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Social Enterprise Places: a place-based initiative facilitating syntactic, semantic and pragmatic constructions of legitimacy

Abstract

Social Enterprises are becoming a significant force of social as well as economic good despite facing many difficulties that are brought about by their unique characteristics. Chief among these is the question of their perceived legitimacy that impinges upon their ability to gain funding, acquire contracts and appear as capable organisations to potential partnering institutions.

This study explores the means by which Social Enterprises are legitimized through participation in the Social Enterprise Place (SEP) programme in the UK. By examining the Boundary Objects (BO) that span the intersections of the incumbent social groups it identifies three pillars upon which SEPs have facilitated SE legitimacy. These pillars comprise (i) the place-based language (syntactic BO), that enables the identification of (ii) common social goals (semantic BOs), and thereby enables the (iii) mobilization of resources toward their resolution (pragmatic BOs).

This research provides insight into the facilitation of legitimacy for Social Enterprises that are engaged in a place-based initiative. By responding to Peterson's (2016) call for macromarketers to take more note of meso level marketing dynamics in different industries the paper highlights the potential for place to facilitate the legitimacy of SEs. In addition, it reveals a further macromarketing dimension to Boundary Object plasticity whereby they may evolve through syntactic, semantic and pragmatic forms over time.

Keywords: Social Enterprise, Place, Boundary Object, Legitimacy, Macromarketing

INTRODUCTION

Social Enterprises (SEs) are a form of organization that utilize commercial means of operation in order to address societal needs (Doherty et al., 2014; Peattie and Morley, 2008). Over the past decade there has been a global growth in both the number and diversity of SEs that seek to deliver social good through commercial activity (Engelke et al., 2016; Dees, 2012; Bornstein, 2007). In the UK for example, between 2012 and 2015 SE numbers rose by 33% and almost half of these created new jobs in socially deprived areas (SEUK, 2017). Consequently, SEs are becoming an increasingly important component of national economic and social growth with over 100,000 SEs in the UK contributing £60 billion per annum to the economy (SEUK, 2019).

SEs are active in many diverse areas including education, healthcare, farming and manufacturing (Temple, 2015). UK SEs are engaged in job creation and supporting disadvantaged groups including vulnerable individuals, socially excluded citizens and those suffering with mental health issues (Mansfield and Gregory, 2019): for example, through employment in cafes that provide ‘experience and accredited training’ for homeless people (Café from Crisis, 2020).

The practices and outputs of SEs are self-evident yet possibly overlooked within the macromarketing body of literature. For example, both seek to contribute to issues pertaining to quality of life and wellbeing (Hill and Dander, 1999; Lee and Sirgy, 2004; Layton 2009, Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Lawson, 2011), social justice (Lush, 2017), access to markets (Gurrieri, Brace-Goven and Previte, 2014; Cerovecki and Grunhagen, 2016), economic regeneration (Cicek, Ulu, and Uslay, 2019), poverty (Gau, Ramirez and Barua, 2014; Saatcioglu and Corus, 2014), economic and social exclusion (Kadirov, 2018) and equality (Kravets, Preece and Maclaran, 2020). Despite this, beyond examining gender equality (Kravets, Preece and Maclaran, 2020), very little

attempt has been made by the macromarketing discipline to understand their unique characteristics, the positive macro contributions they make to society and the many challenges they face.

The growth and success of SEs is widely recognised to be an important element of global social and economic development, particularly in areas experiencing social and economic deprivation (Parkinson and Howorth, 2008). However, despite the significant growth of SEs, their capacity to deliver social innovation in difficult and complex market systems is well documented in the academic literature. In the main these comprise: dealing with the practical, operational and ethical demands of delivering a ‘dual mission’ that balances commercial and social value (Santos, Pache and Birkholz, 2015); accurately measuring & reporting social value to demonstrate the ‘social’ success and subsequent proposition of the SE (Mook, Chan and Kershaw, 2015); sourcing new income streams and investment while operating in social and economically challenging geographies, markets that have previously failed to support private enterprise and dealing with social and ecological problems that have been deemed too expensive or impossible to reach by the public and third sector (Doherty et al. 2014; Lehner and Nicholls, 2014; White et al., 2018); developing and competing for opportunities to work with the public & private sector when SEs are often suggested to be perceived as too small or not professional enough to deliver public projects or commercial contracts (Peattie and Morley, 2008; Jenner, 2016); attaining stakeholder validity in their practice, for example many SEs are still viewed as charities, or lifestyle businesses that are not capable of the professional delivery of contractual obligation (Liu, et al. 2015, White et al., 2018).

This paper argues that many of the challenges that are faced by SEs are symptomatic of the underlying macromarketing causal mechanism (Layton, 2009; Kadirov, 2018)

they have in legitimising their presence (Weinder, Weber and Gobel, 2019; Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Margiono et al., 2019; Nicholls, 2010; Ruebottom, 2013).

Social Enterprise Places (SEP) Programme

In 2014, Social Enterprise UK launched the Social Enterprise Place (SEP) programme to address some of these issues by facilitating the construction of a social landscape where strategic alliances between public, private and governmental actors can flourish and develop collaborative value creation for SEs (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Lambe and Spekman, 2002; Moller, 2013; Ritter and Gemunden, 2004; Hyder and Eriksson, 2005, Tracey et al.. 2005). The programme aims to promote, raise awareness, increase validity, and build markets for SE at a local (geographically bound) level. This is presently happening in twenty-six SEPs across the UK (Figure 1). Successful SEPs are described as geographical areas where SE activity and investment has thrived, and five goals are stipulated for an area to be awarded the SEP label, comprising:

1. Significant social enterprise activity
2. An established SEP stakeholder group must be active
3. Commitment to support and grow social enterprises
4. The measurement of social enterprise activity
5. Opportunities to share knowledge and best practice with other SEPs

(Social Enterprise Places UK, 2019)

There are now 26 accredited Places in the UK

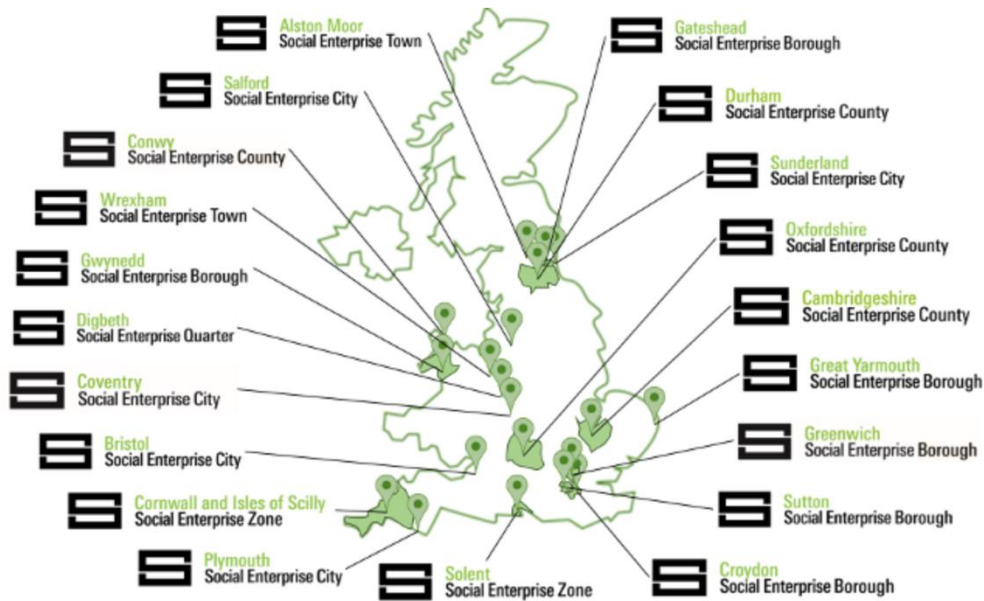


Figure 1: Social Enterprise places Across the UK (Social Enterprise Places UK, 2019)

This study seeks to understand how SEs seek to pursue legitimacy through the beneficial social change they enable within localities, and through their interaction with other influential organisations within both their sociohistorical landscapes and the context of SEPs. In doing so it responds to the call of Fortunato (2014) for researchers to contribute further conceptual development that connects place and entrepreneurship. Like Fajardo, Shultz II, and Joya's (2020) work it applies the perspective of 'Boundary Objects' (Star and Griesemer, 1989) to understand those place based agents and artefacts that have emerged to ameliorate SEs legitimacy to help them succeed as businesses whilst contributing to local social value. The paper contributes to our understanding of a novel 'place based' national initiative that aims to support and legitimise socially enterprising activities, providing the first academic study to consider the implications of the rapidly developing SEP scheme.

The paper is structured as follows: the literature review begins by introducing previous place based macromarketing studies. It then unpacks the various factors that can prevent SEs from being viewed as ‘legitimate’ organisations before turning to the theory of Boundary Objects (BO) to consider some potential solutions. Following this, the methodological considerations of the study are discussed before the findings of the analyses are presented. The paper concludes with statements of theoretical and practical contributions to macromarketing, BOs and SE legitimacy finishing with suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Place-based studies in macromarketing, despite their consideration of meso level activity, are often focused on countrywide or regional development studies. Examples include Layton’s (2015) use of Coral Bay (Western Australia) as a backdrop for his work on formation, growth and adaptive change in marketing systems, Sredi, Schultz II and Brecic’s (2017) insights into post-conflict Bosnia and the creation of communities, Nguyen, Rahtz and Schultz II’s (2014) consideration for tourism to be a catalyst for transforming Ha Long in Vietnam. However, an emerging body of macromarketing work has become mindful of the link between meso level topographies and the resulting socio-spatial interactions they encourage in order to solve macro level social, economic and environmental ‘wicked problems’ (Kennedy, 2015). For example, Cerovecki and Grunhagen (2016) identified the negative impacts of food deserts on vulnerable consumer’s quality of life, suggesting the need for more responsible urban planning that shows a concern for ‘liveable spaces’ and provide access to affordable food.

Kemper and Ballantine (2017) suggested the use of Macro-Social marketing to address the wicked problem of obesity by enacting meso level support to help develop norms and shared understanding that favour healthier food consumption. Recently, macromarketing place-based studies have also been considered through special issues dedicated to 'Alternative Economies' (Campana, Chatzidakis and Laamanen, 2017) and 'Entrepreneurship' (Morrish, Egger, Covin and Ali, 2019). Examples include Watson and Ekici's (2017, p.206) research into alternative food networks on a small farm in Turkey, that showed how a shared commitment can be developed between local and non-local actors to help 'improve the well-being of consumers and producers, localities, markets and society', and Cicek, Ulu and Uslay's (2019) work that found the slow city movement able to assist place authenticity and promote entrepreneurial development. In addition, the work of both Casey, Lichrou and O'Malley (2017) and Samuel and Peattie (2015) has provided macromarketing with a deeper understanding of 'reflexive tactics' and the sustainable/ethical practices and consumption patterns that can derive from one's socio-spatial interactions in distinct and general places. These strands of work suggest that macromarketing is in the early stages of forging an understanding of the role that meso/place-based marketing dynamics play in helping ameliorate wicked problems and contribute to positive, responsible and ethical macro level outcomes. Despite this emerging work, there is still a recognised dearth of macromarketing studies that have empirically explored place's contribution to shape macromarketing phenomena such as its role in facilitating the legitimisation of SEs (Peterson, 2016; Casey et al., 2017).

Social Enterprise Legitimacy

The origins of ‘legitimacy theory’ are imprecise, but emerged from the realms of politics and law before application to the study of organisations (Weber, 1966; Sutton and Rada, 1993). The notion of legitimacy evolved from an early emphasis on conforming to society’s laws and norms to considering different aspects of legitimacy (Deephouse et al., 2017) including effectiveness (pragmatic legitimacy), legality (regulatory or sociopolitical legitimacy) and socially acceptable ends and means (normative or moral legitimacy). These elements of legitimacy are important in preventing organisations from facing external pressure or scrutiny (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). For our purposes, a helpful distinction is drawn by Hirsch and Andrews (1984) between two types of legitimacy challenges that organisations face. The first are ‘performance challenges’ where relevant actors perceive that an organisation is failing to deliver on its primary purpose of ‘delivering the goods’ and fulfilling its mission, with no concern about the social value of that mission. The second type are ‘value challenges’ that question the organization’s mission and existence, regardless of its primary performance. Either type of challenge can be damaging for an organization and threaten its existence.

A widely used and broad based definition of legitimacy comes from Suchman (1995, p. 574): “*Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.*” From the mid-1990 there was an upsurge in interest in how profit-orientated companies could achieve legitimacy (e.g. Kostova and Zaheer’s (1999) exploration in the context of MNCs), for example through the disclosure of voluntary social initiatives alongside financial reports (Maroun, 2018). Whilst mainstream business research into legitimacy tended to focus on value challenges, SEs’ quest for legitimacy can be more concerned with combatting perceived

performance challenges and assuring stakeholders that they can achieve the necessary financial security to successfully deliver their social initiatives (Hudon et al., 2020). As such, two developments in legitimacy theory highlighted by Bitektine (2011) are worth considering. One is that legitimacy challenges may be faced, not just by an individual organization, but by an entire class of organizations (such as SEs). The other is that legitimacy reflects the judgements of multiple stakeholders, and may be influenced by a range of factors including the aims, behaviour, leadership, communication, relationships and media coverage of the organisation or type. A perennial problem therefore, for commercial organisations and SEs alike, is the demanding task of balancing the needs of their different stakeholders, since each is necessary in order for the conferment of ‘legitimacy’ (Suchman, 1995).

A recurring theme in the SE literature raises concerns that they may face particular legitimacy challenges. Weidner et al. (2019, p.500) posit that “*the very nature and specific characteristics of social enterprise complicates their quest for legitimacy.*” Ruebottom (2013) even suggests that the difficulties SEs have in building legitimacy may pose a challenge to their sustainability. These challenges concern three broad types of (often interconnected) perceptions about SEs: value/performance compromise, performance ambiguity, and performance anxiety.

Value/performance compromise reflects the dual mission of SEs to succeed as businesses in order to successfully deliver social value. It has long been acknowledged that for commercial firms “*Legitimacy is known more readily when it is absent than when it is present. When activities of an organization are illegitimate, comments and attacks will occur*” (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978, p.194). In other words, conventional companies can typically go about their business unchallenged, providing they succeed commercially whilst avoiding perceptions of being socially harmful. The intertwining

of commercial means with social ends for SEs requires them to demonstrate success (and not just an absence of failure) on both agendas. The complexity of this dual mission can lead to SEs experiencing ‘mission drift’ (Cornforth, 2014; Santos, et al., 2015; Young and Kim, 2015; Simatele and Dlamini, 2019). Doherty, et al.’s (2014) synthesis of the literature indicates that this arises from financial pressures that can lead to compromise of SEs’ social objectives (Litrico, J-B and Besharov, 2019; Grieco, et al., 2014; Zainon et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2015). Such mission drift is viewed as a substantial threat to SEs’ legitimacy at a consumer, industrial and societal level (Murphy et al., 2019; Weidner et al., 2019; Howorth and Macdonald, 2015). Thus, the primary challenge that SEs face is that of reconciling their dual-mission of seeking to generate social value through commercial means (Bull, 2008; Dees and Anderson, 2006; Hai and Daft, 2016; Smith, Besharov, Wessels and Chertok, 2012; Tracey and Phillips, 2007) and the seemingly impossible task of maximizing both financial and social performance (Alegre, 2015; Battilana and Lee, 2014; Ebrahim et al., 2014; Sanders and McClellan, 2014; Seanor et al., 2014). SEs’ geminate nature also problematizes their positioning within macromarkets (Huybrechts, 2012; Jenner, 2016; Weber et al., 2017). As the hybrid-mission changes toward financial goals so their legitimacy as ‘social’ enterprises suffers and they are less able to collaborate with other SEs. Concomitantly they are perceived as being less fiscally robust if their social mission comes to dominate their bearing. SEs’ ability to cooperate with other commercial organizations can be highly advantageous (Liu et al., 2014; Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern, 2006) but this can lead to further erosion of their status as ‘social’ enterprises (Herlin, 2015).

Performance ambiguity for SEs concerns the challenge of measuring the social value, which is key to their legitimacy. This is also widely acknowledged to be much more

difficult than measuring conventional business performance with its established metrics of financial returns, operational efficiency and customer satisfaction (Peattie and Morley, 2008). There are inherent difficulties in measuring and reporting social value (Ebrahim, et al., 2014; Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; SEUK, 2014; Zainon, Ahmad, Atan, Wah, Bakar and Sarman, 2014) despite several attempts to develop an efficacious approach (Bagnoli and Megali, 2011; Beer and Micheli, 2018; Greico, Micheline and Lasevoli, 2015; Mook, Chan and Kershaw, 2015; Gravel, Michelangeli and Trannoy, 2006; Whitman, 2009; Kadamwe et al., 2014). Cornforth (2014, P. 6) even postulates that SEs will always experience problems in measuring social value given that they pursue a “*socialist mode of production*” within a capitalist system.

The diversity of SEs’ missions, objectives, operations, stakeholders and legal structures (Sunley and Pinch, 2014; Weider et al., 2019), their relative newness, and their lack of any firmly established epistemology have combined to make it difficult to define and capture the role and full contribution of SEs (Doherty et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2015, Peattie and Morley, 2008, Nicholls, 2010). The achievement and reporting of social/public value from commercial operations is often cited as being conflicting, paradoxical, and a contested concept that is hard to translate (Bull and Ridley-Duff, 2019; Teasdale et al., 2013; Doherty et al., 2014; Mook et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2015, Grieco et al., 2014; Zainon et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2015). Teasdale et al. (2013) and Nicholls (2010) are concerned that SEs lack a precise definition, and therefore this causes people to question their legitimacy. This is exacerbated by questionable accuracy in the measurement and reporting of the size, growth, value and impact of the SE sector in the UK.

Performance anxiety for SEs reflects negative perceptions of them being too small and lacking capacity and business professionalism (Peattie and Morley, 2008; Jenner, 2016)

to be able to tender for and deliver on large private and public sector contracts (Cornforth, 2014). White et al. (2008) also suggest that SEs battle negative perceptions of validity while struggling with the professionalization of their marketing function. SEs therefore need more efficacious ways of presenting and marketing themselves (Liu et al., 2015; Liu, Takeda and Ko, 2014). SEs can also experience difficulties in securing investment from so-called 'traditional' sources, with potential investors often being confused about their proposition and put off by the offer of comparatively low financial returns (Doherty et al., 2014; Reiser and Dean, 2014; Lehner and Nicholls, 2014).

These three challenges have combined to create an 'existential crisis' (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015) of 'low industrial legitimacy' (Murphy et al., 2019) and a 'legitimacy deficit' (Margiono, Kariza and Heriyati, 2019) for SEs. This has prompted many SEs (individually and collectively) to proactively seek greater legitimacy amongst their proximal stakeholders and society (Weidner et al., 2019; Parkinson and Howorth, 2008; Bacq and Eddleston, 2018). One strategy to gain legitimacy is through developing working relationships and strategic alliances with other organisations (Austin, 2000; Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Weidner et al., 2019). However, while these are effectively developed and managed at the 'ideation stage of social innovation', they are less effective during 'the social innovation implementation phase' (Phillips et al., 2019, p.315). Ruebottom (2013) further argues that the rhetorical strategy used by SEs to change existing commercial and community practices also has an ability to build legitimacy in both their operations and output. A legitimacy theme that seems relatively specific to SEs concerns the importance of their situatedness within communities, which contrasts mainstream legitimacy debates that are more likely to focus on issues like the international impacts of MNCs (Kostova and Zaheer, 1999). This situatedness, while potentially a double-edged sword (Samuel et al., 2018), appears to be a crucial

means by which SEs may develop and assert their legitimacy. This importance of 'place' was emphasised by Munoz (2010) who calls for a greater degree of research examining the specificities of geographies and places in helping to generate and sustain SEs. While the significance of place has been implicitly examined within contemporary SE literature, little explicit examination of the phenomena has taken place. The SEP initiative therefore affords a prime opportunity to undertake targeted investigation of the operationalization of SEs within a defined physical boundary.

The SE literature reflects the existence of 'divergent viewpoints' (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p. 389) between SEs, their stakeholders and the wider civic and civil society that they seek to serve. Subsequently, this paper turns to Boundary Object theory to understand SEPs' role in creating and managing artefacts that can develop and maintain favourable and coherent macro level understandings and normative belief systems across the 'intersecting worlds' of the SE (Star and Griesemer, 1989, p. 393). BOs are real or conceptual artefacts that are used by social groups, such as tribes, teams or organizations. These artefacts are important components in creating coherence within the group, and in bridging (or maintaining) the gulf that exists between such social groups. They thereby enable shared understanding, the transfer of knowledge or the sharing of practice. In seeking to understand the interactions between social enterprises and the various stakeholders that operate within their local environs (the SEP locations), examination of the BOs that exist within and between these social groups provides an apposite lens through which these 'anchors and bridges' (Star and Griesemer, 1989) may be viewed.

Boundary Objects

Boundary Objects (BOs) were conceptualised by Star (1989) and first used to examine organisational structures by Star and Griesemer (1989). They are tangible or intangible

artefacts (Sullivan and Williams, 2012; Carlile, 2002) that span sociological groups which, although they may be utilised differently by those groups, afford some common frame of reference for them both (Bannon, 2002). According to Star and Griesemer (1989, p.393) *“they are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites.”*

Star and Griesemer (1989) classified BOs as comprising two types: ‘Syntactic’ that span differences in language between social groups and ‘Semantic’ that span differences in meaning. These were later expanded by Carlile (2002) to include ‘Pragmatic’ types that spanned the differences in the practical usage of artefacts by social groups. BOs were originally conceived of as ‘enabling’, that is, they are devices that facilitate the collaboration or otherwise efficacious interaction between two or more different groups of actors: termed ‘anchors and bridges’ (Star and Griesemer, 1989). Some, such as Oswick and Robertson (2009), later challenged this notion and recognised that some BOs may actually inhibit relations, referring to them instead as ‘barricades and mazes’.

BOs may take many forms, comprising tangible everyday objects such as tools or workplace documents, heroic people, project timelines and information systems, or intangible concepts such as social structures, relationships, ideas and notions, and language and expressions (Carlisle, 2002; Yakura, 2002; Fleischmann, 2006; Bergman, Lyytinen and Mark, 2007; Fenton, 2007; Harvey, 2009; Oswick and Robertson, 2009; Benn and Martin, 2010; Bresnen, 2010; Landry, Levin, Rowe and Nickelson, 2010; Kajamaa, 2011; Di Marco, Alin and Taylor, 2012; Lee-Kelley and Blackman, 2012; Sullivan and Williams, 2012; Chang, Hatcher and Kim, 2013; Huang and Huang, 2013). In fact, Bergman et al. (2007, p. 55) state that *“any artefact that is shared*

between two or more actors at the boundary of two social worlds can be regarded as a boundary object.” However, not all artefacts are BOs, and without some shared meaning or sustained purpose they remain merely objects or concepts (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009). Adopting BOs as the objects of analysis can provide insight into the values that are placed upon the seemingly mundane items of everyday work and life (Sullivan and Williams, 2012). While in a macromarketing context, BO theory has been used to frame the way in which entrepreneurship can help ex militants transform their practices from war to a peace-time economy (Fajardo, Shultz II and Joya, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed methods approach in order to examine the presence and role of BOs in the Social Enterprise Places (SEP) initiative. In common with Sunley and Pinch (2014), Samuel and Peattie (2016) and Mauksch (2012) studies, the research examines social enterprise in a range of regions across the UK. Prior to primary data being collected the SEPs were visited and experienced by the lead researcher. During these visits the lead researcher became familiar with the social, economic and geographical topography of the SEPs via, walking the streets, visiting and consuming goods and services at a number of SEs, engaging in informal conversation with SE owners, clients and citizens of the community, and attending SE specific events such as ‘Re-imagining Plymouth’. This was deemed a necessary step in the research process and helped gain an understanding of the research landscape (Fetterman, 2010; Samuel and Peattie, 2016) and enabled a mini-ethnographical experience (where possible) of the SEP through the lens of a visiting consumer (Mariampolski, 2006).

Following this, the lead researcher undertook the data collection through a series of semi-structured interviews with five leaders of the SEPs whom responded to an invite to participate in the study and were contacted through Social Enterprise UK, consistent

with other studies of SEs (Fowler, Coffey and Dixon-Fowler, 2019). These were leaders of five regional SEP initiatives, who are also social enterprise owner/managers, comprising Oxfordshire (a county), Plymouth (a city), Wrexham (a town), Alston Moor (a village) and Digbeth (an urban ‘quarter’). By studying these five areas the study gained insight into each of the types of SEPs that the initiative aims to promote. The interviews each lasted approximately 2 hours and sought to explore the participants’ deep understanding of the SEP initiative and the roles that SEs play within them (Fetterman, 2010; Kutsche, 1998). The initial questions (Table 1) were operationalised from a fusion of the literature review and the mini-ethnographical participation engaged in by the lead researcher. Questions were open-ended as in order to elicit rich responses from those individuals embedded in the focus of the inquiry (Samuel and Peattie, 2016; Charmaz, 2006). Questions were phrased to elicit deeper narratives around the participant’s perceptions and experiences and utilised terms such as ‘tell me’, ‘what do you think’ and ‘could you describe’ (Charmaz, 2006) and further questions were developed during the interviews in order to explore interesting and emergent themes. Other spontaneous interview questions were crafted to explore interesting and emergent subjects and this allowed participants the opportunity to express themselves and to illustrate their points with meaningful examples and personal stories (Duffy, Ferguson and Watson, 2002). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the lead researcher.

Secondary data were collected by the team of researchers, from web-based news and media sources (Canziani, Welsh, Dana and Ramadani, 2019; Rasmussen and Thimm, 2015; Baumgarten and Grauel, 2009) that covered the SEP initiatives in each of the five areas. Utilising multiple data sources enabled triangulation of observations among the researchers (Rasmussen and Thimm, 2015). In total, 80 media sources were drawn upon

(see appendix A).

Initial Interview Questions
How did you become connected to Social Enterprise Places?
How does Social Enterprise (Wrexham etc) work?
What Does Social Enterprise (Plymouth etc) mean to social enterprise in the area?
Tell me how the group has raised awareness of Social Enterprises at a local level.
Could you share some success stories of Social Enterprise Places?
What does Social Enterprise Places mean to (Oxfordshire etc)?
Do you receive any support from you community?
How do you see Social Enterprise places evolving in (Digbeth etc)?
Have you noticed/witnessed any changes in awareness/attitudes towards Social Enterprises in (Plymouth etc)?
Is there anything unique about Social Enterprise (Alston Moore etc)?
How can (Wrexham etc) benefit from a growth in SEs?
What do you think are the major challenges for Social Enterprises in (Plymouth etc) and how has Social Enterprise Places attempted to address them?

Table 1: Initial Interview Questions

The data analysis took place in three phases. First, two of the research team reviewed the interview transcripts and media sources in order to identify the BOs. Drawing upon the pertinent literature, BOs were conceptualised as those tangible or intangible artefacts that spanned the borders between social groups and thereby enabled or inhibited their cooperative interaction. The social groups that were considered are those that are engaged in the SEP initiative and are represented throughout the data, and comprised local residents, social enterprises, local councils and other notable institutions such as universities.

Each section of text that evidenced a BO was assigned a unique code using the following convention: all interview data excerpts are preceded by the prefix ‘I’, the locations of the data sources are identified with a letter (‘O’ for Oxfordshire, ‘P’ for Plymouth, ‘W’ for Wrexham, ‘A’ for Alston Moor, ‘D’ for Digbeth), then each source is identified by a second letter (‘A’ for the first website that was examined, ‘B’ for the second, etc) and finally, each excerpt of data that was selected from that source was

identified with a sequential numerical character (1 for the first quote, 2 for the second, etc). Each code was then assigned a descriptive comment to identify the social groups that the data excerpt suggested were being ‘bridged’. See Table 2 for an example of the coding process.

LOCATION	SOURCE	DATA	CODE	SOCIAL GROUPS
Plymouth	https://plymsoce nt.org.uk	<i>...Plymouth Social Enterprise Network...</i>	PA1	SEs and SEs
		<i>...joined by a common social bond...</i>	PA2	All groups
		<i>...doing business for a good cause...</i>	PA3	SEs and Residents
	Interview: Male, Business Support	<i>I think the Social Enterprise City status has helped us bridge that gap.</i>	IP7	SEs and Wider Community
	https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/plymouth	<i>Plymouth is a hotspot...</i>	PB1	All groups
		<i>...developing as a global ‘Social Enterprise City’...</i>	PB2	SEP and Wider Community

Table 2: Example of coding process

Following this, the interview and media data excerpts were thematically analysed in order to arrange them into common groups. Fifteen ‘initial themes’ were identified, shown in Table 3, where ‘X’ indicates which themes each of the two researchers independently identified. The researchers then filtered the initial themes to confirm the correct identification of BOs and achieve consensus. In accord with Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009), several of the initial themes were reconsidered and agreed to not depict BOs. For instance, ‘Funding’ was found to act as an enabler of SEP activity but was not a BO in itself. Further review enabled the reduction of the initial themes to the final themes of ‘The Place’, ‘Landscape Historicity’, ‘University’, ‘Common Social Cause’, ‘Place-Bound Activities’ and ‘Wider Communication’.

Researcher A	Researcher B	Initial Themes	Boundary Object Analysis	Filtered Themes	Final Themes
X	X	The Place	Yes	The Place	The Place
	X	Symbol	Yes	Symbol	
X	X	University	Yes	University	University
X		Council	No		
X	X	Buildings	Yes	Buildings	Landscape Historicity
	X	Sub-Space of the Place	Yes	Sub-Space of the Place	
X	X	Collaboration	No		
X	X	Common Social Cause	Yes	Common Social Cause	Common Social Cause
X	X	Place-Based Activities	Yes	Place-Based Activities	Place-Based Activities
	X	Projects	Yes	Projects	
X	X	Advice and Support	No		
X	X	People	No		
X	X	Funding	No		
X	X	Wider Communication	Yes	Wider Communication	Wider Communication
X	X	Legislation/Regulations	No		

Table 3: Thematic Analysis

Finally, drawing upon Carlile (2002) the themes were classified as syntactic (enabling a shared language), semantic (enabling a shared meaning) or pragmatic (enabling a shared practice) BOs. See Table 4 for the complete list of the BOs classifications, themes and data codes.

Classification	Themes	Source																							
Syntactic	The Place	Plymouth	PA1	PB2	PB20	PC5	PH1	PI1	PK1	PK2	PK4	PK5	PR10	IP1	IP2	IP3	IP4	IP5	IP6	IP26	IP8	IP9	IP13		
		Oxfordshire	IO1	IO2	IO3	IO6	IO7	IO8	OA1	OE12	OH17														
		Alston Moor	IA M1	AM A2	AM A5	AM B1	AM C1	AM D2	AM D11	AM E1	AM F1	AM F2	AM F5	AM F7	AM G1	AM G4	IA M3	IA M4	IA M10	AD 8	AE2	AF4	AF5		
		Wrexham	IW1	IW2	IW3	IW4	WE1	WG1	WG3	IW8	WB1	IW15	IW16	WC2	WD1	WE1	WE2	WG7	WG10	WG11	WJ1	WJ4	WJ5		
		Digbeth	ID1	ID2	ID3	ID4	ID5	ID11	ID12	DA5	DD11	DD12	DD13	ID20	DB9	DC10	DD11	DD13							
Semantic and Pragmatic	Landscape Historicity	Plymouth	PR1	PR2	PR3	PR6	PR8	PR14	PR15	PS1	PS6	PC6	PT2	PE8	PG10	PL9	PR8	PR9	PR13	IP7					
		Oxfordshire	OQ31	IO3																					
		Alston Moore	AM D13	AM E4	AM F4	IA M5	AM D13	AM E4																	
		Wrexham	WI3	WI5	IW9	IW10																			
		Digbeth	ID6	ID7	ID8	ID9	ID10	DI2	DK26	DA4	ID2	ID9													
Semantic and Pragmatic	University	Plymouth	PA8	PB4	PB23	PC1	PD1	PD3	PE7	PG7	PN2	IP10	IP11	IP12											
		Oxfordshire	IO4	IO5	OB4	OC9	OK21	ON25	ON26																
		Alston Moor	IA M2	AM G2																					
		Wrexham	IW5	IW6	WG8	WH1	WH4																		
		Digbeth																							
Semantic and Pragmatic	Common Social Cause	Plymouth	PA2	PA3	PA4	PA5	PB19	PC5	PD2	PF4	PF5	PH3	PJ1	PL6	PM2	PM3	PM10	PO1	PO3	PQ3					
		Oxfordshire	OJ20																						
		Alston Moor	AA13	AA15	AB2	AC3	AC4	AD1	AD3	AD4	AD5	AD13	AD14	AE4	AE6	AE7	AF6	AG5	AH1						
		Wrexham	IW11	WA1	WD3	WG5	WG6	WI1	WI2	WI3	WI5														
		Digbeth	DH17	DI18	DL27	DD11																			
Pragmatic	Place-Bound Activities	Plymouth	PA7	PA8	PB1	PB3	PB6	PB8	PB17	PB18	PB23	PB26	PD3	PD4	PD6	PD8	PD10	PE1	PE2	PE3	PE4	PE5	PE6		
		Oxfordshire	OB6	OC7	OC10	OF13	OG15	OH16	OK21	IO8	IO9														
		Alston Moor	IA M6	IA M7	IA M8	IA M9	AA1	AA4	AA6	AA7	AA9	AA11	AA12	AB3	AI1	IA M4									
		Wrexham	IW12	IW13	IW14	WE5	WG2	WG9	WI2	IW1															
		Digbeth	ID13	ID14	ID15	ID16	ID17	ID18	ID19	DA1	DA3	DB6	DD14	DG16	DJ24	ID3	ID2	ID12	ID20						
Syntactic and Semantic	Wider Communication	Plymouth	PB7	PB24	PD5	PJ5	IP30	IP31	IP32	IP33															
		Oxfordshire	IO9	IO10	IO11	IO12	IO13	OA2	OC8																
		Alston Moor	IA M11																						
		Wrexham	WG7																						
		Digbeth	ID21	ID22																					

Table 4: Data Coding and Thematic Analysis

FINDINGS

Place

SEP's use of a specific place name in its awarding label appears to have an abstract agency in drawing new actors to support SEs. Place names emerge to represent citizens' and organisations' desire to belong and contribute to a community. Beyond this, most of the SEPs in this study also recognise the SEP label as a key agent in attracting local authority/council, university and business support:

Well, I think the badge was really powerful as a neutral thing for someone national looking at us saying that we were this. Certainly, in the wider business community, it opened doors. It raised awareness and it raised eyebrows.

(IP23)

The (SE) Places brand is about setting it in a national context, or a UK-wide context, credibility. If we're talking to people at government level, and to the senior levels of the university management, they will associate with the Places brand.

(IO7)

I think, for the people that know social enterprises, they are delighted to be part of the 'Digbeth Social Enterprise Quarter'.

(ID5)

SEs have utilized and therefore benefited from a variety of symbols to advance their mission and develop a favourable localised ecosystem for SE to operate effectively. Abundant recognition was given to the power of the place 'badge' in

attracting interest and generating a legitimate platform upon which to advance the momentum and impact of SEPs. For example, Plymouth City Council stated:

Since obtaining Social Enterprise City status in 2013, we have driven the social enterprise sector forward and have shown ongoing commitment to the businesses and organisations in Plymouth. Plymouth City Council has launched the Social Enterprise Investment Fund, which is worth £2.5 million over four years.

(PC5)

Also in efforts to brand and promote themselves as SEPs, some places have changed the context of their town signs:

We've had five signs made up and they've all been fitted now that say, "The world's first social enterprise town".

(IAM10)

'Place' is recognised for its ability to unite disparate people and organisations to champion a novel cause out of a sense of duty or of belonging to a particular place:

We want to work hard to make social enterprise core to Plymouth's economy, and Social Enterprise City is a badge to say we are doing that really well at the minute and we've been effective at that. It's making social enterprise central to the way Plymouth does business.

(IP25)

Consequently, the emphasis upon the organisation's 'oneness' with the locality, its residents and other organisations, authenticates them with pertinent stakeholders and thereby legitimizes them and their causes.

Landscape Historicity

All the SEPs included in this study attributed a pluralistic agency to the physical, social and abstract role ‘geographical place’ has played in the operationalisation of SEPs. Distinct negative place-based narratives around post-industrial economic decline (Plymouth), social deprivation (Digbeth/Wrexham), economic isolation (Alston Moore) and inequality (Oxfordshire) emerged as defining the ‘landscapes’ that SEPs operated in and sought to reimagine. The data concur that the failure of both the state and the free market to address these issues has been a key enabler for ‘another more locally based way’ (IO3) of delivering positive social and economic change for these challenged places:

I would say that we had this traditional business over here making money and a traditional charity over here doing good. I think the Social Enterprise City status has helped us bridge that gap. Here is a credible alternative.

(IP7)

This area there’s the beginning of lots of serious health issues and low skill, long-term unemployment and so on. For me it’s very much about social regeneration, and creating opportunity, and enabling the organisations to become stronger and more sustainable so they can support those individuals.

(ID22)

One of the characteristics of the way the social enterprise community works here, is that a lot of it is about getting the hard-to-reach groups, who are currently excluded from what is seen externally to be a very thriving economy, back into being economically active.

(IO3)

SEPs have subsequently been credited with playing a role in promoting the unique assets of a place for reuse leading to improvements in the physical appearance of areas blighted by the physical signs of economic and social decay. Paradoxically the social and economic history of the places that host SEPs is often called upon and even exploited to champion the SE sector. Suitably sized premises (former factories etc.) offer cheap rent in an area very close to Birmingham city centre with an established SEP community that has helped establish Digbeth's social and economic importance:

This side of the city, this area was always the industrial part. With the decline of small industry and SME, space has become available. What's happened now, because of the 'Digbeth Quarter', we're getting social businesses moving into the area as well, which is, of course, how a zone should work.

(ID9)

Discussions of the various projects that have been initiated frequently make references to a smaller area or region of the SEP. These comprise forgotten landmarks or defunct facilities that, to the casual observer, may seem mundane, but to the local residents are of significance:

...cuts meant the public toilets were going to be closed down...

(AMD13)

...Nenthead Shop, which was reopened in 2007 under community management after being shut for 18 months...

(AME4)

In the case of Plymouth, these areas have great historical importance,

Down by the docks...

(PR1)

...Devonport, around the naval dockyard...

(PS1)

It is interesting to note that these had initially been hotly contested spaces, evidenced in the terminology that is used:

Devonport had its own Berlin Wall.

(PR3)

...contaminated land next to a bomb dump.

(PR14)

However, as a result of the SEP initiative and the ensuing local projects, they emerged as being celebrated symbols of the people's capabilities:

Let's get the leader of Birmingham City Council to come and have a look round, because I said to him, "You've got a pearl here that you are completely unaware of". So, I got him over, and we did a walk round and he was absolutely blown away as well.

(ID8)

A substantial proportion of the SEP discourse focuses upon the availability and reuse of the buildings within a given area. At its most basic level, there is the provision of office space for new social enterprises to occupy:

Physical space being offered to social enterprises.

(OQ31)

Some areas endeavour to capitalise upon this to attract new startups by providing:

Access to real estate - local agents and landlords.

(PC6)

...cheap rent, access to premises, close to city SE clusters.

(DI22)

Sometimes these spaces are made available through contemporary social planning, such as:

One of our primary schools is actually just about to move into the senior school, they're going to kind of merge so that building potentially is coming up for grabs.

(IAM5)

Beyond this, there is a more fundamental change to the fabric of the areas through a substantial rejuvenation of the form and function of buildings in order to:

...bring redundant buildings back into use in the city.

(PT2)

Frequently this comprises a change of purpose, such as the:

Reuse of premises from pub to café and training centre.

(DK26)

However, the change can sometimes be much more substantial. For instance, the Grand Regency buildings in Devonport (PR8; PL9) were restored into "*a social enterprise hub and cultural venue*" (PE8) and:

...its stained-glass windows have just been vacated by a team of cheerleaders.

(PR9)

These do not represent instances of isolated urban-regeneration but are inextricably linked with the social identity of the place and the social purpose of its people. For instance:

...we have got one guy who takes over empty buildings and then puts social enterprises in it.

(IW9)

Additionally, it is not merely the end-result of providing a usable space that is of benefit to the SEs. The activity of engineering the rejuvenation of places also provides an opportunity for local social enterprises to contribute by:

...working with social enterprises locally to provide the fencing, some of the groundworks and also signage and things like that.

(IW10)

Common Social Cause

As one would expect from such an initiative, much of the media discourse covers the efforts that had been made to address social issues. The individual mandates of SEs within SEPs are many and varied, ranging from tackling homelessness (DL27) to care in the community (PL23) and other issues that are of significance to their location (PM2; PM3; PM10). The local significance of the projects is evident in the use of volunteers and the raising and reinvestment of local funds (DH17; PO1; PQ3). What is notable however, is the sense of unity that arises from what are their frequently disparate goals and approaches to social issues:

...joined by a common bond.

(PA2)

...common purpose...

(DD11)

The hybrid nature of social enterprise is evident in the various media sources. While the social aspects of the initiative are most prominent, the economic impact and

ability to deliver social innovation is not overlooked. Interestingly, there does not appear to be a predilection to reify either the social objectives or the economic objectives above the other. Instead, the inextricable links between socioeconomic objectives are emphasised:

...community as well as economic objectives.

(D118)

...doing business for a good cause.

(PA3)

...putting SE into policy and economic growth industrial strategy.

(OJ20)

What often appears as an important factor to many individuals is the ability of the SEP initiative to deliver “...real, tangible innovative projects” (PL6). What emerges once again from the media is the sense of collective benefit that is generated as a result of growing social enterprise:

...social enterprise transforms the economy for the benefit of all.

(PH3)

University

Across most of the areas that were studied, universities were identified as important vehicles for developing and spreading the message of the SEP initiative. The utility of the university was most vehemently expressed among the Portsmouth media materials and interviews, frequently raising the importance of its identification as the:

...world’s first officially certified ‘social enterprise’ university.

(PA8, PB4, PC1, PD1, PE7, PG7)

In the other areas, Oxford Brookes University (IO4), the University of Cumbria (IAM2), Liverpool Hope University (AMG2) and Glyndwr University Business School (WG8) were identified as being key to the SEP initiative:

...the universities did a great job.

(IO5)

The role of the universities appears to be similar across each of the sites and spans their broad mission of research, business engagement and teaching. For instance, they engaged with local schools to introduce young people in the area to the concept of 'social enterprise' and have also played a key role in attracting funding to support social enterprise growth and development:

...there were grants given...to support social enterprises setting up and growing.

(IO5)

Their research and knowledge have also been perceived as being valuable to the legitimacy and success of the SEP initiative:

...a driving force, using world-class research and entrepreneurial expertise.

(PD3)

...awarded a £230,000 research grant to study social enterprise practices across Europe.

(WH1)

One of the practical ways in which universities contributed to the growth of the SEP initiative was through the embedding of the discipline within their curricula. In addition to this, some areas benefitted through the active engagement of students with the SEP initiative:

Getting it on the curriculum for the university is a big success because there are not many social enterprise degrees.

(IW5)

...great stuff going on within university... along with the Student Hubs.

(IO4)

...University run scheme to find, reward, support existing and aspiring social entrepreneurs from students and staff and alumni.

(ON25)

It must be noted, that not all universities are deeply embedded in SEP initiatives:

...so far, we haven't seen many universities showing an interest in social enterprises (WH4).

However, where they are involved their role is unequivocally beneficial, as the continuation of the previous statement says:

It is terrific that our local university is doing so... (WH4).

Place-Bound Activities

Organising SE events appears to be a common practice across the SEPs. Despite the requirements of being an SEP making no specific obligations for events to occur, the data demonstrate the importance of both organising and utilising existing events in order to help improve the awareness and perception of SEs:

[Events] will focus on raising awareness of social enterprise, opening up market opportunities for social enterprises to trade, and promoting volunteering, work experience and employment in social enterprises.

(DJ24)

We then ran a week-long activity. We called it a Social Enterprise City Festival. It generated quite a lot of interest, locally, and got quite a lot of media attention and splash.

(IP15)

These events are symbolically recognised for their ability to raise the profile of SEs, by transforming existing places such as town halls, lecture theatres and the high-street pubs into meaningful (to SE) venues. These events have been deemed successful because they are ‘designed for the community’ demonstrating that their purpose is to support those ‘locally’ who are interested in ‘making a change’ or wanting to ‘change the way this place does business’. Many events legitimize environments for individuals and organisations that wish to do business in or with them. Considerable importance is attributed to events that afford SEs the opportunity to tell their ‘real life stories’ in person directly to potential customers:

The Festival aims to be a week-long celebration of social enterprise in the city.

We try to run events themed around different things every year. One was on Health, one was on Arts and Culture, one was Business and the Economy. It ties in with Global Entrepreneurship Week and Plymouth Enterprise Week that the University runs.

(IP8)

The data also suggest that SEPs enable the ‘social construction’ of a place by facilitating a range of alliances made up of locally based SE practitioners and residents who understand the unique attributes of the places in which they live and work. Subsequently, their sense of place has become a source of value and education that helps inform the practice of SEPs. This manifests in a number of ways. SEPs function as a place-bound network where members view each other, and the group as a whole,

as sources of local knowledge. The function of the SEP subsequently becomes one of a socially situated network that aims to benefit from the multiplicity of practices and knowledge held by its members. Sharing ‘local knowledge’ and more generic business advice to help support SEs develop and deliver market based social innovation is a key function of SEPs. For example, Wrexham, Digbeth and Plymouth host thematic SE networking events that are often focused around key SE issues such as reporting social value and financial accounting:

I’ve found that the networks that we create through place then drive the rest of our business because we engage the individuals. We’re giving them something that they find extremely valued.

(ID2)

There are regular Network meetings, events, promotions, newsletters and all the stuff that you expect from a business network, really. We try to get good speakers in and we put events on like these in partnership with other organisations.

(IP31)

As part of the network, as part of the people who created Social Enterprise Place we are able to have conversations that aren’t about our organisations.

(IW14)

The network meets every other month with a theme, and it’s only an hour and a half, but people usually stay for an extra half an hour or longer, just chatting because they can.

(ID18)

The resulting SEP programme has also proven to expand beyond local influence. Many SEPs have members who provide links to other economic and social development groups. These activities have ensured that SEPs have representation on Local Enterprise Partnership Boards (LEP), Chambers of Commerce and local Councils:

Some of the new social enterprises that are getting growth funding, are based outside the city.

(IO9)

At the more regional level, we worked with the Local Enterprise Partnership. They recognise Plymouth as a strong social enterprise leader, and that's given us quite a strong voice within the LEP.

(IP1)

These links have led to SEs being able to lobby for support for SEs and social entrepreneurs. As a result, both practical and financial support for SEs can now be accessed in Plymouth, Oxfordshire, Wrexham, Alston Moore and Digbeth. For example, Plymouth Council have committed £2.2 million pounds to support SE development in the city while Alston Moore SEP has managed to influence Cumbrian County Council to dedicate £50,000 annual to supporting the sector:

That discussion, lobbying and nudging led to a policy which was, ultimately, 'Let's put £2.2m into social enterprises in the city run by the Council'.

(IP13)

If we're talking to people at government level, and to the senior levels of the university management, they will associate with the Places brand.

(IO8)

Through the Cumbrian Social Enterprise Partnership we have, that the county council funds, we've got a business support programme.

(IAM4)

We've done quite a bit of work on it here, and we worked with Birmingham City Council to implement their social business charter that is linked to every single contract that they put out above a certain value.

(ID20)

It is not just a local pressure group, actually it is part of something much bigger. That makes it easier for agencies like the local authority to engage with it because we have got a credibility, a status that enables us to say, 'We are representing Wrexham as a Social Enterprise Place.' It gets us round a few tables sometimes.

(IW1)

Wider Communication

A great deal of effort has been placed upon the communication of the SEP initiatives in each of the areas that were studied, as evidenced by the gamut of media sources that this study was able to draw upon. Much of this is focussed at a local level, within the SEP itself, and serves to evidence and disseminate the concrete local activities and achievements:

...connecting students, academics, researchers, businesses and entrepreneurs...

(PD5)

...there are regular Network meetings, events, promotions, newsletters and all the stuff that you expect from a business network...

(IP31)

There is however, some recognition of the limitations of this approach:

We put up blogs and opinion pieces alongside some cold, hard news in the business pages, so I suspect awareness in the business community is high, whereas, with the general public and consumers, it's maybe not quite so high.

(IP32)

Perhaps as a consequence of this there is some evidence of deliberate communication being made beyond the notional boundaries of the SEP. For instance:

...working with the British Council ...

(PB24)

Where it is definitely significant is that network of other Places.

We found that really, really important both ways, in terms of sharing what we've done, but also learning from others.

(IO13)

However, some recognise that this also could be improved:

I think we can get better leverage from the connections we have with other Social Enterprise Places, than we are currently doing.

(IO12)

Whatever the extent and limitations of the current level of understanding of SE, the effects of the SEP initiative are extending beyond their geographic boundaries. The once sequestered pockets of social enterprise innovation appear to be melding into a single movement, even though they may still be physically separated. In addition,

political channels of communication have been enacted in most SEPs either at a local level with local authorities or on a national scale by getting local MPs and even Prime Ministers to endorse their local SEP agenda. For example, Oxfordshire had the endorsement of David Cameron (OA2; OC8).

Summary

Evidence from the five SEPs researched for this study suggests that their legitimacy, and therefore also their success, is facilitated by several pertinent BOs. The data are awash with examples of how an affinity to a specific place has informed a series of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic BOs, each of which has played its role in the development of the sector within the confines of a geographical place. All of the SEPs have consistently promoted the value of the sector at a local level through place-based events or via the lobbying of local politicians and business leaders. The actions of the SEPs have subsequently resulted in SEs gaining sizeable public sector contracts (Birmingham), taking over public leisure services with the support of community asset transfer schemes (Wrexham), Local Enterprise Partnerships embracing the sector into its agenda for economic development and growth (Oxfordshire/Plymouth), financial support for SE development from Local Authorities (Plymouth/Alston Moore/Oxfordshire) and in extreme cases the re-imagining of business/economic activity in a specific locale (Alston Moore/Plymouth).

DISCUSSION

The data analysis indicates the complex interplay between the BOs that may be observed within the places that are involved in the SEP initiative. For instance, the geographic ‘name’ of the place afforded both a ‘label’ for the various stakeholders that it encompassed, which enabled a sense of collective self-identity (Qureshi et al., 2018)

to develop, and attracted further socially enterprising ventures to emerge, which aided in the movement gaining recognition and leverage to secure further support. This tacit BO is viewed as a Bridging BO, or the ‘prime mover’ of the SEP initiative, that enabled the other BOs to emerge or become recognised as legitimizing structures. Thus, the findings both support and advance Huybrechts and Nicholls’ (2013) and Tracey et al.’s (2005) work that indicates the importance of cross sector collaboration to build SEs legitimacy. Whilst, from a macromarketing perspective this adds another dimension to the work of Cicek, Ulu and Uslay (2019) by suggesting the place name itself and one’s topophilic (Tuan, 1974) values attributed to it can also legitimise a desire to partake in ethical/socially responsible business practices and consumption patterns.

Drawing upon Star and Griesemer (1989) and Carlile (2002) Figure 2 depicts the ‘ontological hierarchy’ of the place-bound BOs. The SEP initiative provided the language and label of ‘place’ that was pivotal in enabling the many and varied outcomes that were observed in each area. ‘Place’ became an abstract symbol that galvanised and validated SE and formed the lexicon by which previously misaligned stakeholders were able to readjust to tackle pressing social needs. Developing Kemper and Ballantine’s (2017) work this study additionally reveals that Universities appear to play a particularly important role in operationalizing the symbolic and abstract notions of ‘place’ into concrete actions. For instance, the development of expert centres and resources assisted in the development of current socially enterprising activities, while the incorporation of SE concepts into higher education cemented the principles of the movement into the future workforce and citizens.

The common social causes that persist in areas of deprivation and the historical socio-economic landscape of the SEPs present real-world issues that warrant addressing through social initiatives. Many of these had been long-standing concerns and it was

through the provision of the language of ‘place’ and the galvanisation of the collective efforts of institutions such as universities and councils that they were tackled. In all cases the SEP initiative was fundamentally operationalized through practical projects that aided socially enterprising groups and individuals. It was these successful and dramatic transformations that further facilitated the validity of socially enterprising efforts and were communicated within and between SEPs, thereby enabling shared knowledge and collective momentum to be built. Such activities are arguably testament to a co-creative culture that could be seen as a novel blue print for urban planning that favours liveable and sustainable spaces (Cerovecki and Grunhagen, 2016).

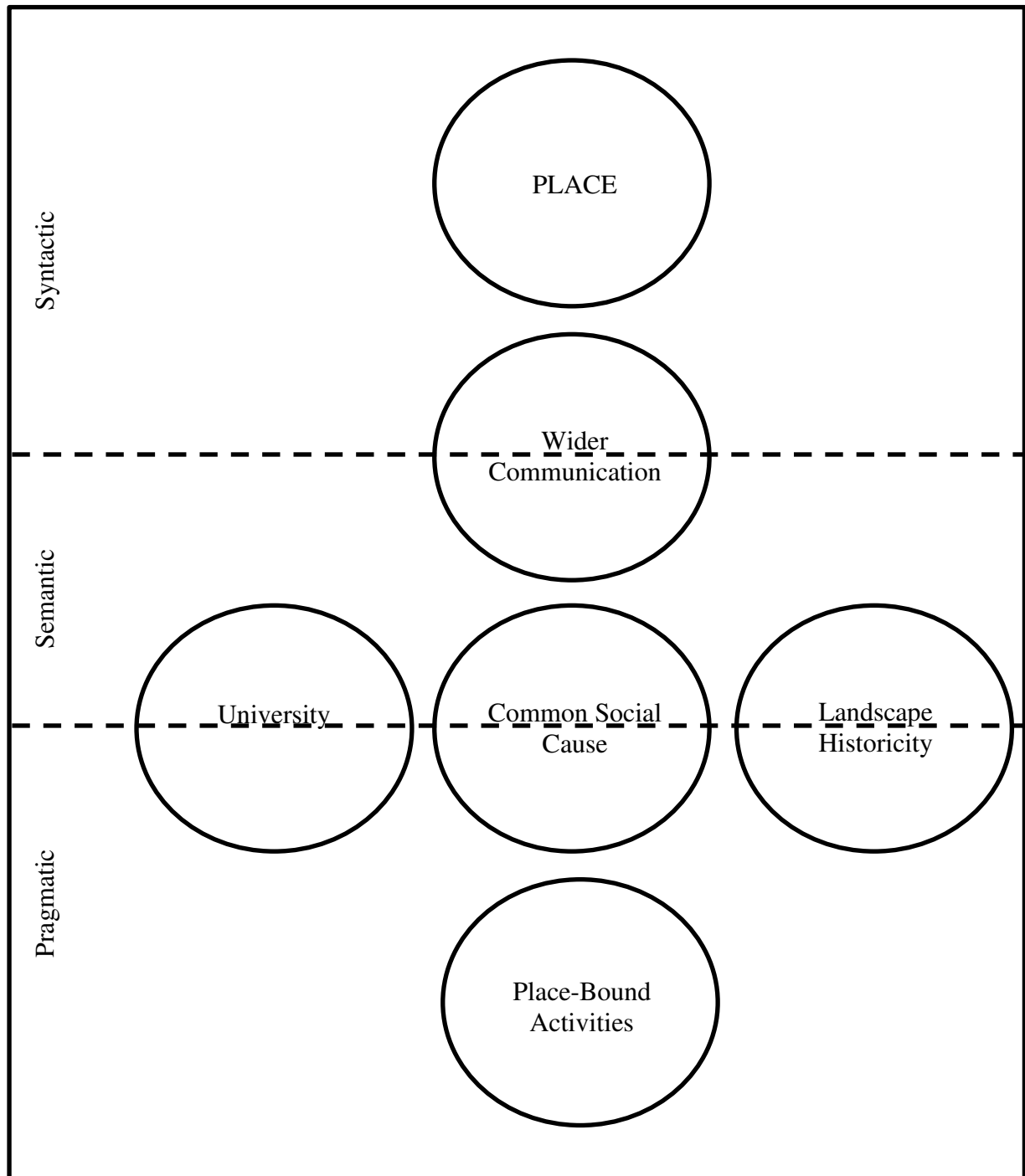


Figure 2, Ontology of SEP Boundary Objects

The historical landscapes within each SEP provide some novel insight into BOs. While they have been variously described as enabling or preventing the sharing of knowledge across social boundaries (Star and Griesemer, 1989), Lainer-Vos (2013) identified the

temporal nature of the interpretation of BOs by different social groups that resulted in the same BO being perceived as ‘bridging’ by one group, but as a ‘barrier’ by another. This study further develops our understanding of the temporaneity of BOs in finding that they may also transform between ‘bridging’ and ‘barrier’ types over time. For instance, many of the buildings and facilities within each area were richly laden with historical significance, either because they were abandoned edifices of previous economic success or were neglected social spaces. These were Barrier BOs that had emerged as symbols of the erosion of public duty. However, through the legitimizing effect of the SEP initiative these became the focus of socially enterprising activities and, following successful transformation, they became beacons of success. As such, over time these BOs are also seen as undergoing transformation into Bridging BOs (Figure 3). There is some evidence within the data that socially enterprising individuals, termed ‘boundary spanners’ by Qureshi et al. (2018), who have been instrumental in the transformation of buildings, are becoming viewed as ‘social champions’. While we do not yet view them as a form of Bridging BO, they may emerge over time as agents of significant social change or may be fulfilling this role in other locations.

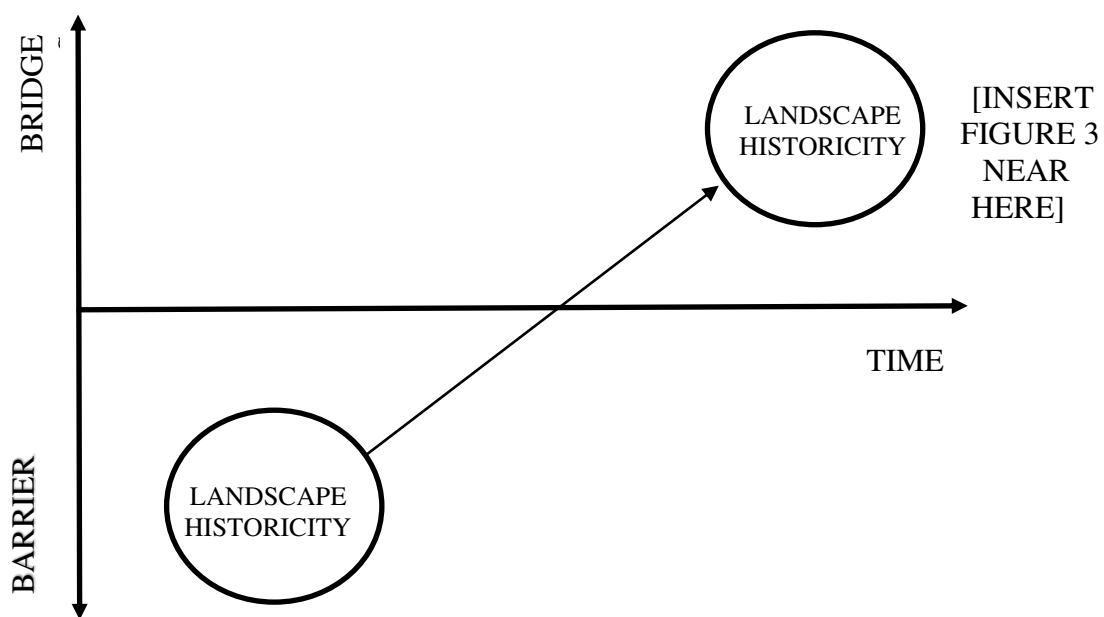


Figure 3: Observed Temporal Transformation of Landscape Historicity Boundary Objects

The findings contribute to our understanding of SEs beyond their internal machinations and start to reveal early empirical understandings of both a meso and macro level shaping of their legitimacy via the spatial and social context within which they operate (Munoz, 2010; Cicek, Ulu and Uslay, 2019). In addition to Kemper and Ballantine (2017), Casey, Lichrou and O'Malley (2017) and Samuel and Peattie's (2015) understandings of how socio-spatial interactions in distinct and general places can influence sustainable/ethical practices and consumption patterns, this work also suggests that the SEP environment, and its constituent actors, have combined to both facilitate the legitimacy of individual SEs and the SE movement as a whole. This in turn also appears to help confer the perception of legitimacy upon the SEP initiative and the SEs it comprises. This also suggests that concerns about SEs' commercial performance and their ability to balance their social and economic missions has the potential to be counterbalanced by place-based legitimacy conferred by local stakeholders. Or as Bensemann et al. (2018, p.2) express it: "*Place sentiments can overwhelm economic rationality in conferring legitimacy*". Strengthening their perceived place belonging through SEP membership and interactions therefore may represent a valuable source of additional legitimacy for SEs.

The lack of precise definitions and established epistemology of SEs has been stated to be a contributor to their perceived lack of legitimacy (Nicholls, 2010; Teasdale et al., 2013). While this may be a point of academic concern, it does not appear to be one that affects the practical operations of SEs. On the contrary, through the combined involvement of important local institutions and community events that are targeted upon shared issues of local concern within the SEP, the purpose of SEs becomes

socially constructed. In tandem, the challenge of measuring and reporting their social value is ameliorated by virtue of the fact that it is demonstrated within the landscape that they and their stakeholders inhabit (Mook et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2015). Consequently, their social and economic value is in part demonstrated in the reimagined buildings and spaces that are experienced as part of everyday life.

There is evidence that the perennial problem of accessing funding and achieving financial stability has also been somewhat mitigated within SEPs (Grieco et al., 2014; Zainon et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2015). The support of important local institutions, and the collaboration between SEs has served to substantiate the legitimacy of the SEP initiative. This has resulted in greater awareness of the importance and potential of SEs and, in some instances, local authorities have budgeted funds specifically for SE support and development. Similarly, the challenge of establishing and communicating their social purpose is recognised to be constrained by expertise and resource availability (White et al., 2008; Peattie and Morley, 2008; Jenner, 2016; Allen, 2020). However, the SEP initiative seems to afford a means of collectively establishing and operationalising a clear macromarketing proposition that communicates to consumers and organisations alike the positive impacts that supporting SEs can have on their immediate and wider community (Hunt 1981).

CONCLUSION

Social Enterprises have emerged as an economically as well as socially valuable form of business that are capable of delivering social value and innovation at a local, national and international level. However, despite their significant contributions and importance they are beset by a myriad of complex problems, among which, establishing their legitimacy is a fundamental concern. In an attempt to address these challenges, SEUK launched the Social Enterprises Places initiative that aims to promote alliances in order

to raise awareness, improve perceptions of their legitimacy, and build markets for social enterprise at a local (geographically bound) level. This examination of five Social Enterprise Place (SEP) locations in the UK evidences this efficacious endeavour. Through a combination of facilitating the legitimization of social enterprises and activities, networking and sharing socially enterprising knowledge, these regions have made significant progress toward building a thriving place-based environment.

The identification of a hierarchy of BOs leads to the recognition of the foundations upon which ‘legitimacy’ may be facilitated. The syntactic BO of ‘place’ manifests as the immaterial language that enables the, semantic, meaning of social norms and values to be shared. This, in turn, facilitates the mobilization of resources toward addressing real, pragmatic, issues. The successful completion of collaborative initiatives thereby is argued to act as a macromarketing dynamic that is able to reinforce the legitimacy of the SEP initiative and foster the growth and capabilities of the movement. This provides new insight into the means by which ‘legitimacy’ is facilitated, created and conferred. Legitimacy may be conceived of being constructed upon three mutually necessary and reinforcing pillars of ‘syntactic legitimacy’, ‘semantic legitimacy’ and ‘pragmatic legitimacy’.

Observing each of these geographically bound SEP initiatives has revealed the emergence of a common set of Boundary Objects that are predicated upon the establishment of a place-based syntax. It is this that has enabled a shared understanding of common sociohistorical issues across social boundaries and thereby fostered a social praxis that has advanced the delivery of social innovations. While the literature on BOs is considerable, this is the first study that identifies an ontology of semantic and pragmatic BOs that emerge from the instantiation of the syntactic form that is ‘place’. Furthermore, it provides some insight into the tacit forms of BOs that thus far have

received little attention, and it identifies the significant influence that quasi-immaterial notions, such as ‘place’, may have in forging bonds and developing alliances across social groups. In addition, the study observed that BOs are not always ‘conceptually bound’ by type and may, over time, transform from ‘barriers’ to ‘bridges’.

A final contribution that this study makes to the field of macromarketing is to highlight the potential for place attachment to operate as a source of legitimacy within the marketing system through a shared notion of ‘belonging’. Although the relationship between belonging and legitimacy is widely discussed within cultural studies, it has barely figured in considerations of how companies, and particularly ethical and sustainability driven organizations, generate legitimacy. One of the few exceptions to this is the study by Bensemman et al. (2018) of entrepreneurial engagement within a disadvantaged community in New Zealand. They demonstrated how differences in local stakeholder perceptions linked to concepts of place can impact (for better or worse) the economic performance based legitimacy that entrepreneurial activity earns. For SEs struggling to balance economic success with social mission contribution, this potential for place and belonging to impact their perceived legitimacy is arguably even greater. This points to belonging and legitimacy as a valuable future research avenue to consider in relation to SE specifically, but perhaps also for business more generally.

Finally, this study suggests some important factors for current and future social development initiatives. First, the findings clearly indicate the importance of the place-based language that serves to identify and unite the many active agents toward common goals. Such initiatives should take advantage of the cohesive power of place identity throughout the lifespan of the project. Similarly, the socio-historical value that is placed upon buildings or areas should not be overlooked when planning redevelopments. Such artefacts are not merely abstract resources to be utilised, rather they should be regarded

as important facets of the landscape that act as focal points for community-based social development. In this manner, initiatives may acknowledge or even ‘celebrate’ the acceptable socio-historical origins of some of these locations and in doing so generate a new reality that includes their authentic past, rather than seek to deny and replace it.

While this exploration of the SEP initiative has drawn upon a broad selection of the types of places that it encompasses, each is assumed to be representative of the other regions of its type. It would be valuable to explore the other locations in which the SEP operates and also other instances where social enterprise development is bounded by a geography. Future BO research in the field of macromarketing should specifically explore their temporal permanence, not only to examine their transition between bridging and barrier forms but also the function of BOs in triggering the materialisation of other BOs. The complex interplay between commercial and social enterprises provides a rich landscape in which to observe public good marketing systems’ (Kadirov, 2018) capacity for alliance and continuation under a novel set of circumstances. SEs’ collaborative endeavours to provide social as well as economic benefits present different challenges to their strategic and operational alignment. Future valuable research could be made through the examination of SE-to-SE alliances, case studies of SE-commercial alliances and SE-government alliances. This paper finally calls for the macromarketing community to further unpack the complexities of SE by pursuing marketing systems-based research that for example could adopt Kadirov’s (2018) theory of marketing systems for the public good, or utilise Layton’s (2007, 2019) systems-based approach.

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Appendix A, Locations and Media Sources

SEP	Media Sources	Interview Details
Oxfordshire (County)	https://www.thenews.coop/89952/topic/democracy/prime-minister-welcomes-first-social-enterprise-county/ https://www.brookes.ac.uk/about-brookes/news/oxfordshire-designated-a-socialenterprise-place-/ https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/oxfordshire https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/about-places https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/analysis-oxfordshire-uks-first-social-enterprise-place/social-enterprise/article/1322423 https://www.osep.org.uk/social-enterprise/near-me https://www.collaborent.co.uk/who-we-work-with/social-enterprise/social-enterprise-places/ https://www.oxfordshirebusinesssupport.co.uk/content/social-enterprise https://www.thenews.coop/89952/topic/democracy/prime-minister-welcomes-first-social-enterprise-county/ https://www.prweb.com/releases/2014/09/prweb12162406.htm https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/funding-community-groups	Two leaders of the SEP: Male, Business Support. Female, University. Time: 2:34:22

	<p>https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2016/11/putting-social-entrepreneurs-at-the-heart-of-industrial-strategy</p> <p>http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2014/Name,100786.en.html</p> <p>https://www.gll.org/b2b/newsitems/gll-celebrates-uk-s-first-social-enterprise-place-in-oxfordshire</p> <p>http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/11874649.County_leads_the_way_in_social_enterprises__declares_minister/</p> <p>https://www.oxford.gov.uk/oxsp/downloads/file/65/paper_2_-_social_enterprise_in_oxfordshire</p> <p>https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/news/article/tender-opportunity-oxlep-building-oxfordshires-social-enterprise-community</p> <p>https://newstartmag.co.uk/articles/oxford-city-council-launch-direct-services-social-enterprise/</p> <p>http://cagoxfordshire.org.uk/new-hub-creative-social-enterprises-looking-occupants/</p> <p>http://www.recyclingwasteworld.co.uk/news/oxford-city-council-transfers-waste-services-to-social-enterprise/172302/</p> <p>https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/our-work/devolution-1/2140-the-oxfordshire-together-model/file</p>	
<p>Plymouth (City)</p>	<p>https://plymsocent.org.uk</p> <p>https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/plymouth</p> <p>https://www.visitplymouth.co.uk/invest/why-plymouth/key-sectors/social-enterprise</p> <p>https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/investmentandgrowth/strategicgrowth/social-enterpriseinvestmentfundcapitalandvenuegrantsloans</p> <p>https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/about-us/university-structure/service-areas/social-enterprise</p> <p>https://realideas.org/social-enterprise-week/</p> <p>http://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Plymouth-Phase-1-report-SE-UK-FINAL-Aug-2016.pdf</p> <p>http://plymouthnewsroom.co.uk/4620-2/</p> <p>https://www.pkf-francisclark.co.uk/news-views/latest-news/plymouth-social-enterprise-city-festival/</p> <p>https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2012/universities-enabling-social-enterprise-delivering-benefits-for-all.pdf</p> <p>http://www.newcontinental.co.uk/social-enterprise-city-celebrating-plymouth-enterprise-week/</p> <p>http://dot-design.co.uk/portfolio_piece/plymouth-social-enterprise-city-directory-design/</p> <p>https://www.devonportlive.com/single-post/2015/11/13/Devonport-The-Heart-of-Social-Enterprise?fb_comment_id=852644304804713_1164798636922610</p> <p>https://www.co-cars.co.uk/social-enterprise/</p> <p>http://www.commercialnewsmedia.com/archives/18597</p> <p>https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/social-enterprise-action-plymouth</p> <p>https://reviveandthrive.co.uk/social-entrepreneurs/</p> <p>http://www.connectedplymouth.co.uk/programmes-and-support/smart-city</p> <p>http://www.councils.coop/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/mir_social_enterprise.pdf</p> <p>https://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/news/business/these-are-plymouths-nicest-businesses-1416637</p> <p>https://ourplymouth.co.uk/news/2018/new-social-enterprise-shop-where-everythings-1</p> <p>https://www.edp.org.uk/hmp-dartmoor-prisoners-complete-social-enterprise-qualification/</p> <p>https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/11/post-industrial-plymouth-business-social-enterprise</p> <p>https://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2015/jul/16/we-wouldnt-go-back-into-the-nhs-plymouths-pioneering-social-enterprise</p>	<p>Leader of the SEP:</p> <p>Male, Social Entrepreneur.</p> <p>Time: 1:43:02</p>

<p>Wrexham (Town)</p>	<p>https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/wrexham https://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/business/social_economy/se_toolkit.htm https://avow.org/en/news/wrexham-social-enterprise-network/ https://www.dailypost.co.uk/business/north-wales-social-enterprises-shortlisted-13512487 https://caiapark.org.uk/wrexham-based-social-enterprises-recognised-for-significant-contributions/ https://caiapark.org.uk/enterprises/ http://www.everyonesbusiness.coop/en/2016/07/12/wrexham-businesses-work-together-to-earn-social-enterprise-place-status/ https://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/AboutGlyndwrUniversity/Newsandmediacentre/Newsarchive/PressReleases2016/SocialEnterprise/ http://www.cynefincommunities.org.uk/places/wrexham.html http://www.cais.co.uk/services/social-enterprises/ http://togetherinwrexham.co.uk/together/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Successful-bids-summary-English-Sept-2017.pdf</p>	<p>Leader of the SEP: Female, Social Entrepreneur. Time: 2:07:12</p>
<p>Alston Moore (Village)</p>	<p>http://www.cybermoor.org/social-enterprise-town/social-enterprise-places-architect-clive-hirst http://www.cybermoor.org/community/social-enterprise-town/ https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/alston-moor https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/special-report-how-community-spirit-pays-a-dividend-8669751.html http://www.cwherald.com/a/archive/alston-named-country-s-first-social-enterprise-town.410994.html http://www.cwherald.com/a/archive/signs-celebrate-moor-as-very-special-place-in-the-world.477503.html http://www.socialenterprisesolutions.co.uk/social-enterprise-places/ https://www.theguardian.com/social-enterprise-network/2011/feb/22/rural-social-enterprise-iceberg https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/288035/pb14145-social-enterprises-evidence-report-140310.pdf</p>	<p>Leader of the SEP: Female, Social Entrepreneur. Time: 1:52:10</p>
<p>Digbeth (Zone)</p>	<p>http://digbethsoentquarter.co.uk http://www.i-se.co.uk/news/the-digbeth-social-enterprise-quarter-successfully-launches/ https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/digbeth http://bssec.org.uk/about-social-enterprise/the-digbeth-social-enterprise-quarter/ https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-25349117 http://www.midlandsinbusiness.com/2015/04/social-enterprise-week-birmingham/ http://artbusinessloans.co.uk/art-supports-digbeth-social-enterprise-quarter/ https://www.bbpmmedia.co.uk/news/professionalservices/city-drive-celebrating-5-years-of-capacity-building-the.html https://www.bvsc.org/sites/default/files/bvsc_update_246_V4_3.pdf http://svsummit.interserve.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sarah-crawley.pdf?sfvrsn=0 http://www.grapevinebirmingham.com/take-a-social-enterprise-themed-bicycle-tour-of-digbeth/ http://www.midlandsbusinessnews.co.uk/digbeth-social-enterprise-full-of-beans-with-second-venture/ https://embertelevision.co.uk/blog/helping-the-homeless-in-birmingham/ https://www.scribd.com/document/320507526/Digbeth-Social-Enterprise-Quarter-14-06-16</p>	<p>Leader of the SEP: Female, Social Entrepreneur. Time: 2:00:04</p>