

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Creating a Roadmap for Social Enterprise: A Collaborative Research Project Between the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House and Land, Food & Community (LFS 350) Students

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Introduction

The Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTES NH) is a charitable organization dedicated to growing the number of social, economic and recreational activities of the residents of the DTES (DTES NH, 2017). Like many other nonprofits and charities (Social Enterprise Alliance cited in Jones & Donmoyer, 2015), they are experimenting with social enterprise to improve the self-sufficiency of their activities. Currently in their third year of social enterprise efforts, they are working in collaboration with students from the faculty of Land and Food Systems at UBC with the hopes to expand the reach of their efforts (C. White, 2017). The aim of the project is to assist the DTES NH in developing and expanding partnerships with local businesses, markets and social enterprise organizations within the community. The project will support and further expand employment opportunities for DTES residents from various socioeconomic backgrounds and increasing the market for their local in-house products (Land, Food + Community II, 2017).

Knowledge of the DTES community is essential to understanding the importance of DTES NH's work. The DTES is rich in history and diversity, but is plagued by stereotypes of poverty, homelessness, drug abuse and neglect. These are countered by attempts of many organizations to meet the needs of the disadvantaged residents (Roe, 2010). The increase of charitable, nonprofit and voluntary organizations over the years has permitted the government to shift some of its responsibility for public good provision to the nonprofit sector. In this shift, the government can largely maintain control of social services, due to nonprofit dependencies on government grant funding and tax remittances with specific requirements. (Roe, 2010). Nonprofits often struggle to align the needs of the community with the stipulations of grant funding (Roe, 2010), and are increasingly turning towards social enterprise, which are “for-profit or nonprofit businesses whose products and services address major unmet needs of society” (p. 297). When successful, social enterprise models can contribute greatly to generating sustainable revenue for nonprofits and reducing their dependency on donors (Reilly, 2016).

Significance

Literature Review

Today, we see social enterprises vary from businesses with a global vision to local ‘grassroots’ companies (Jones & Donmoyer, 2015). We examined case studies of other nonprofits that have incorporated social enterprise models to address dependency on decreasing government funding and grant stipulations.

We found very few peer-reviewed case studies similar to our project, except one nonprofit using social enterprise in the DTES neighbourhood, Atira Women’s Resource Society, which was housing-focused (Svedova et al., 2010). For a better understanding of the social enterprise model in terms of food commodities, we broadened our search to look at similar case studies of nonprofits in BC and across the world that worked with marginalized, or

under-housed populations, and who employ their patrons in their enterprise as a means of community economic development.

Knowledge Gap

Due to the narrow scope of the project, there is little research available on small-scale nonprofits in the DTES who are using the social enterprise model to market food commodities while employing their patrons. To meet the specific needs of the DTES NH for this project, we will be providing useful information and data that does not currently exist for the DTES NH's use.

Guiding Theoretical Framework

As this project will be conducted in partnership with the DTES NH we have incorporated some of their guiding principles into the theoretical framework in order to keep this project in-line with their goals and objectives. Our research is also grounded in the theories of asset-based community development (ABCD), and place-based approaches:

The DTES NH's Guiding Principles

The DTES NH embraces food justice and recognizes food as a means to build and fortify community, as well as a holistic approach to the health & well-being. Rejecting the dominant charity model, they use non-paternalistic methods with their patrons, whom they serve regardless of age, gender, ancestry, etc. They are sensitive to the history of the DTES, including the fact that it sits on the traditional land of the Coast Salish people, and this informs their actions (DTES NH, 2017).

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

ABCD is an alternative approach to development that recognizes the resources of a community and the capacity of its citizens. It focuses on the assets of a community, rather than the dominant needs-based approach. Additionally, it allows for the community to control its own economic development, using resources from within their community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Place-Based Approaches & Research

Place-based approaches are trans-disciplinary, collaborative, holistic processes that focus on addressing issues of a particular geographic space (ie. a neighbourhood). They are constructed with the specific neighbourhood in mind, and utilize as many local resources as possible. (Bellefontaine et al, 2011)

Within the context of our project, this means acknowledging the complex histories of the DTES, as well as the role racism, sexism, economic inequality, and colonialism have informed and continuously shape the realities of the neighbourhood and its citizens, and tailoring our approaches thusly.

Objectives

- 1) Collect information on where and how to sell the DTES NH's fundraising gift basket, and reaching out to organizations that could potentially support this social enterprise.
- 2) While achieving Objective 1, reach out to organizations interested in buying or distributing the holiday basket. These will be some of the same organizations as above, in addition to other firms in the area who may buy many for their clientele.
- 3) Collect information on year-round farmer's markets and holiday markets in the area and how accessible they are to the DTES NH.

Methods

1. Volunteer at DTES NH to foster understanding and connections with the organization and the community accessing their services, at both regular programming and canning workshops.
2. Research local Business Improvement Areas.
 - a. Learn how they work and what services they provide.
3. Contact the three BIA for advice or resources on who to approach to sell year-round baskets.
4. Research other organizations, identified by the DTES NH, who may buy or distribute the year-round basket and what they can offer.
5. Contact the three focus community organizations above.
 - . Pursue potential sales or connections they may offer.
- a. Provide resources for each organization to connect with the DTES NH.
 6. Research year-round markets and holiday markets in the Vancouver area and their accessibility for the DTES NH to sell products at.
 - . BC Association of Farmers Markets, Main Street Farmers Market, Vancouver Christmas Market at Queen Elizabeth
 - a. Find out what the other markets are.
7. Compile a holistic document with interesting information on each of the DTES NH's in-house products that can be used for marketing.
 - . Include information about the DTES NH's sustainability.
8. Provide the DTES NH with clear and straight-forward findings from our work, to inform marketing of the in-house products.
 - . Include information relevant to selling Holiday Baskets

Outcome(s)

By the end of the semester, we will provide a detailed report with clear information about where the year-round and holiday gift baskets can be sold in the next 12 months (e.g. farmers markets, retail stores, etc.), as a “roadmap” guiding the sales process for the DTES NH. Information on how the DTES NH can participate in markets will also be included in the report. If time permits, we plan to create an infographic of information on each of the DTES NH’s products, including the sustainability, production, origin, and other interesting facts. In addition, a report documenting our experience and lessons learned will be provided to the DTES NH. We hope to positively contribute to the DTES NH’s social enterprise initiative, and meaningfully engage in a unique learning opportunity.

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