

Greening the economy: interrogating sustainability innovations beyond the mainstream

Anna R. Davies* and Sue J. Mullin

Department of Geography, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

*Corresponding author: *email* <daviesa@tcd.ie>

Abstract

Current international economic and environmental conditions have led to increasing calls for alternative pathways of development. Globally, the language of a green economy is being promoted as a means to develop a 'win-win' for the economy and the environment. There are concerns, however, that the emerging frameworks for sustainable economic renewal marginalize social dimensions of sustainability and the already existing practices of sustainability innovation within the social economy. Using empirical evidence from Ireland, this article examines the dimensions of this marginalisation by interrogating the dynamic landscape of environmentally focused social economy enterprises as additional spaces of sustainability innovation for a greener economy. It is found that while these enterprises can be cast as spaces of actually existing sustainable development tensions persist which together raise general questions about measuring and communicating sustainability as well as more foundational issues relating to permissible forms of sustainable economic renewal.

Keywords: green economy, ecological modernisation, sustainability innovation, social enterprise, Ireland

JEL classifications: A13, G38, L31, L53, P16, P12, P13, Q20, Q56, Z10

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1. Introduction

The global economic downturn of the late 2000s, and the increasing cognizance of global environmental change among actors across the governance spectrum during the same period, has reincarnated demands for greener pathways for economic development. Supra-national organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have identified unprecedented levels of unemployment and environmental degradation, respectively, across the globe. Although redirecting economic growth has been a clarion call of environmentalists and supporters of strong sustainability for many decades (Neumayer, 2003), the current coincidence of political and economic circumstances has created a new policy landscape of opportunity for alternative development strategies. There is no one agreed vision of the required new landscape[s], however, and variations include development scenarios as diverse as those articulated by architects of 'the green economy' (Scott-Cato, 2009) that promote reduced or no-growth pathways on the one hand and on the other the crises-driven periods of 'creative destruction' as

crafted by Richard Florida in *The Great Reset* (Florida, 2010) that he suggests lead to new periods of economic growth and prosperity through innovation and invention. It is not surprising that environmental activists and supporters of strong sustainability find more affinity with the former scenario rather than the latter. In contrast, national governments around the globe, however, seem to be echoing the perspective of David North (Community and Government Director, Tesco plc) who, when speaking at the Royal Geographical Conference in London in 2010, felt that rather than de-emphasizing the role of business and consumerism in new development trajectories, the emphasis should be on technological innovation and consumer empowerment. This is evidenced in the raft of state-based pronouncements on the potential of restructured economies for creating employment without environmental degradation in UK, USA and beyond. The Irish Government, for example, has published statements outlining strategies for creating a smart green economy (Government of Ireland, 2008; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2009) and has commissioned a High Level Action Group on Green Enterprise (Forfás, 2009). For the most part, the emphasis in these statements is on encouraging technological eco-innovation and enterprise within the private sector; that is effectively greening the outputs of the mainstream economy rather than anything more radical. As a result, the processes of transition to a greener economy are seen to be predominantly technical and financial rather than social or political. While it may be too early to evaluate the long-term impact of these statements on the greening of mainstream development trajectories, it is an apposite time to reflect on these newly articulated, but nonetheless familiar, visions of creating a positive sum game for the economy and the environment. In particular these articulations should be read against a backdrop of already existing spaces of development that not only seek positive environmental and economic gain (perhaps pro-profit, but not necessarily for-profit) but also accommodate attention to social considerations. Often problematically categorized as 'alternative' (see Leyson et al., 2003¹) these spaces include, although may not be restricted to, environmentally focused social economy enterprise (ESEE) activities that are the focus of attention in this article.

There is a growing body of literature addressing grassroots environmental enterprises that also incorporate a social dimension to their activities. Beyond research examining eco-communities (see Pickerill and Maxey, 2009), much of this analysis has focused on specific environmental sectors, for example examining recycling (Sharp and Luckin, 2006), forestry (Macqueen, 2008), energy (Malhotra, 2006) or food production (Pudup, 2008). Aside from the work of Seyfang (2009, Seyfang and Smith, 2007) and Davies (2009), these kinds of activities have not been considered together as a distinct sub-section of the social economy. Research examining the social economy has tended to be more holistic in its approach (see Amin et al., 2002; Leyshon et al., 2003; Bridge et al., 2008; Amin, 2009; Di Domenico et al., 2009; Hudson, 2009; Fuller et al., 2010) and while some areas of activity have been delineated for specific attention, such as

1 Leyshon et al. (2003) do much to expose the relational and unstable notion of alternative within the social economy sector. In particular, Fuller and Jonas (2003) delineate different types of alternative practices including alternative-oppositional (rejecting mainstream approaches), alternative-additional (providing additional choice but not necessarily rejecting mainstream approaches) and alternative-substitute (providing goods or services that are no longer provided by mainstream activities of the public or private sector). Amin (2009) suggests another position, alternative-complementary, for social economy activity. This places social economy activity alongside but not replacing state provision or private sector development.

credit unions (Fuller and Jonas, 2003), most discussion treats the social economy as a diverse but generally coherent sector. There are a number of reasons why ESEE might not have been given specific attention within the social economy, ESEEs being relatively few in number when compared with other social economy activities perhaps, or it is possible that researchers see no distinction between the activities of ESEEs and other non-environmental focused social economy activity, but no case has been explicitly articulated. In its detailed interrogation of the ESEE sector in Ireland, this article will argue that while experiencing similar tensions between social and economic demands that commentators have highlighted in the social economy (Hudson, 2009), ESEEs experience additional and specific challenges rooted in the aspiration to meet environmental as well as social and economic goals.

Initially a reflection on the tensions within and between current discourses on transforming economies from current patterns onto more sustainable trajectories is presented. This focuses empirically on published statements from a wide range of actors operating across all spheres and tiers of governance and theoretically on a reconceptualisation of ecological modernisation as an enduring discourse of sustainability. Then attention is paid to the roles allocated to non-mainstream sectors of the economy and the position of social capital within this body of literature. Leading on from this reflection is a detailed consideration of ESEEs as actors operating beyond the mainstream economy. This section teases out the geography of ESEEs within the Republic of Ireland as delineated by a comprehensive survey of such enterprises. Moving beyond the physical location of these enterprises, this incorporates an analysis of their form and function. The influence of governing mechanisms on ESEE activities, as constructed internally through daily practices and management approaches and externally through the funding and regulating functions of the state and private sector activities, is also examined. Finally, a deliberation on the impact and associated values of the ESEEs sector in Ireland is presented, and the challenges facing it outlined. In conclusion, the implications of the research in the context of the 'new recession economy' of Ireland are detailed. While the highly contextual nature of ESEEs, both in terms of definition and operation, limits a simple extrapolation of precise findings to other geographical contexts, attention to broad patterns of engagement between ESEEs, governments and the mainstream private sector economy adds importantly to current policy and academic rhetoric of greening economies.

2. Smart green economies: reiterating the rhetoric of weak ecological modernisation?

Attention to the complexities of economies, particularly the pervasive forms of capitalist economies, has long been a preoccupation of economists, political analysts and economic geographers, reflecting what Hudson neatly summarizes as 'the plurality of competing forms in which capitalist economies can be conceived and constructed' (2009, p. 494). It is not the aim here to rehearse these debates apart from reiterating the position that current interpretations of neo-liberal capitalism which focus on the individual, celebrate material consumption and valorise the acquisition of commodities seem to be increasingly creating social inequalities and environmental insecurity (Castree, 2008). Instead, the purpose of this section is to reflect specifically on recent statements arguing for a readjustment to economic patterns that seek to address

environmental degradation while ensuring economic growth. Two bodies of literature are considered here, initially separately and then collectively in relation to this article's focus on ESEEs. The first emanates predominantly from formal government and non-governmental bodies who make explicit cases for restructuring current practices to promote a less environmentally destructive approach to economic development couched in the framework of 'green jobs'. The second reflects on the academic work that has similarly focused on economic readjustments to facilitate a positive sum game for the environment and the economy, primarily within the conceptual realm of ecological modernisation.

In 2010, the ILO made the ominous statement that unemployment, linked to the global economic recession, had reached its highest ever level globally in 2009 (ILO, 2010). It has been estimated that in 2009 around 212 million people are out of work with little immediate reduction in that number on the horizon (Houser et al., 2009). Only a few years earlier the UNEP's fourth global environmental outlook stated dramatically that there was 'unprecedented environmental change at global and regional levels... [n]ow is the time to pursue the transition towards sustainable development supported by well-governed, innovative and results-oriented institutions' (UNEP, 2007). Taken together, the coincidence of these economic and environmental crises has led to the coalescing of rhetoric from states and non-governmental organizations, around the need for stronger, more resilient pathways for development that are more likely to provide employment (often presented as a proxy for social capacity building) and environmental protection, particularly with respect to mitigating and adapting to climate change. Various referred to as a 'New Green Deal', or the 'Smart, Green Economy' among other monikers, the suggestion is that economic growth can be reasserted through innovation and the future environmental well-being of the planet secured.

While there are multiple channels through which simultaneous growth and protection might be achieved, the most commonly articulated arenas of development are identified as the highly technological environmental innovations sector (Huber, 2008) and include renewable energies, carbon capture and storage, transgenics and nanotechnologies. For example, UNEP (2008) estimated that at least 2.3 million people were employed in the renewables sector in 2006 and predicts an increase in these numbers by 2030 to over 20 million across wind, solar and biofuel-related industry and agriculture. Indeed, the UNEP and Sustainability Energy Finance (SEF) Alliance has stated that renewable energy programmes will generate 'per dollar, an order of magnitude more jobs than will expenditures for fossil fuel plants or tax cuts' (2008, p. 78). However there are counter reports, such as Fankhauser et al. (2008), which suggest that while labour-intensive, low carbon jobs will emerge initially, the numbers could level out and even decline in the future. Equally job losses are likely to occur in other sectors traditionally reliant on fossil fuels as a result of decarbonisation strategies (Houser et al., 2009).

Optimistic outlooks for the green economic sector are replicated at the supra-national level with the European Commission estimating, in 2009, that the attainment of the 20% target for renewables by 2020 could create around 410,000 jobs. Nation-states too seem to be pinning their hopes on 'green jobs' with USA passing American Recovery and Investment Act in 2009 with between \$60–80 billion (depending on how calculations are compiled) allocated to clean technology, green jobs and energy efficiency initiatives. The Act included grants for advanced batteries and electric vehicles, for the adoption of smart energy grid projects and the expansion of the

alternative fuel vehicles fleet (Wheeland, 2010). Similarly, at least in terms of focus, the Welsh Assembly published *Capturing the Potential: a green jobs strategy for Wales* (Department of Economy and Transport, 2009) in which it explicitly stated its commitment to promoting an economic recovery alongside strengthening its action to combat the causes and impacts of climate change. This document suggests that already the low carbon sector in UK is on a par with the health and construction sectors being valued at £106.5 billion in 2007/2008 and forecast to grow at 5% per annum despite the current economic conditions. While there is less evidence of a direct government cash injection in the Welsh context, there is the prediction that £50 billion worth of investments in low carbon energy production could be located in Wales alone over the next 10–15 years bringing green job opportunities to a region where many communities are still experiencing the effects of deindustrialisation during the 1980s. Of course such optimistic readings of economic development potential are not new to regions like Wales as detailed in the work of Lovering from the late 1990s (Lovering, 1999).²

The dramatic fall from grace of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy in Ireland has been widely reported and linked directly to governance failures, particularly with respect to banking practices and the housing sector (see Murphy and Devlin, 2009; O’Toole, 2009; Ross, 2009). Despite the specificities of Ireland’s experience of the global recession, the proposed solutions have been remarkably similar to other nation-state responses around notions of a smart economy. In 2008, a framework for sustainable economic renewal was published by the Department of the Taoiseach (Department of the Prime Minister), which identified the inter-related challenges of climate change and energy security, suggesting that the ‘smart economy is a green economy in that it recognises the inter-related challenges of climate change and energy security. It involves the transition to a low-carbon economy and recognizes the opportunities for investment and jobs in clean industry’ (Department of Taoiseach, 2008, p. 8). By 2009, The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment had published its plan for providing the economic renewal *Science, Technology and Innovation: delivering the smart economy* which, as its title suggests, focused specifically on the scientific knowledge-based foundations. It also led to the formation in 2009 of a High Level Group on Green Enterprise aimed at stimulating the green economy. The suggested approach to create such an environmentally focused economy was to develop key sectors including renewable energy, efficient energy use and management (including eco-construction), waste management, recovery and recycling, waste and waste water treatment. In contrast to the UK government that seems to be keen to devolve service responsibilities to more local levels and engage with what is being increasingly called ‘Big Society’ (Cox and Schmuecker, 2010), in Ireland reforms of the planning and foreshore licensing regimes are proposed, including the location of decision-making powers with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to speed up planning decisions for green developments. Set alongside procedural mechanisms for facilitating green developments is the proposal to identify green zones, green public procurement and a green international financial services centre linked to world-class centres for research and development in

2 While the focus of Lovering’s (1999) concern was what he saw as an over-simplistic, and hence problematic, relationship between theory and policy making in the realm of new regionalism, there is some useful work to be done examining more intimately than is possible in this paper the relationship between research and policy-making in the field of the green economy as described in governmental documents.

niche green areas based in Ireland. Together the overarching aim is explicitly ‘to extend this [the ‘green island’] brand into the environmental goods and services sector’ (Forfás, 2009, p. 11). In contrast to USA though there has been no major stimulus package provided to create employment within the green sector.

Bold statements for a new approach to economic practice are not restricted to government pronouncements or formal environmental organizations. The Global Climate Network, for example, notes that ‘[g]overnment action on climate change promises economic opportunity. The language of climate change policy has hitherto been largely negative, with wide use of such words as ‘limitation’, ‘constraint’ and ‘reduction’. However, investing in new technology, stimulating new economic activity around a re-engineering of energy systems and growing new markets—all necessary to avoid climate catastrophe—will stimulate growth and offer new, skilled employment to workers’ (Global Climate Network, 2010, p. 4). Other collaborations such as the Green New Deal Group in UK, including journalists, activists, authors, green party MPs and policy advisors, have outlined the large-scale investments that are required to create an environmental transformation and new green collar jobs. Fundamental to this group’s proposed solution to the enviro-economic crisis is the provision of low-cost capital to help fund the green economic shift. Where the plan diverges from nation-state documents is in the explicit articulation of the need for new alliances between environmentalists, industry, agriculture and the unions. Similarly the Institute for Public Policy Research, among other think tanks, has proposed that ‘our entire economy will have to reinvent itself so that every job, from office manager to architect or plumber, becomes a ‘green job’—radically transforming out patterns of carbon consumption and resource efficiency’ (Lawton, 2010, p. 1).

While the optimism of these documents is intuitively appealing, the literature reveals little consistency in terms of what is meant by the term green employment (UNEP/SEF Alliance, 2009), and in many cases green jobs are more accurately described as jobs within the renewable energy or clean-tech sector (Bird and Lawton, 2010). In addition, there is often limited detail on where and how these jobs will be manifest and for whom will they be available (Brinkley et al., 2008; Van Jones, 2008; White and Walsh, 2008a; Bird, 2009; Bird et al., 2010). Highly technological sectors will not be easily accessible for those already struggling to find employment in the current economic climate and certainly the long-term unemployed or those on the margins of mainstream economy are unlikely to be accommodated.

The eco-innovation or green-tech, clean-tech private sector focus of the governmental greening statements resonates with academic analysis of economic-environmental relations frequently grouped together under the term ecological modernisation. A core component of ecological modernisation theory, notwithstanding its diversity of interpretation and evolution as a concept (see Christoff, 1996), is the ‘pivotal role of technological innovation in changing the ecological properties of society’s metabolism’ (Huber, 2008, p. 360). As with the statements of nation-states on the green economy, detailed above, much of this conceptual work on ecological modernisation focuses on pioneer companies and creating lead markets for competitive advantage. Ecological modernization is therefore seen as ‘readaptation of industrial society within the global geo- and biosphere by *modern means* such as a scientific knowledge base and advanced technology in order to upgrade the earth’s carrying capacity and make development more sustainable’ (Huber, 2008, p. 360, italics in original). Crucially, however, ecological modernization has generally been spatially and sectorally bounded in its

pronouncements, focused not on nature conservation for example, but on developing the environment, and on large producers and retailers in industrialized economies as focal actors in influencing production chains and stimulating innovation. As Gibbs (2006) suggests ecological modernization has tended to be an optimistic view of positive change through technological developments that reduces impact on the environment, but it has been criticized for over-simplifying assumptions about the role of states in ecological transformations and under-theorising the role of capitalist eco-efficiency and rationalisation in environmental reform (Baker, 2007). These conceptualizations of ecological modernization follow on from the insights of Harvey (1996) who sees its thrust perpetuating ‘dominant forms of economic power’ (Harvey, 1996, p. 82) rather than being radically transformative. Little is said in ecological modernization analyses, for example, about the power relations that surround the implementation of any policy, whether environmental in focus or not. This is despite the reasonable view that ‘ecological modernisation is a fundamentally *political* concept’ (Gibbs, 2006, p. 200, emphasis in original) concerned with setting agendas, allocating resources, mediating disputes and setting the rules of the game. In particular, proponents of ecological modernisation have been rather reticent about confronting the impacts of neoliberalisation and its ability (or not) to resolve current environmental crises. Certainly critics of the theoretical developments within the field have been concerned about how the discourses of ecological modernisation have been seamlessly incorporated into corporate statements and global economic institutions without much apparent change to everyday practices (Robertson, 2004). Its accommodating characteristics, or ‘seductive appeal’ (Baker, 2007, p. 30) are though what has made the language of ecological modernisation so attractive to policy makers throughout Europe and specifically in Ireland (Davies, 2009).

Of direct interest to this article is the relative silence of much ecological modernisation research and the green economy rhetoric of governments about how issues of equity and justice are implicated in any transition to greener, more ecologically modern practices. Related to this is the explicit assumption that technological and economic entrepreneurs are located within the private sector and are the main determinants of social change. This is particularly problematic when individualism and entrepreneurship, as commonly comprehended, are not generally seen as having collective concern for either the environment or wider society as a primary goal. It also ignores a wealth of research that examines trading spaces beyond the mainstream and innovators who are not motivated primarily by self-interest or profit, but often by a combination of social, environmental and economic factors (Amin et al., 2003; Leyshon et al., 2003, Lee et al., 2004; Hughes, 2005; Seyfang, 2009). This research argues that the [re]building of community capacity is often at the heart of these innovation spaces and in many cases, although not all, there is what Hughes calls a ‘reinsertion of the local’ in the activities beyond the mainstream market sector (Hughes, 2005, p. 498) with an emphasis on Offer’s (1997) notion of ‘relations of regard’ between producers and consumers.

Social economy enterprises that engage in environmental activities provide a potential site of sustainability transformation and may include community gardening programmes, low impact self-build housing projects and community energy efficiency schemes (see Church and Elster, 2002; Pickerill and Maxey, 2009). Although much of the research examining these alternative spaces of innovation provides a positive reading of the embodied activities, there remain questions about its potential to

transform mainstream market exchange practices and contribute significantly to sustainable development (Allen, 2003; Lee et al., 2004; Marsden and Smith, 2005). In particular, actors from within these non-mainstream spaces often face significant challenges in terms of demonstrating value beyond current pricing systems, which has tended to both exclude many beneficial aspects of environmental and social worth and to underestimate the negative environmental and social implications of many priced goods and services (Hudson, 2009). How for example is self-esteem, which may be generated through participating in regular environmentally benign work for the previous long-term unemployed, to be measured as added value of a grassroots sustainability enterprise? More specifically, how could these kinds of benefits be considered in terms of awarding contracts, say for competitive local authority waste management services?

Work of organisations such as the New Economics Foundation (2008, 2009) have produced an extensive review of tools for calculating added value beyond the standard indicators of profit and turnover such as calculators for compiling estimates of social return on investments (SROI)³ or local benefits (Local Multipliers). Although attempts are being made to modify and adapt these tools to the social economy context in many cases, they require significant resources to collate and process. Despite more than 10 years of development in the field of triple bottom line accounting (see Elkington, 1997), it was only in 2007 that the United Nations and International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives accounting standards became widely dispersed, primarily through the concerted efforts of organisations such as the Global Reporting Initiative network for greater standardisation in the field of sustainability reporting. Although advancements have been made in the private sector with respect to environmental reporting and corporate social responsibility, the uptake of these standards has been limited and traditional conceptions of wealth and work remain (Seyfang, 2009).

Ultimately there seems to be a narrow interpretation of ‘greening’ within governmental rhetoric with only partial intersection with broader concepts of sustainable development. At the same time, the environmental social economy sector is both a real (if small) and potentially expanding space of ‘greening’ that engages directly with all three pillars of sustainability, but it is an area that is currently under-researched.

3. ESEEs in Ireland

An examination of the nature and formation of ESEEs in Ireland was undertaken in 2008 with the aim of providing the first systematic sustainability analysis of their activities. This was funded by the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences as part of its Thematic Research Strategy on definitions and strategies for growth in Ireland’s ‘new economy’. In 2007, when the call for research proposals was made, the Irish economy was yet to experience the dramatic waves of economic decline that have subsequently followed. Indeed the research project detailed in this article was deemed eligible for funding only on the grounds that it was seeking to establish

3 SROI is calculated through comparing the value of the benefits relative to the costs of achieving those benefits. The formula for measuring SROI is: $[SROI] = \frac{[\text{Net present value of benefits}]}{[\text{Net present value of investment}]}$.

pathways for an inclusive economy, bringing marginalized groups into the new economy of the Celtic Tiger. This highlights that even under conditions of high, and persistent, economic growth not all sections of Irish society benefitted equally, or even at all. The relevance of the study since the onset of recession post-2008 has become arguably even more central to the interests of government for two reasons: as a means to invigorate discussion of reducing numbers of people on the unemployment register (current rates of unemployment standing at 13.4% up from 5.2% in 2008) and also in terms of the intersection of ESEE activities with governmental articulations of a need for a green economy.

This article reports on the initial mapping and survey components of that research project. In the absence of a formal singular definition of an ESEE, a working definition was developed such that it was defined as 'a formal, democratic, autonomous, not-for-profit organization, that operates like a commercial business (but may include the services of volunteers) using traditional and/or alternative economic methods to produce environmental goods and/or services primarily for the benefit of local communities'. Once the working definition was established, the identification of ESEEs took a variety of forms. Initially formal datasets of non-governmental organizations, e.g. the Trinity College Dublin database of 3757 non-governmental organisations (see Donoghue et al., 2006) and government funding agencies for social economy activities (more than 1200 FÁS actions, the Irish Government's Community Employment Scheme and 440 POBAL contracts, the administering organisation of the Irish Government's Community Services Programme) were examined and relevant organisations contacted. More diverse search techniques were also adopted including Internet trawls, public database analysis and networking at conferences for community and voluntary organisations developing personal contacts that were useful for accessing ESEEs as fluid and isolated research subjects.

While more than 90 organizations were initially contacted as potential ESEEs, only 69 met the criteria detailed in the working definition and a database was generated that provided basic details of the enterprise. Reasons for exclusion included enterprises not being, or intending to be, formally registered as in Company Limited by Guarantee without share capital; being for private profit rather than not-for-profit or pro-profit; being a national organization or not having any paid members of staff. Following identification, ESEEs were invited to participate in a questionnaire survey that sought information on their form, function, location and governing context. This process led to ESEEs categorizing themselves into one of seven environmental areas according to their primary functions: waste management, land management, education, tourism, energy management, transport and biodiversity (Table 1). Some of these categories, such as waste and energy, incorporate activities that are relatively homogenous (e.g. recycling and retrofitting of residential housing) and easily distinguished from other primary ESEE functions. Others, such as land management, incorporate a range of activities (from allotments to community maintenance services and community gardens).

It is hard to establish whether this number of ESEEs is relatively low or not when compared with other countries given the lack of research in the area across the globe. Neither was it possible to get an accurate picture of what percentage of social enterprises were ESEEs as figures on the social enterprise sector are not compiled in Ireland.

Table 1. ESEEs categorized by environmental sector and type of ESEE

Type of ESEE	Environmental sector							Total
	Transport	Waste	Biodiversity	Education	Land	Tourism	Energy	
Company Ltd. by Guarantee	12	8	4	11	9	7	11	62
Unincorporated body	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Trust	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Other	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	3
Total	13	8	5	13	10	9	11	69

3.1 The geography of ESEEs in Ireland: form, function and location

According to Enterprise Ireland, which is the government agency responsible for indigenous business sector development and promotion, all ESEEs surveyed fall into the 'small' category of Small Medium Enterprises, with less than 50 employees. Nearly half (48%) of the ESEEs in Ireland have between 4 and 10 employees, and the total number of full-time equivalent jobs provided by the ESEE sector is 740 with around 500 people volunteering within those enterprises. Given the emphasis on enterprise, it may not be surprising to see more people employed than volunteers involved in ESEEs, but in some cases the level of volunteer activity within ESEEs is significant. One waste management enterprise, for example, has 10 staff but more than 50 volunteers who work on a daily basis. How such volunteer work can or should be incorporated into business size is unclear and debated in the literature (Mook and Quarter, 2004). In terms of the reach of ESEE activities, 90% of their workers live within 5 km of the enterprise for city enterprises and within 10 km for non-city enterprises. The goods and services provided by the ESEEs tended to have a wider impact. In particular, 44% of ESEEs said that people travelled more than 10 km to avail of goods they produced and 72% of ESEEs reported customers travelling more than 10 km to avail of their services. The distances involved are still relatively small and were considered local by the ESEEs themselves. The scale of operations is though perhaps not as tightly defined as those reported in Hudson (2009, p. 499) who refers to the experiences of social economy enterprises in South Wales that focus on 'meeting local needs in a small area... [with activities] conducted on a very, small scale'. Such a micro-geographical focus has been given as an explanation for limited expansion and diversification of social economy activities and hence is seen as a barrier to multiplication of enterprises and skills development among the workforce. Indeed Hudson talks of certain social economy organizations circumventing 'the limitations of the local by operating on much bigger and/or multiple scales' (Hudson, 2009, p. 504). Such scaling-up of activities is identified as a factor helping to create economic and political success through access to further markets and therefore a wider range of funds to diversify activities. There remain questions, however, about whether successes in these areas may be at the expense of meeting social or environmental goals and even whether expanding activities into direct competition with mainstream economies is permitted by governing arrangements. These questions are revisited in later sections relating to governance and sustainability impacts.

It is often argued that the social economy (and by association the environmental sub-set of that economy) has a distinct character, formation and purpose in comparison to the public and private sectors. In particular, there is much made in the literature of the origins of social enterprises and the circumstances that promote their emergence (Bennett et al., 2000). The work of Hudson, for example, suggests that social economy enterprises typically develop from the initiative of ‘a small number of altruistic individuals, motivated by ethical and/or social concerns, voluntarily giving their labour freely or working in poorly remunerated jobs, at much less than the wage rates that they could command in the formal mainstream economy’ (Hudson, 2009, p. 498). In this research, the origins of ESEEs were explored in terms of who initiated the organizations, why they were motivated to do so and where the ESEEs were located.

As with Hudson (2009), it was found that those who engage in the work of setting up and running ESEEs in Ireland are motivated by non-monetary concerns and are not looking for high levels of material rewards. However, it is not simply a case of individuals initiating ESEEs because they were intrinsically less materialistic. The responses to the questionnaire indicated that what Hudson terms ‘the logic of the mainstream’ (2009, p. 498) is seen by ESEE initiators to have failed certain aspects of environmental protection and/or certain sections of society either because the activities are not profitable or that they are not politically strategic and fall beyond the scope of public provision priorities.

In terms of who initiates ESEEs, the survey revealed a varied picture with a range of key actors involved, although most commonly (43% of ESEEs) they were set up by a group of local residents either coming together to form a group over a particular issue or through an existing community group that sought to refocus its attention on an environmental issue. In 15 cases (22%) a local development company started the enterprise and 14 ESEEs (20%) were led by an individual: the archetypal community champion, catalyst or maven. Community groups have tended to support the general public in the main with attention to specific target groups, such as disabled and substance misusers, following and these groups seem to particularly focus on waste management, biodiversity and tourism activities. Local Development Companies began to support ESEEs after 2000 and specifically in the transport and energy categories. This follows government funding opportunities suggesting strategic activity on the part of professional development agencies rather than grassroots’ initiatives motivated by indigenous environmental or social visions. Further examining the temporal dimension of ESEEs, only 9 (13%) enterprises surveyed were in existence prior to 1995 with the bulk (44%) of ESEEs being established post-2000. However, as these statistics only indicate existing organizations, it is not possible to say how many organizations might have been established and subsequently folded prior to the survey. Certainly anecdotal data gathered during the research project suggests that the landscape of ESEEs across Ireland is transient, influenced not only by the vagaries of resources but also by awareness of environmental issues and potential solutions.

While all ESEEs by definition have major environmental, social and economic components to their activities, across the whole sample 34 (49%) of ESEEs said that they were primarily initiated for social reasons. These social motivations were generally targeted on particularly disadvantaged sectors of people including the elderly, non-drivers, long-term unemployed, people with special needs, people affected by drug use and the traveller community. In some cases, the societal sectors are as much marginalized by their location as their individual characteristics, as with the case of

rural non-drivers and the transport ESEEs. Only 18 ESEEs (26%) characterized themselves as sustainability enterprises by coupling both social and environmental motivations as the main drivers of their enterprises. A slightly smaller proportion of ESEEs (17 or 25%) articulated a purely environmental motivation for initiating the ESEE, and the specific motivations were tightly aligned with the particular environmental sector.

The characteristics of localities in which social economy enterprises are located has been examined in a UK context by the research of Bennett et al. (2000) Amin et al. (2002) and West (1999) among others. It is often assumed that as the social economy provides a means to regenerate deprived communities, they will be located in areas of deprivation. However, Hudson (2009) is quite explicit about an uneven geography of social enterprises within UK suggesting that the most deprived areas often lack the basic resources necessary to set up enterprises, leading to a potential reinforcement of social exclusion geographies. In order to see whether similar patterns could be observed within the ESEE sector in Ireland, an examination of ESEEs by pre-existing deprivation indices was conducted. GIS maps were produced from the database which delineated ESEEs by location, enterprise type (e.g. community business, co-operative), social target group (e.g. low-income individuals, long term unemployed, people with different abilities) as well as environmental focus. An initial examination of spatial location indicated a relatively even spatial distribution of ESEEs across the counties of Ireland with a concentration in the Dublin region (see Figure 1). On a population basis this concentration is unsurprising with Dublin accounting for more than 35% of the total population of Ireland (CSOI, 2008). Yet further analysis revealed that 73% of ESEEs were actually located in non-city locations with 28% classified by the Central Statistics Office as rural locations. The only environmental category with a city location bias was waste management (Figure 1 and Table 2).

Deprivation ratings (based on demographic profile, social class and labour market situation) in Ireland are collated by POBAL based on 3440 electoral divisions. The division in which each ESEE is located was established and ranked against the national range of deprivation along deciles of deprivation (the most deprived decile being ranked 1st and the least deprived decile being ranked 10th). It was found that 41 (60%) of ESEEs are located in deprived areas, defined as such by the fact that their deprivation scores are less than 0. However, no ESEEs were located in the four most deprived deciles and three ESEEs were located in the least deprived decile. The bulk of ESEEs (68%) are clustered around the 7th (35%) and 8th (33%) deciles. These figures seem to lend weight to Hudson's (2009) arguments, but as previously discussed ESEEs in Ireland are not necessarily always set up for the sole purpose of economic regeneration of areas typically considered deprived. The focus on particular environmental needs, goods and services and the attention of many ESEEs to the general public, in addition to specifically targeted vulnerable populations, provides some differentiation in motive and purpose from other forms of social economy enterprises. Equally the usefulness of these deprivation ratings is questionable as electoral divisions in Ireland are highly uneven in size and population. One division in the commuter belt just outside Dublin has more than 32,000 people registered, while two rural divisions in Donegal and Leitrim have just 16 people registered. In addition, within urban areas such as Dublin it is common to find affluent properties alongside small clusters of social housing. This pattern of affluence intermingled with pockets of low-income housing is something that has become more pronounced in Dublin, and to some extent across Ireland, following

ESEEs by Environmental Category

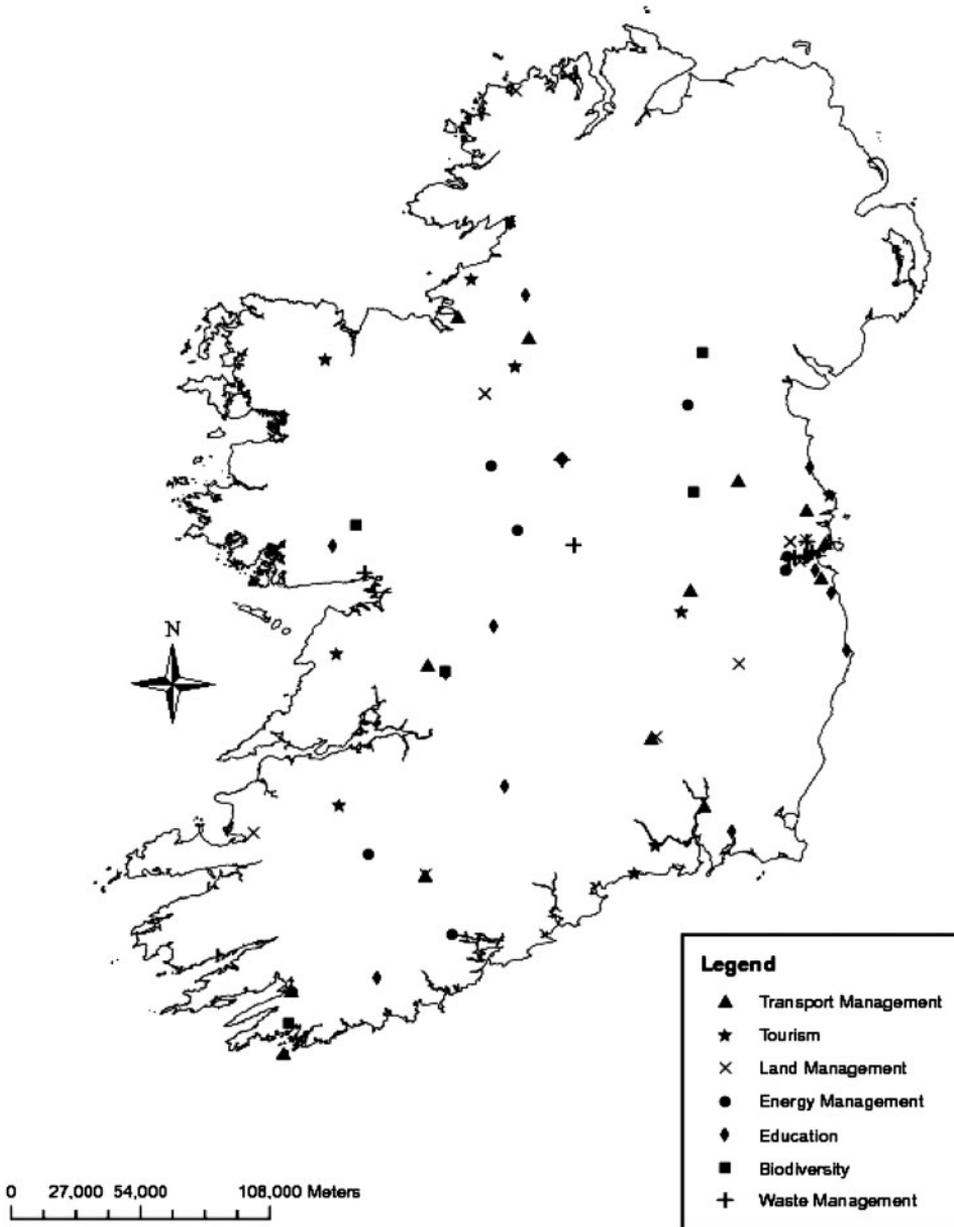


Figure 1. ESEEs by environmental sector.

the housing market boom of the 2000s. As such the available deprivation data are relatively insensitive to micro-geographical inequalities and only indicative of broad patterns. Clearly there is space for more nuanced deprivation statistics to really explore the characteristics of areas that support the initiation and evolution of ESEEs.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of ESEEs by sector and city versus non-city location

Location	Environmental sector							Total
	Transport	Waste	Biodiversity	Education	Land	Tourism	Energy	
City	2	6	0	2	5	1	3	19 (27.5%)
Non-city	11	2	5	11	5	8	8	50 (72.5%)
Total	13	8	5	13	10	9	11	69

3.2 Governing ESEEs: internal and external factors

While the previous section detailed the types of organizations and activities that populate the landscape of ESEEs in Ireland, it is important to consider the processes of rule making and decision taking that shape their everyday operation. As indicated extensively by Moolaert and Nussbaumer (2005), Eaton (2008), Gerometta et al. (2005), and Graefe (2002), among others, attending to matters of governance is as important to social economy analyses as it is to other spheres and tiers of governance (Davies, 2008). A second aim of the questionnaire was therefore to construct a more nuanced picture of the governing conditions that frame how ESEEs in Ireland operate.

In terms of internal governance, all ESEEs bar one, a land management operation, had a functioning management board or Board of Directors that sets the mission statement and oversees the strategic running of the enterprises. The only ESEE without a management board was a fledgling enterprise established in 2008 and this enterprise was in the process of identifying potential board members. In the majority of cases (64%) the management boards had between 7 and 12 members and in many cases (42%) the board members were classified as stakeholders in the venture. For example, one transport ESEE has board members with experience of people with mobility constraints through ill health or disability including representatives from the Health Services Executive and disability support groups. In a quarter of cases board members were specifically recruited by the manager of the ESEE for having a particularly relevant skill set for the enterprise, but in a similar number of ESEEs respondents said their board members consisted of anyone who was interested in participating.

As a function of their inclusion in this research all ESEEs were independent from either public or private organizations in the sense that they are autonomous organizations that define their aims and objectives. Many though had formal links with other organizations, particularly with state agencies through funding schemes. Indeed 24 (35%) enterprises had 100% of their wages paid by a state agency grant. In 58% of ESEEs, the activities of the enterprise generated sufficient funds to pay at least some of its staff members. Out of the 10 (14%) ESEEs that had no state assistance with wages, it was the biodiversity sector that had the highest level of independence with 80% of the ESEEs in that sector receiving no state funds. This independence was, though, as much a function of the lack of government funding for biodiversity-related activities, as it was to do with an explicit governance choice by the organisations. Funds for the operations of ESEEs were sourced from a variety of mechanisms including business loans (28 or 41% of ESEEs) and all ESEEs had at some point applied for grant

funding. The levels of success in achieving grant funding, however, did vary across environmental category. On the one hand, energy ESEEs reported a 100% success rate in all but one case because of a government funding mechanism, the Warmer Homes Scheme, run by Sustainable Energy Agency Ireland which expressly sought to work with community groups. At the other extreme, the Biodiversity ESEEs had the least success in applying for grant funding with three out of five enterprises in that sector having a less than 50% success rate.

The shaping role of the state in ESEE development is reflected in the fact that 43 (62%) ESEEs received central government funding to start the enterprise, and that local government was responsible for initiating the establishment of 16 (23%) enterprises. The main source of revenue for 41 (60%) enterprises remains grants awarded by state agencies. The criteria for state funding ESEEs are specific, and the protocol for both application and implementation of practices within ESEEs for government funding is highly prescribed with calls for interest in a limited number of specific areas, often and targeted at particular groups within the community. This creates a specific landscape of ESEEs that emerge in relation to strategic state priorities, but it also means that ESEEs are vulnerable to shifting patterns of government support.

The nature of the ESEE sector is not entirely defined by state intervention with ESEEs interacting with other ESEEs, environmental and social economy organisations and, in a limited number of cases, with private sector organisations. Free support was given to other social enterprises by 38 (55%) of ESEEs. This consisted primarily of enterprises offering advice, information and donations of goods and services (23 or 60% of ESEEs) although financial assistance was also provided on occasion to assist with service provision. Cross-ESEE interaction was greatly facilitated by networking through umbrella organisations, with 45 (65%) of the ESEEs belonging to such groups. The benefits of such collaboration are indicated in the finding that all of those ESEEs not currently involved in a wider network would like to belong to one holding the view that it would strengthen their operations and increase the sustainability of their activities.

In stark contrast to UK, the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has quite clearly stated that social economy enterprises should not compete with the private sector and he has been quoted as saying 'in general these enterprises because they get state support on a continuous rolling basis they should not be dislocating private business. . . I would say look, get some private guy to do it, that's a commercial operation' (Eamon O'Cuiv, personal communication 2009⁴). This is reflected in funding requirements from POBAL which states that proposals should be for 'practical, local service. . . which the private or public sector has been unable to provide' (POBAL, 2008, p. 1). While Hudson (2009) reports that the ability of social economy enterprises to expand and diversify can and does bring them into direct competition with the private sector, such engagement is being discouraged in Ireland. The role for the social economy, including ESEEs, is clearly envisaged by government to remain at the margins of the mainstream economy simply providing a safety net for sectors of society marginalized by economic patterns of exchange and social capacity.

4 Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders as part of the overall research project and included politicians, social entrepreneurs, funding bodies, statutory organizations and other related bodies.

3.3 Perception, impact and future of ESEEs

It was contended in the introduction of this article that ESEEs are examples of actually existing sustainability enterprises in that they undertake activities that simultaneously seek to provide social, environmental and economic benefits. However, it was clear at an early stage of the research that establishing exactly the sustainability impacts of ESEEs would not be an easy task. Aside from the inherently contested nature of the term sustainability itself, there is the additional complexity of measuring the impacts of ESEEs in ways that are consistent, comparable and accurately reflective of the activities that are undertaken. The impact of some activities can be easily quantified, for example the numbers of people employed by ESEEs. Others are quantifiable but not necessarily easily or accurately measured without significant costs in terms of monitoring, such as the carbon dioxide emissions saved through retrofitting energy efficiency measure in low-income housing. The impact of some sustainability benefits including the self-esteem gained through actively participating in recognized employment or the heightened awareness of environmental challenges are far more intangible, difficult to quantify and ever harder to accommodate within current frameworks of value used in the mainstream economy.

As discussed in the second section of this article, the issue of demonstrating value beyond economic value (or what is often termed triple bottom line, or sustainability, accounting) is something which has been addressed by a number of academics and organizations in relation to social economy activities; however, the process is still embryonic. Nevertheless, a fundamental component of establishing the sustainability impacts of ESEEs is information. Although some formal data collection is undertaken by 46 (67%) ESEEs, primarily on the back of reporting requirements for funding bodies, the information gathered is limited in depth and scope. Certainly organizations felt that their reporting was structured for financial accountability purposes rather than for communicating the total sustainability impacts that their ESEE contributed to the goal of sustainable development.

The challenge of demonstrating sustainability impact was seen as a contributory factor in the low public awareness of the ESEE activities with 29 (42%) ESEEs believing that the general public are unaware of the work that they were involved with. Nonetheless another 28 (40%) ESEEs felt that their activities were positively perceived with only 7 (10%) enterprises suggesting a negative reaction. Among the reasons for a negative perception of ESEEs among the general public were problems related to the nature of the activities and the people involved. As illustrated by the Land Management ESEE response below an environmental focus does not necessarily generate supportive views from the general public in Ireland. There remains a persistent scepticism of environmental management among certain sections of the Irish population, borne out of the legacy of colonialism, and a view that environmental concern is a recreational activity of privileged urban elites or extreme environmentalists (Cabot, 1999)⁵

The vast majority don't know [ESEEs] exist. They are seen as filtering or catchment for social deprivation. There are two levels of perception eco warrior or mopping up prisoners and delinquents, so not too many positives (Land Management ESEE).

5 The impact of colonialism on Irish human–environment relations is too intricate to explore fully in this paper however a key influence can be traced back to the 1840s. In 1841, and while under colonial rule, the population of Ireland was 8 million; double the current population. The population was supported

I don't think they [the public] know it [ESEEs] is out there. I would fear that the general public would see social enterprise as that they have another white elephant, mainly going nowhere. They don't see the benefits we see, and I suppose you can't really expect them to see. They probably see it as a waste of taxpayers' money (Tourism ESEE).

The tourism ESEE above highlights major problems for the ESEEs. On the one hand, it reinforces the need for better communication of the impacts that the ESEEs are actually having; that is demonstrating their value more broadly. On the other it raises the tensions between being reliant on the state (and therefore on taxpayers money), but not being encouraged to engage in surplus generating activities that can ensure financial independence for the organisations because that would also potentially bring them into direct competition with the private sector.

The low level of ESEE activity in Ireland and the focus on marginal activities means that there is little direct engagement with the private sector than say compared with the activities within UK. This is reflected in views of ESEEs such that 13 (19%) felt that private business had no understanding of the kind of activities that their enterprise was involved with. The same number, primarily from the transport and energy sectors, said they sensed that private business felt threatened by their activities, as 'a fly in the ointment' or 'a nuisance' or even unfairly privileged because of their access to government funding. In contrast, 21 (30%) ESEEs suggested that private business was supportive of their activities. Most of these ESEEs were within the tourism sector, which is the most likely to bring financial gain to the local businesses through spin-off benefits of their activities. One waste ESEE felt that it was their particular approach, rather than the fact that they are an ESEE, that made them popular with a certain section of private business entrepreneurs:

Because of our model, we find that a lot of self-made business people really get off on what we do, our staffing costs and how we run the business appeal, as we have innovative solutions to problems. There is great word of mouth about us as a social enterprise (Waste ESEE).

However, one land management ESEE below suggests that it is only once ESEEs identify niche markets, become successful and start gaining their own successes in open competition that conflict with the private sector will emerge:

I can see us having a conflict with private business. We recently won a tender contract with the Blanchardstown Area Partnership. We were the cheapest, but I think they also took into account that we were a social enterprise. We are going to be fitting smoke alarms and better security in 25 homes. I can see that we are going to have a problem sooner [rather] than later, they see it as unfair competition as we get help with the wages through an employment scheme (Land Management ESEE).

primarily by potato cultivation. This dependency made the population vulnerable to crop failures and also put pressure on the ecology of rural areas through the exploitation of trees and shrubs for fuel. The impact of potato blight and the famine that followed in 1845 became a significant reference point for Irish conceptions of human environment relations. There was a sense among the population of being doubly betrayed, first by nature and second by the colonial rulers (in association with landowners and privileged elites) who failed to support the millions of people affected by the famine. It has been argued that it was the failure of socio-political powers in this instance (and others) that has led to a strong scepticism of state-led interventions in environmental management and a strongly utilitarian rather than romantic relationship with the land (see Foster 1997; Viney 2003; Davies 2008).

As the ESEE above indicates there are no formal or transparent mechanisms for incorporating social or additional environmental benefits as part of public contracts and certainly no agreed measures for evaluating such benefits. While green public procurement has been raised as a desirable possibility through the green economy statements (Forfás, 2009), there have been no concrete developments on how such a procurement process might operate and no mention of a role for ESEEs in that process:

We are paying rates of €3,000 a year to the government when really we should be getting support from the government, not paying them. We are providing facilities for the local community, but the government does not see any value in that. There is a lot of talk, and you prick your ears up... and it comes to nothing (Biodiversity ESEE).

Under current conditions of financial insecurity and public sector cuts, the reliance on state funding is problematic for ESEEs and they were asked about what they felt the future would bring for their enterprises. For the most part fears about instability in funding regimes, availability of capital and increased competition across social enterprises for scarce resources predominated. The responses were mixed, however, with 42% feeling that there could be some positive developments for their enterprises with more people looking both for alternative careers and for low-cost or sustainable goods and services. Interestingly the potential for positive reinforcement of ESEE activity through the development of a smart green economy was not highlighted by those involved in ESEE operation.

4. Conclusion

The increasingly visible calls for development to be greened that are being articulated around the globe, and by actors from all spheres of governance, are intuitively appealing and may superficially appear as eminently rational responses to the current economic, environmental and social crises. The extent to which these calls envisage a radical transformation of production and consumption practices, however, is unclear. Certainly within an Irish context, the pronouncements by the state on greening the Irish economy are seen as a means to meet environmental obligations and to respond to recession through a continued commitment to private sector innovations driven primarily by technological transformations; continuing a long-standing coalition of state and business interests and a familiar economic model:

A key feature of the Smart Economy is building the innovation or 'ideas' component of the economy through investment in human capital and its ability and effectiveness in translating ideas into valuable processes, products and services...It has, at its core, the creation of an exemplary research, innovation and commercialisation ecosystem so as to create 'The Innovation Island' (Department of Taoiseach, 2008, p. 33).

There is only limited attention paid in these statements to how social needs might be affected by the greening processes described and an implicit assumption that the employment opportunities provided through eco-innovation will necessarily lead to a better quality of life for all. This marks a persistent trend in government articulations of sustainability in Ireland, which assume a trickle-down model of economic growth leading to social sustainability, an approach which is not underpinned by evidence from

previous growth periods within the Irish economy. In 2005, the peak of the Celtic Tiger years, only USA had greater inequalities in incomes than Ireland. In a survey of 18 industrialized countries, only Italy and USA had higher levels of poverty and Italy alone had higher levels of functional illiteracy than Ireland (UNDP, 2005).

Ireland is not bereft of activities that seek to engage explicitly with the tripartite concerns of sustainability however. Certainly the research presented in this article indicates the existence of a small, but nonetheless significant (at least for the local communities who are engaged with their activities) body of actually existing sustainability enterprises. Yet these enterprises are primarily located at the margins of the mainstream economy and as a result they face a number of challenges similar to social economy organisations in other countries, such as ensuring that their activities are adequately resourced and suitable goods and services provided for those who need them. ESEEs are niche enterprises that create environmental benefits alongside other benefits also seen across the social economy sector including jobs, training and skills development that are tailored to local needs, as well as social capital through opportunities for education, engagement, building self-esteem and confidence. There is room for more theoretical reflection here on the location of ESEEs within social economy typologies as identified by Jonas and Fuller (2003) and referred to in the introduction to this article. Using this typology and the amendment by Amin (2009), there are elements of ESEE activity across most categories, except alternative-oppositional, depending on environmental sector and the specificities of the ESEE in question. For example, within the land management sector much of the work could be seen as alternative-substitute given the absence of state provision for training activities as carried out by the organic and community gardens. Equally the scientific contributions to preserving native agricultural biodiversity made by the one seed saving ESEE have never been paralleled by state or private sector activity. However, within the transport sector the dominant focus of ESEEs on providing accessible mobility mechanisms is directly related to the removal of state-led initiatives providing such a service clearly locating their work within the alternative-substitute category. Other ESEEs and ESEE categories are more difficult to locate within the typology. The energy ESEE sector, for example, is dominated by the provision of state funding for the retrofitting of limited energy efficiency devices to low-income houses. In effect most, but not all, of the ESEEs are the state-funded delivery mechanism for state-defined objectives. Whether this makes them alternative-additional or alternative-complementary is a matter for further reflection that deserves more detailed analysis beyond this article.

The commonalities of experience between social economy enterprises in Ireland and overseas aside there are, however, two areas of tension that are perhaps unique to the specificities of the ESEE sector and the Irish context. The first concerns the difficulties experienced by ESEEs in terms of measuring and communicating the total sustainability value of activities beyond the mainstream profit-margin metric. These difficulties are multifaceted. Triple-bottom line accounting methodologies for social enterprises are being developed but they tend to be generic, labour intensive and not focused on the specific activities of ESEEs. In addition, the enterprises themselves have little time, money or energy to conduct more detailed reporting or accounting measures than they currently adopt. Current practice, however, generally falls far short of accurately reflecting what the ESEEs do and does not communicate effectively the difference that many ESEEs have made to people's lives. Most problematically, even if sustainability

impacts were accurately measured and communicated, no formal mechanisms are in place to ensure that these benefits can be taken into account in terms of state funding or contracting procedures.

The second, albeit related, area of tension regards the governing conditions under which ESEEs operate, particularly in terms of competition for business with the private sector and funding rules from public sector support agencies. In the absence of clear policy from government in terms of the role for ESEEs within transformations for a green economy it remains in the hands of ESEEs themselves, in conjunction with the wider social enterprise sector, to call for more structured support and collaborate more effectively with other partners. Innovative initiatives in USA, such as the Blue Green Alliance (BGA), point to useful partnerships between trade unions and environmental groups as particularly fruitful actions. The BGA is a partnership between the United Steelworkers trade union and the Sierra Club and it combines advocacy, training and campaigning on the green jobs agenda lobbying for improved workers' rights in environmental programmes (Bird et al., 2010). Similarly WE² is a coalition of government, union and NGO groups in Wisconsin that seeks to create jobs for local unemployed people through retrofitting energy efficiency measures in residential and public buildings. The programme has incorporated minimum labour standards and spatially constrained hiring policies to ensure target populations benefit from the scheme.

There have been a number of publications both in Ireland and within the EU which lend weight to calls for more support for ESEEs. At the EU level the European Commission produced Integrated Guidelines for the economic and employment policies of Member States for the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy. Within these Member States are encouraged to promote and support the development of the social economy and social innovation. A recent report by the Social Enterprise Task Force (2010) provides a suite of recommendations to enable the social enterprise sector to assist in national economic recovery. They recommend the incorporation of the social enterprise agenda into the government department responsible for enterprise and into local authority planning and development strategies. This would mean adding a social enterprise remit into existing enterprise funding mechanisms, allowing social enterprises to access flexible finance arrangements and equity-type instruments reducing the reliance on state grants. Basically this implies extending the support structures available to private sector Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to the social enterprise, and by association the ESEE, sector. Most pertinently they suggest that social clauses should be inserted into public and local authority procurement policies and supporting mechanisms create to encourage social enterprises to work together and apply for public contracts. In essence what is being called for is not preferential treatment for ESEEs but an equivalent range of supports as are available to the private sector, which the Social Enterprise Task Force identify as '28 tax breaks, a government department with a budget of €2 billion and a variety of support agencies ranging from County Enterprise Boards and Enterprise Ireland to specialist agencies such as An Bord Glas [the Horticultural Development Board]' (2010, p. 7). Going beyond the findings of the Social Enterprise Task Force, the inclusion of specific environmental requirements in all of the above would promote better links between existing green economy strategies and social inclusion objectives thereby establishing a more coherent sustainability agenda within central government policies.

One issue that has been raised regards the capacity of the ESEE sector to create a significant impact on unemployment reduction. Certainly without access to the kinds of support that private sector enterprise initiatives receive both financially and otherwise, as detailed above, this is a valid concern. Nonetheless, even given the current constraints, it is clear that ESEEs can and do provide employment opportunities often to those who are most marginalized in society. Equally nowhere in *Building Ireland's Smart Economy: a framework for sustainable economic renewal* (Department of Taoiseach, 2008) is there a clear prediction regarding the number of jobs that will be created by the new smart green economy nor any guarantees that any jobs created will go to those who are currently unemployed. There are assertions that the proposed pathway through an emphasis on clean and green-tech will provide 'high quality, well-paid employment' (Department of Taoiseach, 2008, p. 8) and that public investment will 'offset some employment losses' (Department of Taoiseach, 2008, p. 47), but the scale and accessibility of that employment is unclear.

In conclusion, it is likely that without some bold attempts to restructure the governing conditions (both internal and external) under which ESEEs operate, they will remain what Seyfang (2009, p. 76) calls the 'symbolic embodiment of alternatives'; incubators for social and environmental innovation beyond purely technological fixes but with little diffusion beyond the localities in which they operate. Without targeted stimulus packages, modified regulation and specific government policy it is hard to see how ESEEs will be able to scale-up operations or increase their numbers and contribute significantly to an broad and inclusive greening of the economy.

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