The Green Social Economy in British Columbia and Alberta

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*It should be axiomatic that an enterprise which has social purpose will have a clear positive environmental policy, for to be environmentally irresponsible is to be socially irresponsible.* (Pearce 2003, 43)

In this chapter, we describe, in broad brush strokes, what the BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA) mapping team has learned about social economics and green or environmental social economy organizations in Canada’s two westernmost provinces. Because the social economy is challenging to define, it is also challenging to measure. Its emergent and rapidly evolving qualities add to the complexity of designing an appropriate net to capture its scale and scope. In order to apprehend the richness and diversity of the social economy sector in our two provinces, the BALTA team used a mapping survey, described below, to gather data from a variety of social economy organizations.

One intriguing finding in the data gathered by the BALTA team provided the seeds for this volume: a large number of social economy organizations declared that they were serving an environmental purpose. As John Pearce suggests in the statement quoted above, segmented definitions of social economy groups blur in reality. The hard lines of social, economic, environmental, and cultural—tick boxes in our survey—did an injustice to the integrated way in which many of these organizations see themselves doing their work and delivering value to their communities. But before delving into the details of the BALTA survey and our findings, we provide some contextual history for the social economy in Alberta and British Columbia.
Alberta has led all provinces in Canada in growth over the last twenty years (Alberta 2011). The export boom in Alberta continues to attract workers and investment from around the globe, especially in the petrochemical and energy industries, and Alberta now has the fastest-growing population in Canada. As a major supplier of petroleum resources, Alberta has been eager to spread its economic philosophy of neoliberalism across the nation, a goal in part realized by the election of the federal Conservative Party and an Albertan prime minister in 2006. Looking to Alberta to promote a social economy movement like that in Québec (described in chapter 1) might therefore seem a fond but futile dream.

Despite rapid growth, quick profits, and high wages for some Albertans, however, poverty and inequity persist in the province. Alberta is not homogeneous, despite cultural tropes of cowboy hats and oil rigs. In their “Introduction” to Writing Off the Rural West (2001), Roger Epp and Dave Whitson describe two Albertas: one sociogeographic region and set of peoples inside the economic boom, and the other outside. They argue that wealth and power is concentrated along the Highway 2 corridor and the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, in resource cities like Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, and in the recreational settlements along the southwestern Rocky Mountain corridor; meanwhile, people in eastern rural Alberta and parts of the north and south, as well as in the poorer neighbourhoods of the cities, are struggling in what Epp later describes as “outer Alberta” (2006, 729). A recent report published by the Parkland Institute on disparity in Alberta confirms those patterns. Diana Gibson (2012, 7) found that economic inequality is increasing, with “Alberta’s top 1 percent . . . by far the wealthiest in the nation, while at the bottom Alberta has the most intense poverty.” Her analyses of Alberta’s booming cities and industrial countryside help explain the need for the social economy in Canada’s richest province. Ecological conditions are also deteriorating, as expansion in the tar sands, shale gas, and conventional oil and gas industries continues, with especially negative effects on ecosystems and First Nations downstream from Fort McMurray, home to the world’s largest industrial megaproject.

But many Albertans seem determined to cash in on their place in a global free trade marketplace. Raising concerns about the negative impacts of the current boom on the poor or the environment is seen as meddling with people’s personal rights to seek prosperity. Nevertheless, there is evidence that many other Albertans are resisting neoliberal, get-rich-quick economic clichés and are fighting...
for ecological and economic futures that are just and sustainable (Davidson and Gismondi 2011). Indeed, progressive politics, which has deep historical roots in the province, has generated many and varied collective responses by Albertans to poverty and economic and environmental precariousness.

The prairie west has always been a unique region of Canada. Alberta was founded in 1905, almost forty years after Canadian confederation in 1867. The region was shaped economically by grain farming and was politically dominated by federal land and immigration policies in its early decades. Gerald Friesen (1999) describes Alberta as the noisiest province—tempestuous and loud, with money in its pockets. Early on, Alberta’s settlers and governments struggled, subordinated in part to eastern elites. Many Albertans carry resentment and animosity towards Ottawa’s politicians and federal regulators, feelings brought forward from these early decades of the 1900s, when eastern Canadian bankers and politicians controlled private credit, loans and public investment, immigration, and resources in the western provinces. That resentment and protest against Ottawa became entrenched in the 1980s following the crash of Alberta’s first oil boom. Increasing oil production and rising oil prices had created a thriving petrochemical refining and manufacturing sector and thousands of spin-off jobs in Alberta’s construction and support service sectors. Real estate and business in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary were booming. Oil dollars filled the provincial coffers, and public spending expanded public sector services and jobs. Alberta had joined the twentieth century. But when the global oil crisis of the 1970s took oil prices even higher, Liberal prime minister Pierre Trudeau imposed a National Energy Program (NEP) to keep Alberta’s politicians from raising oil prices to world rates and to maintain lower gas costs for eastern Canadian consumers. The federal government’s actions killed the boom. The economy and the oil industry had gone bust by the mid-1980s. People lost companies, jobs, and homes. Many migrated out of the province. New grievances against Ottawa joined the old ones. Memories of the NEP and its effects persist, and the resentment is widespread across Albertans. In the 1990s, Ralph Klein, then Alberta’s premier, became expert at using the memory of the NEP to whip up public resistance to federal environmental reviews of Alberta’s resource projects. Well into the 2000s, Klein blunted public discussion of environmental issues like climate change; First Nations’ and farmers’ concerns about the Oldman River dam; and public concerns about business and housing expansion in Banff and Jasper National Parks, coal mining near Hinton, forestry and pulp and paper expansion in northern Alberta, gas exploration in the foothills, and the growth of the tar sands industry.
Paralleling Alberta’s defiance of federal power has been an enduring socio-cultural set of images of the independent, self-reliant, go-it-alone Albertan (farmer, rig worker, oil businessman), which in turn has reinforced a widely held ideology that unbridled individualism, markets, and businesses are the solutions to poverty, social inequality, and even environmental protection, rather than government policy and programs (Filax 2008). The Conservative Party, which ruled the province from the late 1960s to 2015, wove this mythic individualism into its brand of prairie neoliberalism. In the 1990s, Premier Ralph Klein disguised government support for large corporations and private investors with folksy tales of his support for the self-reliant farm family, independent rig worker, or urban oil company entrepreneur, while gutting the environment department, cutting and curtailing public services, and privatizing lucrative government sectors (Taft 1997).

Nevertheless, a stream of progressive agrarian populist politics with deep historical roots in Alberta continues to flow in the province. Critics counter the roughneck and cowboy images by explaining that Alberta’s individualism grew out of frontier communities, forged in the era of collaborative prairie settlement and homesteading. It was strong family and community co-operation that ensured the survival of those early settlers and rural communities against isolation, hostile weather, and difficult agricultural and economic conditions. Individualism, from this perspective, is rooted in community values. In those early days, collective responses by Albertans (to provide rural electrification, farm and fuel supply, and local financial capital) operated to offset the power of banks and corporations, “plutocratic economic parasites of Central Canada” (Epp 2006, 742). The co-operative movement took root in the prairies in the early 1900s as a democratic populist movement, and Albertans elected the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) political party to govern the province (1920–35). The UFA founded the Alberta Wheat Pool in 1923, at the behest of co-operative farmers who realized the need for state support to confront private capital. But the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation would emerge in Saskatchewan, not Alberta, where the UFA political movement was displaced by Social Credit rule (1935–70), a more conservative than progressive force in Alberta and Canadian politics (Finkel 2006).

Social Credit’s platform of support for struggling farmers, especially its concept of non-interest social dividends and its efforts to escape the control of central Canadian financiers, appealed to the broad Alberta population struggling out of the Depression. In 1938, Social Credit created Alberta Treasury Branch, a provincially controlled and owned financial institution that competed with private banks, as well as credit unions. The ideas behind the bank blended a Christian
critique of capitalism with popular protest against commercial bankers in Toronto and Montréal, who prevented credit provision for many Albertans (Whalen 1952). Alberta Treasury Branch remains a Crown corporation today. Left-wing popular opinion is that it is a conservative counterweight to credit unions. That said, it maintains some 635,000 customers and $33 billion in assets, operating across Alberta as ATB Financial. Ralph Klein tried to privatize ATB (at the same time as he privatized the Alberta Liquor Control Board) as part of his neoliberal downsizing of the state in the 1990s. He was prevented by his own Tory rural caucus. ATB enjoyed public goodwill (Bird 2012) because during the recession of the 1980s, the corporation had protected many small businesses and oilfield contractors while the banks were calling loans and foreclosing. In an age of global mismanagement, ATB remains a well-managed, Alberta-owned Crown asset. If we seek financial sustainability to fund a green transition in Alberta, a publicly owned financial house with a progressive mission and supportive past practice in rural communities is a promising asset. Politics and a struggle for state power will have to come first, but the institution is already in place.

Similarly, Alberta credit unions (including a number of francophone caisses populaires in rural francophone communities like St. Paul and those in the Peace River country) also began providing alternative credit and community support in the mid-1930s. In 2013, the credit union system served members in more than two hundred branches across the province and had over $21.6 billion in assets (Alberta Central 2013, 3, 20). The Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, which serves the province’s francophone population, also remains prominent in community development. And today, over 65 percent of Albertans are members of co-operatives. Individualism co-exists with collectivity in the UFA agricultural, building, and fuel co-operative networks, as well as in more than 550 other member-owned Alberta co-operatives like grain pools and consumer co-ops, feedlots, gas and energy co-operatives, seed-cleaning plants, First Nations enterprises, and social housing co-operatives (www.acca.coop). Critics suggest, however, that we not overstate the depth of Albertans’ co-operative commitment. They make note of pressures on the sector to become more competitive, reduce workforce, and even demutualize (Quarter, Mook, and Armstrong 2009). Writing about the late 1990s, Roger Epp (2006) describes the end of rural Alberta being the centre of political

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1 Paul Cabaj, ACCA director. Speech at 2012 International Year of Cooperatives Gathering of Alberta Cooperatives, Red Deer, Alberta. Author’s notes. Canada’s 8,500 co-operatives and credit unions have more than 17 million members, and 4 in 10 Canadians are members of at least one cooperative (Canada, 2012, 15).
life in Alberta, along with the eclipse of many organizing and co-operative skills embedded in rural communities. But where Epp sees an eclipse, we see a stubborn legacy of co-operative frameworks and ideals resurfacing today in rural/urban collaboration around local food, conservation, alternative energy, and other environmental concerns. These also include promising alternative community finance models such as the new-generation co-operatives Westlock Terminals and the Battle River Railway, and the opportunity development co-operatives in Sangudo and Crowsnest Pass. Other indications of a progressive framework of values in Alberta are evident: continued state support for new and old forms of co-operation and credit unionism, considerable public membership in small and large co-operatives (more so in user services than production), and a rise of interest in co-operation in cities, especially among youth. It’s not the united protest and glory of Alberta’s past, but neither is it an empty field. Rebuilding a politics on these foundations is possible.

Alberta’s Aboriginal peoples also have a history of participation in the social economy through innovative partnerships created to address their unique community needs. For example, the challenge of adequate housing for First Nations communities throughout Canada requires community-based responses because of the specifics of property ownership under First Nations treaty rights. Peace Hills Trust, a fully owned trust company founded in 1980 by the Samson Cree Nation, offers a First Nations response to housing problems that is created through common ownership and real estate equity limitations based on the Indian Act (Schwamborn 2010). Likewise, in response to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Alberta’s court system, Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) was established in 1970 with the objective of providing court-worker assistance to Aboriginal people in conflict with the law. Today, NCSA’s services range from the provision of family and community wellness programs that shape restorative and social justice models to the full operation of the Stan Daniels Healing Centre, a federal Community Correctional Centre with a Section 81 designation.

Alberta’s Métis people, who have faced a different set of barriers, have often been left outside of mainstream programs. Addressing this issue are the Métis Capital Housing Corporation (MCHC) and its sister corporation, the Métis Urban Housing Corporation (MUHC), both of which are owned by the Métis Nation of Alberta. MUHC was incorporated in 1982 to provide “affordable, adequate, and appropriate rental housing for low- and moderate-income Métis and Native families within the urban centres of Alberta” (Métis Nation 2007). Building on the
success of this endeavour, MCHC is now working to increase Métis home ownership, one example being MCHC’s recently completed Boyle Renaissance project in east downtown Edmonton, which contains 150 affordable units with district energy provided by Enmax Corporation (Wodzynska 2014). There has also been much pan–First Nations and Métis protest, including civil resistance, against environmental destruction in various regions of the province.

It is this active and progressive history of Alberta co-operatives, credit unions, trusts, non-profit organizations, and social groups (ethnic, First Nations, Métis, religious, rural, and urban) that provides the context for current social economy initiatives in the province, to which we will return following an introduction to the social economy in British Columbia.

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA CONTEXT

Since its beginnings as a province, British Columbia has had a strong economic base of natural resource industries, especially fisheries, orcharding and agriculture, forestry, and mining. But BC’s economy is also cyclical and has resulted in winners and losers, rich and poor classes, strong cities and weak small communities, and rural hinterlands. Today, many BC communities are suffering from crises related to fluctuating resource prices, the collapse of fisheries, a declining forestry industry, the overharvesting of resources and ecological degradation, and foreign ownership of natural resource industries. Since the 1970s, a politics of confrontation has created divisions between urban and rural people, pro-development and pro-environment groups, and First Nations and settler communities. The recent mountain pine beetle crisis decimated interior forest stands and threatened the future of many of BC’s non-metropolitan local economies (Nikiforuk 2011). Large disparities of wealth can be seen between, for example, small communities in rural and northern regions versus the lower mainland, as well as between social classes within cities like Vancouver. Although British Columbia experienced near-universal provincial growth during the long boom of the postwar period (with the exception of First Nations communities), political and economic restructuring has created tremendous intraprovincial variability and inequality: “greater income disparity, homelessness, and poverty are evident to anyone who walks the streets of Vancouver, Victoria, and even smaller communities” (Cohen and Klein 2011, 58).

As in Alberta, the social economy in British Columbia comprises many strands, including traditional community economic development (CED) practice, a strong
co-operative movement, some progressive municipal initiatives, social enterprises, charities and foundations, and unions. One unique aspect of BC has been the strength of the province’s First Nations, who have never been subject to treaty and who remain economically sovereign over their traditional territories. Since the 1970s, First Nations’ local control over education and the economy has evolved, with land claims issues remaining a central motivating force underlying demands for community control of resources and economic opportunity. On the co-operative side, there is also a long history of Aboriginal co-ops within fisheries in British Columbia, especially with respect to harvesting; industrial fish processing co-operatives have been less successful. In terms of CED, Aboriginal development corporations are community owned and are often resource based. In the 1980s, the federal Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy sought to increase community capacity and community investment in First Nations. This generated interest in joint ventures between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, a trend that continues to expand and evolve today.

Since the mid-1970s, British Columbia has also had a long evolution of Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs). In BC, these organizations have maintained a focus on lending and entrepreneurial development, with some social enterprise and social co-operatives in the mix. These development corporations have ranged from relatively conservative to more progressive. In rural areas, they remain important, proactive, and community based. Community Futures have also been involved in the development of community infrastructure. For example, the City of Revelstoke, located in the Columbia District of BC, has been active in addressing local business growth, unemployment, and the boom-and-bust cycles in the forest industry. Revelstoke municipal authorities established a community forest tenureship in the 1990s to support local wood milling, manufacturing, and value-added processing. Social-public partnership—that is, collaboration between social economy organizations and municipalities—is an important strand of strong sustainability revisited throughout this book.

Co-operatives and credit unions also have a long history and prominent presence in BC’s society and economy. (See chapter 10 on credit unions in British Columbia and Alberta.) Religious, ethnic, and other co-operatives have played key roles in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, as well as in the provision of services such as housing and elder care. (See Stories of BC Co-op Movement at http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cccbe/resources/galleria/index.php). Recently, the British Columbia Co-operative Association has drawn attention to
the networks of green co-operatives providing alternative transport, housing, social, and food services in Canadian cities (Restakis 2010). On the financial side, Coast Capital Savings and Vancity credit unions are long-time supporters of the social economy and are exploring innovations in affordable and attainable housing and green building. In addition, one of Canada’s largest consumer co-operatives, Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), has its head office and warehousing divisions in British Columbia. (MEC is also popular in Alberta and has outlets across Canada). As a retail co-operative, MEC tries to build and operate its facilities with minimum ecological impact and dedicates 1 percent of gross sales to supporting environmental causes. Further, MEC has established sustainability and value-based supply chain standards with both international suppliers and local sustainability initiatives. Some critics see MEC’s mission of encouraging outdoor recreation and nature exploration as increasing the impact of humans on wild nature. Others are critical of its contribution to consumerism and its displacement of small local outdoor-equipment stores. MEC, nevertheless, provides an example of a progressive, global-scale, Canadian co-operative operating within a worldwide consumer society and capitalist economy. In collaboration with international groups, MEC is leading and encouraging retail companies to take up sustainability indicators, green procurement, fair workplace standards, and conservancy and stewardship initiatives (Ponto 2008; Quarter, Mook, and Armstrong 2009).

Enterprising Non-Profits (ENP), an emergent force in Canada’s social economy, is a collaborative program that began in 1997 in Vancouver with support from the United Way and the Vancouver Foundation. The program “promotes and supports social enterprise development and growth as a means to build strong non-profit organizations and healthier communities” (VCF 2014). ENP grew rapidly throughout the province and now has affiliate sites across the country that are introducing innovative social purchasing models. A recent survey of social enterprises in British Columbia and Alberta indicates the wide range of their work and shows that an increasing number of such enterprises are involved in environmental work (Elson and Hall 2010). Social enterprises, which are now found worldwide, use commercial approaches to market their services and products and use profits to grow the enterprise (in terms of both impact and employment) and to extend their social and ecological missions.

Finally, one weakness in the social economy in both Alberta and British Columbia is the lack, across all sectors, of supporting infrastructure, which appears somewhat narrow in focus. There is a need for more systematic cross-sector alliance
building and fiscal support along the lines of Chantier de l’économie sociale in Québec (Lewis and Conaty 2012). In the conclusion of this book, we return to a discussion of the role of government support and the building of system-wide supports needed to strengthen and expand the social economy network in western Canada.

**Mapping Survey Methodology**

It wasn’t until the mid-1990s that the term *social economy* began to be widely used, and it started in Québec. Since that time, Québec has led the country in the development of the sector (Bouchard 2013). But even by 2008, comparatively little discussion about the social economy sector—its actors, contributions, or impacts—had taken place in western Canada. In January of that year, the BALTA group undertook a five-year project to begin to fill the information gap. A preliminary profile of the size and scope of the sector in BC and Alberta was undertaken using existing data from such sources as *The Canadian Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Comparative Perspective* (Hall et al. 2005), other government studies, and various reports by non-government organizations. The resulting BALTA report provided evidence for the important roles of non-profit and voluntary organizations and co-operative businesses in employment and revenue generation, non-market housing, social enterprise, and the provision of local and regional social services. It also identified financial, philanthropic, and other intermediary groups that sustain and support the social economy. In particular, it acknowledged the significant presence of the co-operative model in western Canada and its role in consumer, energy, farming, housing, and non-financial services, alongside strong financial co-operatives and credit unions (Sousa and Hamdon 2008).

To learn more about social economy organizations in Alberta and British Columbia, the BALTA team implemented a mapping survey (Affolderbach, Gismondi, and Soots 2008). Using definitions from Restakis (2006) and Pearce (2003) to help identify which groups to survey, we sought information from co-operatives, credit unions, non-profit and volunteer organizations, charities and foundations, service associations, and community and social enterprises in both provinces. Drawing on Lewis (2006), we paid particular attention to those social economy organizations that use market mechanisms to generate revenue and pursue explicit social objectives. We believed that revenue generated by trading services and products in the market by organizations in the third sector is, as Pearce (2003, 25) argues, an important but largely under-recognized economic
contribution to society—a contribution that provides social economy organizations with fiscal resilience and with a democratically controlled means to expand their programs.

For-profit enterprises were included in our survey only if surpluses were mutually shared by members in a collectively owned structure, such as in co-operatives or collectives. We excluded from our survey hospitals, universities, government organizations, and conventional capitalist firms such as sole proprietorships, partnerships, and investor-owned or publicly traded companies. The overall goal of the BALTA survey was strategic:

We are interested in achieving more than merely setting out a baseline of actors in the social economy. For example, can mapping help us capture the characteristics of the social economy that are often rendered invisible quantitatively but are of crucial importance to achieving durable results? How do we capture data useful to policymakers? What kinds of questions are of importance to practitioners, which if answered could lead to improvements in the development of a new generation of practitioners? How can the research relevance of the mapping be maximized by producing a comparative base of accessible data from which more effectively honed research questions might be posed? (Lewis 2006, 2)

To further define our population in line with national survey efforts, we drew on the methodology of the Canada Research Chair in Social Economy research group, who used the following criteria when profiling social economy organizations: (1) economic activity through the production of goods or provision of services, (2) social rules prohibiting or limiting distribution of surpluses among members, (3) voluntary association of persons and/or of collective bodies, and (4) commitment to democratic governance processes (Bouchard, Ferraton, and Michaud 2006). With the collaboration of practitioners and umbrella groups in Alberta and BC, we developed a contact list for the survey of 1,600 social economy organizations (Affolderbach, Gismondi, and Soots 2009).

From the outset, a number of us in BALTA had been intrigued by certain social economy organizations doing key environmental work in our two provinces. While groups working on the environment were recognized in Canada’s national voluntary sector survey (Hall et al. 2005), and in some survey work in Québec and the Maritimes, the BALTA team decided to explore the relationship between the social economy and environmental work more deeply. Our emphasis on environment is linked to increased public concern about resource extraction and the export of oil
and gas, minerals, and forest products in both provinces, and the equally strong concern for conservation and ecosystem health and its links to life and livelihood. We formulated specific questions about environmental goals and activities in order to capture any evidence of the green social economy. As Lewis (2006, 16) explains:

> To better understand the extent to which the social economy in the region is engaged directly in environmental restoration and protection through social enterprise is, in my view, a strategic design issue. Given the cross-cutting nature of [the issues of] climate change, peak oil, and local and regional environmental degradation, the extent to which social enterprise is conscious of and practically engaged in activities that promote solutions is of real value.

The question in the back of our minds was whether environmental conservation should be understood as just one more mission alongside such goals as poverty alleviation, job training, and affordable housing provision, or whether the relationship between environmental and social sustainability is in fact more intertwined and will only be achieved with transformative change and a paradigm shift in thinking. This entire book explores this question. As Lewis (2007, 2) argues: “At the end of the day, . . . the belief that re-embedding social goals into the heart of our economic life is crucial, and that placing both into a proper and durable relationship within the ecological limits of our planet is our most present and urgent meta-priority.”

MAPPING SURVEY FINDINGS: HIGHLIGHTS

The BALTA mapping project analysis is based on completed surveys from 478 social economy (SE) organizations, 33 percent from Alberta and 67 percent from BC. While we cannot claim that our findings represent the social economy sector, given the sampling method and size, an interesting portrait of the social economy in these provinces has begun to emerge from the information gathered. The following highlights from the BALTA mapping survey findings indicate the importance of the sector not only to the provinces’ economic well-being but also to the well-being of their people and communities.²

² For more details of the BALTA mapping project and survey results, go to “Mapping Results, Reports, and Papers” under the “Research” tab at the BALTA website (http://www.socialeconomy-bcalberta.ca/research/mapping-results-reports-papers.php). For the final report, see Gismondi et al. (2013).
➢ SE organizations are purposeful.
   • Almost 90 percent of organizations reported having an explicitly stated social purpose or mission guiding their work. Most frequently, these missions are related to education and training, the provision of basic needs, health, housing, human rights, and family services.
   • A significant proportion (26%) also reported having an environmental purpose or mission, and the majority of these focus their activities on conservation and protection, along with resource management.

➢ SE organizations help to build social capital in communities.
   • Almost half of the organizations service their local communities: cities, towns, and regional areas.
   • Almost three-quarters of the organizations also provide support to each other.
   • Over 75 percent of profits generated by the surveyed SE organizations are invested back into growing the organization and its services.

➢ SE organizations are active in the economy.
   • Annual operating budgets reported by SE organizations in the two provinces total over $638 million, while the capital budgets exceed $1.19 billion.
   • Annual revenue totals $2.62 billion, of which $1.95 billion is generated through participation in the market economy.

➢ SE organizations participate in a variety of work sectors.
   • Over 40 percent of the SE organizations described their “primary” work to be in the services sector.
   • The focus of the remaining groups ranges from agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining to arts and culture, housing, environment, and business.

➢ SE organizations provide numerous employment opportunities.
   • Collectively, the surveyed organizations have more than 12,500 full-time and 4,500 part-time employees.
   • In addition, the respondents provide 971 seasonal and 2,111 contract opportunities.
   • A total of 1,694 individuals from traditionally under-represented social groups are employed by 109 SE organizations.
The mapping survey asked respondents if they have an explicitly stated social and/or environmental mission. Twenty-six percent of the respondents indicated that their organization has an environmental mission. We will refer to this group as environmental social economy (ESE) organizations throughout the following discussion. The data provided by these 124 organizations form the basis for this initial portrait of ESE organizations in Alberta and British Columbia. Again, while we cannot claim representativeness, given the sampling method and size, the respondents provided important information about the ethos and activities of their organizations. For a full report of the findings from the ESE organizations within the BALTA Mapping Survey, see Gismondi, Ross, and Marois (2014).

**Environmental Missions**

Reinsertion of social and/or environmental goals into economic decision-making is a defining characteristic of social economy organizations. Thus, we asked respondents to choose, from a list of fifteen pre-defined items, all of the areas that best describe their establishment’s “environmental mission or scope of activities.” An additional “other” category was included to allow participants to elaborate on a mission or activity not found in the original list. As shown in figure 2.1, the ESE organizations reported a broad range of missions/activities, the most frequently identified ones being conservation and protection, resource management, alternative business practices, health, agriculture and food, and pollution prevention.

Of the multiple missions and activities listed for their organizations, participants were next asked to specify one primary category. Of the forty-five Alberta ESE organizations that specified a primary category for their environmental mission, conservation and protection, health, resource management, and agriculture and food were noted most frequently (see figure 2.2). There was also a relatively large “other” group whose environmental missions covered a range of activities not specified in the list of primary categories offered. The sixty responding ESE organizations in British Columbia provided a varied list as well (see figure 2.3). Excluding the “other” category, conservation and protection, alternative business practices, agriculture and food, and sustainability were most frequently noted.
Figure 2.1 Environment-related activities of ESE organizations in Alberta and BC

Notes: N=47 (Alberta); N=77 (BC). Percentages do not total 100% because many of the organizations surveyed identified multiple environmental missions. The conservation category covers both conservation and protection.
Figure 2.2 Primary environmental mission for Alberta ESE organizations

Notes: N = 45. “Other” combines categories selected by less than 5% of the organizations and/or were unspecified. These categories are alternative energy (4.5%), transportation (2%), waste management and recycling (2%), pollution prevention (4.5%), green building/architecture (2%), legal/financial services (2%), sustainability (4.5%), and unspecified (7%).

Figure 2.3 Primary environmental mission for BC ESE organizations

Notes: N = 60. “Other” combines categories selected by less than 5% of the organizations and/or were unspecified. These categories are transportation (2%), climate change (3%), green building/architecture (3%), research/independent science (2%), co-labeling/auditing/monitoring (2%), health (3%), and unspecified (7%).
**Social Missions**

Most ESE organizations (93.5%) also had a social mission. In both Alberta and BC, social mission was defined most frequently by participation in the education and health sectors and through provision of basic needs.

We next asked respondents to choose a primary social mission. Alberta ESE organizations most frequently chose target groups and environment as their primary social mission (see figure 2.4). Although fair trade and sustainability were listed as separate categories, they could also be interpreted as environmental. In British Columbia, excluding “other,” the ESE organizations most frequently chose target groups, education, and environment to define their primary social mission (see figure 2.5).

![Figure 2.4 Primary social mission for Alberta ESE organizations](image)

**Figure 2.4** Primary social mission for Alberta ESE organizations

Notes: N = 41. “Other” combines categories selected by less than 5% of the organizations. These categories are housing (2%), legal/financial services (2%), family services (2%), arts and culture (2%), and other (2%).
Figure 2.5 Primary social mission for BC ESE organizations

Notes: N = 56. “Other” combines categories selected by less than 5% of the organizations. These categories are human rights (1%), health (3%), basic needs (4%), family services (1%), fair trade (3%), housing (1%), and other (3%).

Organizational Structure
In addition to identifying the missions and activities of ESE organizations, the mapping project team explored the relationships among each organization’s mission, age, structure, size, and ways of interacting with the community. The following descriptions emerged.

The ESE organizations tended to be younger than SE organizations in general. While the average age of the latter was 28.7 years in Alberta and 25.9 years in BC, the average age of ESE organizations was 25 years in Alberta and 21 years in BC. Figure 2.6 shows the growth of ESE organizations from 1914 to 2010. The most senior ESE organization currently operating in Alberta was incorporated in 1914; the most junior, in 2007. In British Columbia, the oldest ESE organization was incorporated in 1943; the newest, in 2010. A dramatic increase in the number of ESE organizations occurred in Alberta starting in 1998 and in BC starting in 1994.

The majority of ESE organizations in Alberta and British Columbia identified their legal form as a non-profit organization (45% and 51%, respectively) and/or a non-profit society (45% and 29%). In their study of social enterprises in Alberta and British Columbia, Peter Elson and Peter Hall (2010) reported a similarly high proportion, with 73.9 percent of their respondents with environmental missions reporting having a “non-profit legal structure.” Interestingly, a number of ESE
organizations surveyed for the BALTA mapping study in British Columbia (21%), but not in Alberta (4%), identified themselves as for-profit organizations or corporations. Given these structures, it is not surprising that in both Alberta and British Columbia, the majority of ESE organizations reported that they invested their profits back into their organizations (64% and 79%, respectively), while another 17 percent in each province reported donating to other community organizations.

Figure 2.6 Growth of ESE organizations in Alberta and BC from 1914 to 2010
Notes: N=44 (Alberta); N=76 (BC)

In terms of accountability to a defined constituency, almost two-thirds of all ESE organizations indicated that they had a membership base. Membership numbers across the various ESE organizations ranged from 20 to 2.8 million in Alberta and from 4 to 392,000 in British Columbia. A greater proportion of Alberta organizations (75%) than BC organizations (56%) reported having a membership base. While the mapping study found a median of 210 and 142 members in Alberta and
British Columbia ESE organizations, respectively, the average calculated in Elson and Hall’s social enterprise study was 484 members (2010).

The social economy literature, particularly on community economic development, frequently emphasizes the local scale of operations within social enterprises, or what is often called “local embeddedness.” Place-based connections are seen as a key factor in success but also as a limiting factor for the scaling up of operations. John Loxley and Laura Lamb (2007, 202), however, emphasize the importance of making business relationships with others in the larger economy. For example, the purchase by an expanding community development enterprise of goods or services produced by smaller marginal social economy organizations, or social enterprises, would be a backward linkage. Whereas, the sale by the community enterprise of a service or commodity to a larger community development firm like a province wide Food Coop or Cooperative Gas Bar would be a forward linkage. Thinking of business relationships as dynamic is a way to conceive of local embeddedness as nested in a larger system.

The results of our survey confirmed both the local and multi-levelled focus of social economy organizations. Most frequently, ESE organizations in both provinces provided services to the local communities and neighbourhoods, cities and towns, and regional areas where they were located (see figure 2.7). Despite this local focus, the ESE organizations in general reported a larger geographic focus than was reported by SE organizations as a whole, with proportionally more ESE organizations serving their provincial, national, and international communities. As figure 2.7 illustrates, in both British Columbia and Alberta, ESE organizations frequently served national and international communities. This finding is not surprising given that environmental issues cross political and geographic boundaries.

In addition to addressing environmental problems, ESE organizations tend to develop linkages and networks that enhance the social capital of an area and benefit the social economy. Social capital refers to attitudes that are based on neighbourliness, trust, and cohesion and that facilitate positive exchanges and effective collaboration (Logue 2006). This network-building characteristic was illustrated in our survey, with 81 percent of Alberta organizations and 88 percent of BC organizations stating that they provide support to other organizations. Figure 2.8 summarizes the types of support, along with the proportion of organizations providing that support. Note that the highest proportion of organizations provide support in the form of networking, capacity building, advocacy and promotion, and research and education.
Figure 2.7 Geographic Range Served by ESE organizations in Alberta and BC

Notes: N=47 (Alberta); N=77 (BC). Percentages do not total 100% because many of the organizations surveyed indicated that they serve more than one type of geographical area.

Figure 2.8 Type of support given by ESE organizations in Alberta and BC to other organizations

Notes: N=38 (Alberta); N=68 (BC). Percentages based on valid N (i.e., only those organizations indicating that they provide support to other organizations). Percentages do not total 100% because many of the organizations surveyed identified multiple support activities. “Other” includes, for example, “housing” and the “provision of food.”
Work Areas, Employment, and Financial Profiles

The BALTA mapping project also explored the work sectors in which the ESE organizations participated, and the survey responses covered a broad range. The largest proportion of Alberta ESE organizations defined their primary work sector as involvement in services (35%), followed by 24 percent in the environment sector (conservation, resource management, transportation, research, and climate change) and 17 percent in the field of natural resources (agriculture, fishing, forestry, mining). As in Alberta, the largest proportion of ESE organizations in British Columbia defined their primary work sector as involvement in services (30%). Next largest was the environment (19%), followed by arts and culture (14%). Further work sector details for the ESE organizations in both provinces can be found in table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Primary work sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Sector</th>
<th>Alberta</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/insurance</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and culture</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/scientific</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within these diverse sectors, responding ESE organizations employ more than 7,500 people in paid positions and create an additional 7,400 volunteer opportunities. Small organizations dominated the survey respondents, with 26 percent of Alberta ESE organizations and 54 percent of those in British Columbia reporting fewer than five full-time employees. Since the question about number of employees and volunteers was not answered by all respondents, the summaries provided here probably underestimate the total numbers of people employed in full-time, part-time, seasonal, contract, and freelance positions, as well as the number of volunteers across both provinces. Further employment details for the ESE organizations in both provinces can be found in table 2.2.
Table 2.2 Employment in Alberta and BC: Number of organizations and jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alberta</th>
<th></th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5625</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>5852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2628</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4773</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to employing numerous people, ESE organizations in both provinces make significant financial contributions to the economy. Annual operating budgets reported total over $122.2 million, while capital budgets exceed $903.5 million. Note that only 68 percent of Alberta participants and 78 percent of BC respondents were able to provide fiscal information about their organization’s actual operating budget. Even fewer Alberta (38%) and BC (29%) participants were able to provide dollar amounts to describe their organization’s actual capital budgets. Therefore, the sums provided underestimate the total dollar amounts related to the organizations that responded to this survey, especially with respect to actual capital budgets.

Median figures (mid-point of the distribution) and sums (total across all organizations) for both the operating and capital budgets were calculated for BC and Alberta ESE organizations. In Alberta, the median operating budget was $338,404 (range = $900–$3.3 million), and in British Columbia, it was $248,566 (range = $950–$21.7 million). In addition, Alberta and BC organizations show total operating budgets of $25.7 million and $96.5 million, respectively. The median capital budgets for Alberta (range = $3000–$18.2 million) and BC (range = $200–$850 million) were calculated at $45,544 and $116,445, respectively. The responding organizations reported total capital budgets of $19.5 million in Alberta and $884 million in BC.

An obvious follow-up question to the size of the budgets was the sources of revenue to fuel these budgets. Most ESE organizations depend on a number of revenue sources. The most frequent sources of revenue reported in both provinces are sales of goods and services, government grants, donations, and memberships and subscriptions (see figure 2.9). Again, not all organizations were able to answer
this question, so the percentages underestimate the numbers of ESE organizations receiving income from any particular source.

Figure 2.9  Sources of revenue for ESE organizations in Alberta and BC
Notes: N=35 (Alberta); N=57 (BC). Percentages do not total 100% because organizations surveyed indicated multiple revenue sources.

Annual revenue figures for ESE organizations were calculated by summing the dollar amounts from each of the categories noted in table 2.3 below—government grants, loans, service contracts, and so on. Figure 2.10 depicts the proportions of Alberta ESE organizations with total revenues within various ranges. As shown by the chart, the largest proportion of organizations surveyed (and who could also provide revenue information) reported revenues less than $20K. Significant proportions of Alberta ESE organizations reported total revenue in the ranges of $20K to $100K, $100K to $500K, and $500K to $1 million.
## Table 2.3 Revenue: ESE organizations in Alberta and BC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alberta</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sales Revenue</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service contracts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$64.5 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of goods/services</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$20 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships/subscriptions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>$4 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources of Finance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$42.5 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government grants</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$43 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$3.8 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$15 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation grants</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>$70 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate sponsorship</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$5 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities/Crown corporations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding revenues/anomalies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casinos/gambling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$57 K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Revenue</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>$303.5 M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As figure 2.11 shows, the largest proportion of BC organizations surveyed (and who could also provide revenue information) reported revenues between $100K and $500K, with another significant proportion reporting revenues between $1 million and $10 million.
ESE organizations in the two provinces reported a total of $303.1 million in sales revenue, $250.8 million in Alberta and $52.3 million in BC. Fifty-seven percent of Alberta and 73 percent of BC organizations earned at least a portion of their income through market-based or business activity (i.e., through the provision of goods and/or services). Figure 2.12 provides a summary of the proportion of ESE organizations in Alberta and British Columbia who reported involvement in various types of market-based activities.

Figure 2.12 Market-based activities of ESE organizations in Alberta and BC

Notes: N=93 (Alberta); N=201 (BC). Percentages do not total 100% because many of the organizations surveyed identified multiple market-based activities.
*The categories include the following:
Services—social, professional, technical, scientific, administrative, public, health care, employment, personal, business, and consulting
Food—service/catering, production, and distribution
Housing—accommodation, housing, and property management
Arts—arts and culture, gallery arts, theatre, and performing arts
Sales—retail and wholesale
Natural Resources—agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining
Business—production/manufacturing, construction, transportation/storage, real estate, etc.
Other—unspecified and unclassifiable data

54  Gismondi, Ross, and Marois
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CONCLUSION

The 124 ESE organizations that completed the BALTA mapping survey provided much information for the discussion that occurs in the following chapters of this book. These organizations show that seeking to achieve a social good through enterprise activity and being environmentally responsible can be compatible. The assertion that being engaged in socially conscious and challenging work is enough—that adding in the component of environmental responsibility is too much—is false. These ESE organizations are functioning with intertwined missions, proving that truly integrated development—development that balances social, economic, and environmental goals—is possible. To deepen our understanding, we conducted follow-up interviews with some of the directors of these organizations and found that many of them were operating with a “triple bottom line”—a commitment to a social mission, environmental sustainability, and financial self-sufficiency.

The social economy provides an approach to socio-economic activity that not only is consistent with sustainability but also provides alternative ownership and control models. It animates the values of democracy, participation, and co-operation while engaging people in the processes of local social change and community building (Cannan 2000). Social economy organizations also forge associative links with the state, which is one of the features of strong sustainability. Note, for example, the significant number of government contracts for environmental services that are delivered by ESE organizations. These relationships between government and ESE organizations lay the groundwork for scaling out co-operative multistakeholder strategies to address environmental problems.3

The social economy mobilizes people to act in the interests of eco-social justice based on reciprocity and co-operation. It builds community capital. The social economy can also serve to reinforce the notion that sustainability is a process and not a fixed outcome. Indeed, what Crescy Cannan (2000, 371) says about community development can also be applied to the social economy: it “tends to see some of its processes as goals—participation is both a means and end, for the participative society is one in which all can have a voice, where discrimination has been addressed, and where the capacities associated with effective participation continue to develop.”

3 Figure 2.9 shows that between 48–58% (depending on province) of ESE organizations receive government grants; and between 18–32% (depending on province) of ESE organizations receive service contracts.
As this book argues, however, the depth, or strength, of sustainability and social economy initiatives is crucial. Initiatives at the strong end of the continuum have the best potential to be transformative; the weaker endeavours merely slow the decline.

REFERENCES


