## 4. Across models - Social and environmental innovation

Innovation is temporal in nature and therefore inconsistent with an effort to describe prevailing models of social enterprise. However, across many of the models described above, we note the presence of Australian social enterprises whose approach is purposefully concerned with mission- and/or business-related innovation. The primary intent of this approach is to provide new and improved responses to unmet social, environmental, cultural and economic needs. Innovation may relate to the nature of goods or services being exchanged, the associated production processes, supply chain arrangements, or the business model itself. Social enterprises that identify with this approach are typically concerned with (re)combining “old” elements in new ways and/or being path leaders, modelling the social, environmental and/or cultural benefits of emergent goods, services, and business practices.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With its historical roots in an enterprising non-profit sector and the presence of cooperative and mutual businesses, the practice of social enterprise in Australia is relatively mature. Yet, the language of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship remains marginal and contested within civil society and between civil society and other actors. The nature of social enterprise activity in Australia reflects the role of an internally diverse civil society within an economically privileged society and in response to an increasingly residualised welfare state. Australia’s geography and demography have also played determining roles in the function and presence of social enterprise, particularly in rural and remote communities. Geographic and demographic factors have been largely overlooked in macro-accounts of national social enterprise fields to date (Smith and Stevens 2010); the Australian experience illuminates the need for further attention to these factors.

Policy levers and regulatory conditions to support social enterprise development in Australia have been uneven across states, reflecting the loosely federated political structure of the country and the effects of parochialism arising from this structure. A review of “critical historical moments” in the development of social enterprise in Australia suggests that a number of actors have played important and differentiated roles. These include:

1. Communities—the history of social enterprise in Australia is grounded in cooperative and community-owned models of business ownership. These have largely been initiated from the ground up by groups of citizens expressing collective self-determination in relation to access to goods and services. This history gives rise to the diversity of the social enterprise field in Australia, although demutualisation associated with the rise of neoliberalism has somewhat eroded this legacy over time.
2. Non-profit organisations—Australia’s non-profit sector is, historically, enterprising, which, along with community action, accounts for the maturity of the field. Larger non-profit organisations—particularly community service (or welfare) organisations—have played a powerful role since the late 1990s in shaping contemporary discourses of social enterprise and in pioneering the intermediary environment for social enterprise development. Smaller organisations, which are more populous in number, have enjoyed less policy influence. This has informed relatively narrow definitions of social enterprise that are reflected in some policy programs and the early development agendas of social enterprise intermediaries.



3. Governments—policy and regulatory conditions have substantially shaped the social enterprise field. Australia’s mixed economy of legal forms is indicative of incremental developments within the regulatory environment at both state and federal government levels. These have at times constrained capitalisation and trading across social enterprises incorporated under particular legal forms in different states. Social policy—particularly the establishment and increasing residualisation of the welfare state—has clearly informed the formation and substantive focus of some social enterprise models. Environmental policy—particularly with regard to renewable energy and waste minimisation—is currently generating new opportunities and new regulatory imperatives to which social enterprises are responding. While explicit policy support for social enterprise has been piecemeal in Australia at best, it is clear that government investment through a myriad of programs has played a historically significant role in social enterprise development.
4. Institutional entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs—across all sectors, but particularly within government and civil society, institutional entrepreneurs (Lowndes et al. 2006) and intrapreneurs (Kistruck and Beamish 2010) have played a substantial role in shaping policy support and leveraging investment into social enterprise development. This includes local institutional entrepreneurs as well as international actors who have imported logics and models from other jurisdictions. This has produced something of a “pastiche” of social enterprise discourses and practice in Australia, which does not always appear to logically follow the country’s own socio-cultural or political trajectories.
5. Intermediaries—from a history of a relatively small presence of civil society intermediaries, Australia has experienced recent rapid growth in the number, types and geographic spread of specialist intermediary organisations and networks that support social enterprise development. These organisations are playing a growing role in shaping the discourses and operating environments of social enterprise in Australia through direct policy advocacy, selective investment in particular types of social enterprise and privileging of particular ways of assessing the field’s impacts. Less attention has been given in policy and practice to the actual or potential contributions of traditional business intermediaries—including professional advisors, mainstream financial services providers, and business incubators—to social enterprise development.
6. Academics—academia has played a small role in “naming” the social enterprise field in Australia through empirical research and development of definitions that have been embedded in policy by some governments and utilised in practice by some social enterprise intermediaries. Postgraduate teaching programs have played a role in developing social enterprise practice, with early programs established well over a decade ago.

Our analysis of the institutional influences informing social enterprise development is virtually silent on the role that private for-profit business has played. This is because private for-profit business appears to have played a very minimal role in early developments in social enterprise in Australia, apart from through philanthropic activity. Current developments suggest a growing role for the private sector in advancing the social economy, as private for-profit firms look to social enterprise as part of new efforts to improve their value chains. Developments in social procurement (cf. Barraket and Weissman 2009) outlined above are driving new relationships between private for-profit firms, social enterprises and governments as each seeks to produce new forms of social, financial and economic value.

While each of the above-described sets of actors has contributed to the development of the field, broader institutional effects have substantially determined the growth and shape of social enterprise in Australia. The developments outlined in this paper suggest clear examples of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) in the evolution of the field. However, emergent models of social enterprise in Australia also depict the ongoing dynamism of diverse civil society responding purposefully to new needs generated by systemic, demographic and technological change, and new “opportunities” generated by institutional failure. In this sense, understanding developments in social enterprise helps illuminate “how things change” as well as “how things stay the same” in institutional trajectories related to the social economy.

In developing this paper, we remain conscious of the highly contingent nature of classifying social economy phenomena. Issues regarding classification raised by participating authors included:

- complexities in determining the “lead variables” for classification of hybrid organisations;
- the very different classificatory accounts that may arise from such determinations;
- the relative value of functional versus historical approaches to classifying practice and organisational forms in the social economy; and
- the challenges of establishing fixed categories for a field of organisational action that typically operates along a continuum.

Finally, we note the empirical challenges of “telling the story” of Australian social enterprise. With a mixed economy of organisational forms, regulated by different levels of government and with no central governmental or civil society commitment to routine data collection and reporting, the evidence upon which this paper is based is largely confined to meta-analysis of grey literature, case study research and media sources, and some use of ageing cross-sectional data. It is our hope that the ICSEM project, along with parallel academic-industry research initiatives in Australia, will further improve the evidence base from which our accounts of social enterprise and the wider Australian social economy are derived.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the mission-centric and historical approach to classification taken in this paper suggests that social enterprise development in Australia is grounded in an iterative interplay of collective (civil society) aspirations and institutional forces.

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