

Project Title: Investigating the evolution of of social enterprises and the social entrepreneurship eco-system in the North West and and Derry Strabane City Region

Supervisors: Dr. Isobel Cunningham

Prof. Mike Caslin

Dr. Laura Bradley

Keywords: Social enterprises, social entrepreneurship, 4P Social Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial ecosystem, economic development, challenges, motivations, cross border

Project Summary:

According to Forfás (2013) a social enterprise is “an enterprise that trades for a social/societal purpose and where the surplus is primarily reinvested in the social objective”, (pp. 2). Social enterprises are growing in popularity across Europe, (European Commission, 2020; Terziev et al, 2020). They support achievement of various Social Development Goals (SDGs) including social, economic and environmental challenges whilst engaging in commercial activities to effect societal impact and change, (Forfás, 2013; Gupta et al, 2020). They provide employment, engage fragmented resources, generate economic returns, mobilise local communities, enhance the entrepreneurial culture and deliver inclusive demographic, green and digital initiatives amongst other things (Bauer et al, 2018; European Commission, 2020; Terziev et al, 2020). Despite this there are gaps in understanding these critical economic entities, (O’Shaughnessy, 2020).

This proposal outlines a research project focusing on the social enterprise ecosystem and sector across in the North West of Ireland. Social enterprises are supported by the Government (Lyon et al, 2019) and are prioritised by the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship and the European Commission through, for example, the Social Business Initiative (2011), Europe 2020 Strategy and European Social Fund, (Teriez et al, 2020). This study aims to better understand the formation, needs and map social enterprises in the North West region.

There are criticisms that social enterprises do not have the necessary skills and experience to deliver quality public services effectively putting public services in danger of not meeting the needs of their multiple stakeholder groups (e.g., Powell and Osborne, 2018; Powell,

Gillett, and Doherty, 2019). As has their over-reliance on grant funding which can stifle their ability to innovate and develop a sustainable business model. The study draws on previous studies conducted which explored social enterprise practitioners' views on business support provision (Mazzie et al, 2020) and will focus on the pre-start up, start up and established stage of social enterprise development. This enable policy holders and decision makers across the local entrepreneurial eco system to better understand how to aid the start up and development of social enterprises.

Overall aim is to investigate the formation and evolution of social enterprises/entrepreneurs in the North West region.

Objectives

1. To build a demographic profile of entrepreneurs
2. 4P Social” Entrepreneurs for People, Profit, Planet and Place
3. Identify the motivations and challenges they encounter at each stage of formation and evolution
4. Identify the importance of local entrepreneurial ecosystem in the process
5. Outline the importance of intermediaries, hubs, HEIs to the process.

Candidate Qualifications/Requirements:

Level 8, Degree in Business (minimum 2.1) or equivalent. Applicants will be called for interview, please note that shortlisting may apply.