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Capacity Analysis - An Explanatory Framework for Social Innovation in Sustainable Development Initiatives

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Capacity Analysis - An Explanatory Framework for Social Innovation in Sustainable Development Initiatives

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1. Introduction

The member states of the European Union (EU) are encountering a crisis in terms of resource availability, use and disposal of products (Miller, 2014, and Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2011). Within the EU, material recycling and waste-based energy recovery secures approximately 5 per cent of the original raw material value (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015). Arising from current high levels of personal consumption and disposal, resources in Ireland are being depleted at an unsustainable rate (Doyle & Davies, 2013). Within the EU, each person consumes, on average, 13.3 tonnes(t) of materials annually (EC, 2015a). Much of this is being discarded, with an average waste production rate of 5t of total waste per person annually (EC, 2015a).

The conventional linear relationship between production and consumption is no longer sustainable (Moreau *et al*, 2017). For the switch from a linear to a more sustainable use of goods and products to be realised, citizens must alter their consumption patterns to consume within sustainable limits for the benefit of the environment and to ensure an acceptable standard of living for future generations (Jackson, 2011). A key component of the transition towards a more sustainable society is the preservation of products in use for longer and the development of a repair and reuse culture (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015).

Reuse social enterprises contribute to addressing a range of environmental, economic and social issues facing urban areas and regions (Aiken & Slater, 2007; Bichard, 2006; and Gutberlet, 2016). In response to the benefits that they generate, there has been a significant increase in reuse internationally over the last 30 years (Gutberlet, 2016). Indeed, the social economy was the first sector of the economy that engaged in reuse and upcycling, long before investor-owned businesses started to do so. Reuse social enterprises can be considered a form of sustainable development initiative (SDI). This paper is concerned with, firstly, the motivations for citizens establishing reuse social enterprises. Secondly, the paper examines the factors that contribute to establishment of reuse social enterprises. The core question being addressed is:

What capacities are present in communities and how do they contribute to some communities being more receptive than others to sustainable development initiatives in Ireland?

Section two of this paper examines the key concepts underpinning the research. The third section focuses on the motivations for communities and groups of individuals to establish reuse sustainable development initiatives, followed by the theoretical framework for sustainable development initiatives in section four. This paper outlines a piece of research and the methodology for the research undertaken will then be outlined in section five. The penultimate section details the research findings. The final section of the paper contains the discussion and conclusion.

2. Concepts

2.1. Sustainable development initiative

Sustainable development initiatives can be viewed as social enterprises with an environmental focus. Social enterprise has been defined in many different ways. Indeed, at European level, there is no universally accepted definition of a social enterprise (GHK, 2006). However, the number of definitions of what constitutes a social enterprise reflects the diverse understanding of what a social enterprise actually is.

The Forfás (2013) definition is widely used:

An enterprise that trades for a social/societal purpose, where at least part of its income is earned from its trading activity, is separate from government, and where the surplus is primarily reinvested in the social objective

The strength of the Forfás definition is that it states that social enterprises have social and economic objectives. The principle of community ownership is alluded to but it does not place significant weight on the fact that social enterprises are managed differently to private enterprises in that they are democratically governed by a group of people on behalf of a community, rather than by shareholders seeking a return on their investment.

The European research network, EMES, has formulated a definition of social enterprise. This definition is based on four economic and five social criteria (Nyssens, 2006a). The economic criteria are:

- Continuous activity in the form of production and/or sale of goods and services. Unlike traditional not-for-profit organisations, social enterprises do not normally undertake advocacy work; instead, they produce goods and services.
- A high level of autonomy: social enterprises are created voluntarily by groups of citizens and are governed by them. Public authorities or private companies have no direct or indirect control over them, even though grant funding may be provided by these organisations.
- A significant economic risk: the financial viability of social enterprises depends on the efforts of their members, who have the responsibility of ensuring financial resources are either secured or generated from trading activity, unlike the majority of public institutions.
- A minimum number of paid workers are required, although, like traditional non-profit organisations, social enterprises may combine financial and non-financial resources, voluntary and paid work.

The social criteria are:

- An explicit aim of community benefit: one of the principal aims of social enterprises is to serve the community or a specific group of people.
- Citizen initiative: social enterprises are the result of collective interaction involving people belonging to a community or to a group that shares a certain need or aim.
- Decision-making not based on capital ownership: this generally means the principle of 'one member, one vote', or at least a voting power not based on capital shares. Although capital owners in social enterprises can play an important role, there are other stakeholders that influence decision-making.
- Participatory character, involving those affected by the activity: the users of social enterprises' services are represented and participate in their structures. In many cases, one of the objectives is to strengthen democracy at local level through economic activity.

- Limited distribution of profit: social enterprises include organisations that totally prohibit profit distribution as well as organisations such as co-operatives, which may distribute their profit only to a limited degree, thus avoiding profit-maximising behaviour.

Thus, the EMES definition outlines the essential characteristics of social enterprises. Firstly, it highlights that social enterprise is concerned primarily with the provision of products or services for sale and therefore differs from traditional non-governmental organisations who are either engaged in advocacy or charity. Secondly, social enterprises must serve a community – this can take the form of providing a service or generate a benefit for its community. Thirdly, social enterprises are started by a group of individuals belonging to a community, sharing the same space or with a shared identity including ethnic minority groups or marginalised groups, for instance people with disabilities. They are independent of the State and are governed by a group of individuals associated with the community and often on behalf of their community. However, their governance structures may include external expertise involving the state or the private sector but their motivation for being involved should be the development of the social enterprise. Fourthly, social enterprises differ from private enterprises in that it is predominately a membership structure with each member being allocated one vote. This allows communities to shape the future direction of the social enterprise and in so doing, it contributes to democracy being enhanced. Fifthly, unlike charities, which are based on a donor-recipient relationship, social enterprises should endeavour to promote the involvement of the users of the social enterprises at all levels of the social enterprises decision-making. Finally, to limit behaviour which is not consistent with the mission of the social enterprise, profit maximisation is limited (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010).

A broader definition considers social enterprise to be that part of the economy that is engaged in economic activity to meet a social objective. They are democratic entities which are controlled and owned by either their members or by the communities which they serve (Molloy *et al*, 1999; and Amin *et al*, 2002). This definition incorporates co-operatives, associations and mutuals.

2.2. Waste, reuse and the circular economy

Gutberlet (2008) draws attention to the subjectivity of waste. However, some definitions are more dominant than others (Gutberlet, 2016). The dominant definition of waste views it as something that is not wanted and which the owner intends discarding (Pongracz and Pohjola, 2004). This perspective sees waste as a nuisance (Pongracz and Pohjola, 2004). Davies; (2002) Ackerman and Mirza (2001) believe that the current situation needs to be transformed from viewing waste as a liability to viewing it as a resource.

According to Miller *et al*, (2014: p.2), 'reuse occurs when an owner continues to use a material for the same or an alternative use, or when the item is transferred to someone else for continued use. In both cases, the item is still a resource and is not considered waste. At some point, everyone has things that are no longer useful to them, but these items, which still have value, may be useful to others and can therefore be reused'. Similar to the concepts of waste and reuse, the circular economy is a contested term (Bocken *et al*, 2017)

2.3. Capacity

The concept of capacity refers to the ability of members of a community or indeed the community itself to make changes by harnessing the resources at their disposal either individually and collectively (Middlemiss & Parrish, 2009).

There are a range of motivations for establishing reuse social enterprises which are outlined in the next section.

3. Motivations for establishing re-use social enterprises

The principals of reuse social enterprises have different motives for establishing them (Taylor, 2008; and Lucklin and Sharp, 2005). Reuse social enterprises have a number of social objectives that tend not to be met by the state or the private sector (Lucklin and Sharp, 2003). These include the provision of employment and training (Lucklin and Sharp, 2005). They also serve as a source of goods to low income households (Lucklin and Sharp, 2006). In addition to realising social objectives, environmental protection and economic regeneration are motives for the formation of reuse social enterprises (Davies, 2007). With regard to employment, the jobs provided by reuse social enterprises augment the skills and confidence of individuals who were previously long-term unemployed (Brennan and Ackers, 2003). In relation to environmental motives, the desire to reduce the level of waste going to land fill is the primary motive for principals in establishing reuse social enterprises (Davies, 2007). King and Gutberlet (2013); and Gutberlet (2016) believe that reuse social enterprises, particularly in Latin America, are established to fulfil a combination of environmental, economic and social justice objectives.

Regarding ideological motives, a number of commentators allude to the formation of reuse social enterprises to compensate for the failure of the private sector to stem the increase in the generation of waste in Western societies (Ahmed & Ali, 2004; Price & Joseph, 2000). Reuse social enterprises have the potential to reduce resource use and waste generation (Belk, 2007). The next section outlines the factors which lead to the successful establishment of reuse social enterprises.

4. Theoretical framework

Sustainable development initiatives and in this instance, reuse social enterprises, encounter a number of challenges and barriers to their establishment. This section of the paper firstly examines the challenges that reuse social enterprises face. It then proceeds to outline the capacities required for their successful implementation.

Sustainable development initiatives, which include reuse social enterprises, tend to be driven by a small cadre of volunteers who generally give a lot of their time to the development of such initiatives (Seyfang, 2007). The leadership of reuse social enterprises have a tendency not to pay sufficient attention to the external environment or to strategic development (Brook Lyndhurst, 2009). This can be further compounded by a tendency of the leadership of social enterprises to not have business acumen. According to Brook Lyndhurst (2006) another challenge reuse social enterprise can encounter is not affording sufficient attention to developing management processes. This can lead to a lack of consistency in the quality of products (Brook Lyndhurst, 2006).

The above can stymie the capacity of reuse social enterprises to achieve financial sustainability (Brook Lyndhurst, 2009). Rather than solely concentrating on the capacity of reuse social enterprises, Amin *et al*, (2002) assert that the demographic profile of communities in which social enterprises are located has a significant impact on their capacity to become financially sustainable. Indeed, communities which would benefit most from the presence of reuse social enterprises tend to provide less of a conducive environment for social enterprises to successfully operate than more affluent ones (Amin, 2009).

Furthermore, Hines *et al*, (2008) assert that the major challenges which reuse social enterprises encounter emanate from the environment in which they operate. These challenges include demands placed on them by the regulatory environment, having to operate in a competitive environment against investor-owned businesses. This can be further compounded by social enterprises having insufficient resources to employ a management team to increase the size of the business.

Access to appropriate facilities of sufficient size and appropriate location can present a challenge to the financial sustainability of reuse social enterprises (Brook Lyndhurst, 2009). Accessing appropriate sources of finance is deemed a significant barrier to reuse social enterprises achieving financial sustainability. Brook Lyndhurst (2006) believe the tendency of reuse social enterprise to rely on grant finance prevents them from innovating and increasing scale. An alternative perspective on grant finance is put forward by Doyle (2009). He asserts that reuse social enterprises can fulfil the objectives of a number of state agencies and consequently should be awarded state funding.

Therefore, an examination of the capacities critical to the implementation of successful reuse social enterprises could assist communities and policy-makers alike in the establishment of reuse social enterprises.

Pringle (2015) cites four categories of capacity which constitute the theoretical framework. The first is individual capacity. Pringle (2015) defines individual capacity as the level of skills, values and finance that individuals within a community possess which can assist in the formation of sustainable development initiatives – focusing on renewable energy. Middlemiss and Parrish (2009) assert that an individual's social context shapes their capacity to initiate sustainable development initiatives. The presence of leaders within communities, who have a clear vision for the development of reuse social enterprises, is critical to their successful establishment (Brook Lyndhurst, 2006). Successful reuse social enterprises tend to be characterised by possessing effective leaders who have the capacity to secure resources (Brook Lyndhurst, 2006; Connett & Sheehan, 2001). Brook Lyndhurst (2006) identify sustainable reuse social enterprises as possessing effective managers, management structures and processes.

The second is the structural capacity of a community. This focuses on the culture and values pertaining to organisations within a community that have an influence over communities' efforts to implement sustainable development initiatives (Middlemiss & Parish, 2009; and Pringle, 2015). Local development agencies, politicians and state agencies are included in this category. The presence of community organisations and supportive state and local development institutions can contribute to a range of barriers being addressed (Pringle, 2015). State agencies that are supportive towards reuse social enterprises can have a positive influence on the outcomes of reuse sustainable development initiatives (Dedehouanou, 1998). However, to maximise the supportive role they can perform requires greater integration between various departments of local government (Yousefpour, Nina, Barraket, Jo, & Furneaux, Craig W, 2012). Even if there is greater collaboration and integration between departments in local authorities, the framework proposed by Pringle does not acknowledge that some local authorities are more supportive towards working with reuse social enterprises (Chambers, 1989). Moreover, Zanon and DeGroot (1991) draw attention to the fact that some local authorities are not receptive towards bottom-up approaches to addressing waste via the development of reuse social enterprises.

Strong and equitable relationships between community organisations and state agencies are fundamental to enabling the latter to effectively perform the role of animator of sustainable development initiatives (Conor and Sheehan, 2001). In addition such relationships facilitates communities securing the necessary expertise (Connett and Sheehan, 2001).

The third is Infrastructural capacity. This refers to the stock of infrastructure that is present in communities which are conducive to the drive to promote sustainability (Pringle, 2015). The lack of appropriate facilities is cited as the greatest challenge to reuse social enterprises attaining financial sustainability (Brook Lyndhurst, 2009). Adequate space enables reuse entities to store discarded material and products which, over time, could generate income (CWIN, 2016). This study emphasises the importance of the establishment of retail units to sell reuse products to the public (CWIN, 2016). The proximity of reuse facilities, including retail units, to residential areas, contributes to the donation and purchase of reuse products (Steel, 1996).

Finally, cultural capacity refers to the level of commitment and openness to sustainability that exists within a community (Pringle, 2015). Cultural capacity is influenced by the historical context towards sustainability.

5. Methodology

5.1. Case selection

Eight cases were selected in Ireland and Scotland for this paper. The social enterprises were selected because of their varying perceived reasons for establishment, varying models of operation and their core organisational objectives.

The eight social enterprises are:

- Boomerang recycling located in the northside of Cork city;
- Kingdom Revamp based in Castleisland, County Kerry;
- Recycle IT located in Clondalkin, Dublin;
- Recreate based in Ballymount, Dublin
- Rediscovery Centre, situated in Ballymun, Dublin;
- WeShare whose principals live in Dublin;
- 4Rs is based in Derry city;
- Rejig, located on the Isle of Islay, Scotland.

5.2. Methods

Twelve semi-structured interviews were held with key individuals who are either managers, voluntary directors or volunteer leaders associated with the above eight reuse social enterprises. A few managers of reuse social enterprises said that their respective management committees would not have time to participate in a focus group. The interviews were held either in person or over the phone and they lasted between 40 minutes and one hour.

5.3. Data collection and coding

A list of trigger questions (see Appendix 1) was used to guide the interviews, and some additional questions were posed, depending on each interviewee's responses. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

5.4. Analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis was employed to formulate themes from the transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process entailed reading each of the transcripts a number of times in order to become familiar with the data. The text of each of the transcripts was then coded. The following eight themes were identified: getting started; organisational development; management; resources; sustainability; relationships; values and policy.

6. Findings

The research findings pertain to interviews and focus groups with individuals associated with reuse social enterprises and policy makers. A number of themes are employed to categorise the research findings. The themes are: getting started; organisational development; management; resources; sustainability; relationships; values and policy.

In turn, each of the themes includes a number of sub-themes.

6.1. Getting started

6.1.1. Motives

Interviewees speak of there being multiple motives for establishing reuse social enterprises. The achievement of social objectives are the most commonly cited motives for the establishment of reuse social enterprises. These social objectives are in the main concerned with both employment creation and strengthening the skills of unemployed individuals with a view to securing employment. Furthermore, a number of the social enterprises target their recruitment at marginalised social groups and disadvantaged communities.

The northside of X being very very high in youth unemployment.

It's somewhere to go when they come out of prison.

The idea was that there was 100 per cent unemployment among Traveller community in Y.

Other social objectives include the supply of low-cost furniture to families experiencing poverty. For some interviewees, the reuse social enterprises contribute to addressing inter-generational unemployment and for others, it addresses other social issues such as criminal recidivism and anti-social behaviour.

An environmental motive is considered the primary reason for the establishment of three reuse social enterprises. This motive encapsulates varying ideological perspectives from reducing the incidence of illegal dumping of harmful waste to treating waste as a resource.

It was before there was any legislation involved in dealing with the waste that we deal with here and around the same time, there had been huge issues with illegal dumping of fridges particularly.

There was an idea that from the community, that waste could be a resource and that there were valuable materials being thrown away that could be put to better use.

Although, the overwhelming majority of social enterprises cited one primary objective, they each had subsidiary objectives.

It was a dual motive and it would be environmental and social.

Two interviewees refer to the governance structure being composed of individuals representing organisations that have different priorities for their respective social enterprise.

According to interviewees, groups of residents, community organisations, local authorities, local development agencies and networks of community and voluntary organisations initiate reuse social enterprises.

6.1.2. Pre-Development

Half of the Interviewees acknowledge the importance of undertaking a feasibility study and business plan prior to the commencement of operations.

We were so glad that we did a business plan and we learned a lot from a social enterprise in the UK. We believe that this prevented us from making a load of mistakes which could have stopped...

Indeed, one interviewee refers to the time and resources invested in doing a business plan as reducing the risk of the social enterprise failing.

I have seen social enterprises get into all sorts of problems from not taking the time to do a plan.

For two interviewees, the pre-development phase allows promoters of their social enterprise to engage with the local community and to allay the fears of residents concerning the proposed operation.

According to one interviewee, the community outreach campaign resulted in the social enterprise recruiting a board member with a qualification and experience in environmental science.

I got this very comprehensive pamphlet which had been put together by the environmental working group and it was the A-Z of recycling and reuse facilities in the county, very much ahead of their time.

Two interviewees acknowledge the relevance of social enterprises building a relationship with suppliers of discarded material.

So I would have done initial, I suppose, public consultations, when we had the business plan done, we did some public consultations and invited a lot of retailers and distributors of electrical appliances and ... appliances within the county to come and listen to what we were talking about to see if we could get them to buy-in to the whole idea.

The same interviewees refer to these meetings as providing the social enterprise manager with the opportunity to convey to prospective suppliers that they are professional and reputable operators.

A number of the reuse social enterprises have a relationship with a parent structure. According to Interviewees, parent structures can facilitate the formation of reuse social enterprises through the provision of working capital and accessing reuse facilities.

6.2. Organisational development

6.2.1. Strategic expertise

According to a small number of interviewees, directors who have the requisite knowledge and expertise are required to ensure the organisation fulfils its mission. The same cohort of interviewees refer to the board of a social enterprise having directors with the following expertise: business expertise; knowledge of employment law; social enterprise expertise; knowledge of governance and expertise in the relevant social enterprise activity.

Regarding the level of expertise required by community representatives serving as directors, interviewees express two contrasting points of view. One perspective speaks of these directors having the requisite expertise prior to participating on a board. The other perspective considers that the role of the social enterprise is to provide community representatives with the necessary skills and expertise to effectively participate on a board. By undertaking the latter course of action, this can contribute to boards of social enterprises achieving balanced representation.

But it's something I suppose that we need to be mindful of, that it doesn't become entirely corporate.

Two interviewees emphasise the importance of reuse social enterprise not being complacent with the level of expertise on the board.

We're always looking out to strengthening the board either on a temporary basis with consulting somebody or bringing somebody on board and where somebody can be dropping out and we'll end up looking for somebody to complement that, but corporate governance is always something that you have to spend a certain amount of time at nearly every meeting.

Both interviewees refer to their respective social enterprise allocating time at board meetings or at subcommittee level to identifying prospective board members with expertise.

The finance person recently stepped down off our board and so I went out looking for a finance person specifically, so we would be, we would be very targeted in who we bring onto the board in terms of their skills set rather than people who are just generally passionate about, you know, social inclusion.

One interviewee outlined how a board without the requisite expertise in employment law and governance can undermine the management team in performing their duties.

At that point in time, there was a skills gap on the board of directors that actually knew what being a director meant so it's fair to say that the organisation went through about 10 years of turmoil because of that skills gap, it's emerged out of that over the last six or seven years, it's emerged out of that and become what I would call a decent social enterprise now.

A number of interviewees consider the commitment required by directors of reuse social enterprises. One perspective refers to directors, due to other commitments, only having time to attend monthly board meetings. The other perspective suggests that board members need to undertake tasks between board meetings. The same interviewee refers to tension arising between directors if they are undertaking different levels of work between meetings.

A number of interviewees comment on board succession as increasingly becoming an issue for their social enterprises.

6.2.2. Operational expertise

According to the overwhelming majority of interviewees, staff with expertise and skills relating to their respective social enterprise activity perform a central role in the social enterprise fulfilling its mission.

I've been in the recycling industry for a number of years. I've been to Africa, I've been to China and America and it was all within the waste recycling sector. The knowledge acquired certainly is having a positive impact on the social enterprise.

He did have experience, yes, and he did have experience of project management on sites as well, he knew how to get the jobs done and he was a chippy as well so they know more the jobs that need to be done. Last year we recruited another guy who was a chippy.

Interviewees detail a number of benefits from employing staff with expertise relating to the social enterprise activity.

- The opportunity to train formerly unemployed staff a range of skills on site.
- The capacity to diversify into producing new products which can strengthen its financial sustainability.
- Knowledge of environmental regulation reduces the reliance on external consultants.
- Knowledge of the markets enables social enterprises to secure the best prices for recycled material.

A number of interviewees cite other types of expertise as being key to maintaining a sustainable social enterprise. These include: financial management; marketing; and the capacity to measure impact; generic business expertise and logistics.

You would also need somebody that would have a good business acumen, you know, because any business...

The key skills in getting the social enterprise up was financial management, business and knowledge of the industry. They are key skills in keeping the social enterprise successful.

Four interviewees are of the opinion that reuse social enterprises encounter a greater number of challenges than investor-owned businesses. These include: being restricted to employing lower skilled staff; barriers to staff acquiring new skills; the challenging behaviour of a proportion of staff that were formerly unemployed; the reluctance of a proportion of staff to address their literacy issues, and the requirements of funders. Consequently, two interviewees speak of the importance of social enterprises employing key staff who have experience of supervising staff that were formerly long-term unemployed. A different interviewee notes that the level of traded income generated precludes it from hiring additional staff.

6.2.3. Planning

Two interviewees consider planning as being an integral part of the development of reuse social enterprises and not solely undertaken at start-up stage. Planning is regarded by the same two interviewees as being an essential precursor to determining whether or not to diversify into the reuse of new products. Consultation with communities, state agencies and the private sector, according to two interviewees, can lead to the identification of new market niches. Planning can then proceed to deliver appropriate reuse products to meet these market niches. Finally, two interviewees speak of the planning phase being undertaken prior to a reuse social enterprise scaling up its operations.

6.2.4. Awareness raising

The research findings point to two aspects of awareness raising. The first relates to reuse. Three interviewees speak of the need to increase the level of reuse in Ireland through enhancing awareness of it. One interviewee refers to implementing an awareness campaign via the household collection of goods and materials.

So there's an educational element there and I suppose the carrot in that educational element is that you're offering to take away what people would consider as waste at no cost to them and but the important thing is that they direct it in our direction, not to dumping or to any other form of discharge, you know.

Strengthening the profile of social enterprise in Ireland is the other aspect of awareness raising. Two interviewees point to enhancing the awareness of social enterprise within local authorities, state agencies and the Irish population. The branding of reuse goods is considered an effective action to mitigate the stigma of second hand goods among the population.

... So we're trying to say to the person considering purchasing a reused item, no actually this is not cheap, low quality stuff, it's actually good as new and we care about these materials and we're returning them to the market and there's a good reason to do so.

6.2.5. Equilibrium

Several Interviewees acknowledge how social enterprise, in aiming to realise a social objective while simultaneously achieving financial sustainability, can encounter a number of organisational challenges. According to two interviewees, reuse social enterprises can encounter staff productivity issues when they either diversify into new market niches or increase the level of activity. The same interviewees acknowledge that a balance needs to be achieved in acknowledging the issues certain staff may experience, while at the same time expecting staff to become more productive after receiving supports.

We had quite a low burden of financial administration because we have a couple of big customers. We've gone from that model into servicing and charging householders. This has placed more demands on our staff.

Three interviewees refer to the challenge social enterprises encounter in realising their environmental objectives when their main funder demands more of a focus on generating income.

It's maybe moving into what you would call a normal business, objectives of driving the sales side and they're not able to focus at all or use the environmental message to explain what they do.

One of the interviewees acknowledges how this reduces the amount of time staff have to visit schools to deliver workshops aimed at promoting the awareness of reuse.

6.2.6. Progression

Progression of residents and staff onto governance structures and into employment is an objective of a number of reuse social enterprises, according to four interviewees. One interviewee speaks about how supporting residents, including young people, to gain the expertise to become a director of the board is being pursued to ensure that the social enterprise does not encounter a succession crisis in years to come. The same interviewee comments on how her social enterprise is recruiting local young people so that they can be trained to take up both management and social enterprise development roles.

Four interviewees comment on how social enterprises consistently support staff and individuals on work placements to gain employment, often with better pay and conditions. One interviewee details the range of practical supports below.

I help them with their CV, help them with interview skills, try and organise an interview for them so they get the job.

However, one interviewee speaks of the small number of employment opportunities realistically on offer to reuse social enterprise staff. With a tightening of the labour market, two interviewees refer to reuse social enterprises having to recruit individuals who are experiencing a range of personal issues including mental health and drug misuse.

There's an awful lot of input needed, support needed that we traditionally wouldn't have made.

6.3. Management

The theme of management is covered under the five sub-themes below.

6.3.1. Committed

Persistence and tenacity are key attributes of managers, according to four interviewees. One of them considers managers who are passionate about improving the lives of marginalised groups as being another important attribute.

Constant dripping water on a stone. It will wear the stone eventually, if you keep at it, your message will get across.

They acknowledge how these attributes are pivotal to achieving the objectives of reuse social enterprises. In particular, persistence and tenacity are considered necessary attributes to secure resources, including facilities.

6.3.2. Inclusive

According to two interviewees, managers who create an inclusive work environment tend to gain the co-operation of staff. One interviewee emphasises the priority that he placed on creating a team. This entails informing all of the staff and participants of the sales targets. They are informed of how attaining the targets ensures that the social enterprise is financially sustainable for another year.

I've actually got buy-in from all the individuals and I tell them what we are trying to do, I tell them why I'm trying to do it. I tell them the numbers that we have to achieve, the reasons why we have to achieve it, and they feel a part of the project.

One interviewee mentions that the manager can communicate to create an inclusive work environment. Two interviewees acknowledge how holding formal communication is not as effective an approach as holding informal meetings with many of the staff of reuse social enterprises.

If I can stop for a cup of tea, then I have the cup of tea with the lads and I let them know how things are getting on.

The point is made that many of the staff are encountering a range of challenges to work either part or full-time. Two managers comment on how managers need to be mindful of the background of some of the staff.

The key thing to addressing these challenges is good common-sense management

According to two interviewees, a successful manager of a reuse social enterprise needs to have good inter-personnel skills. One interviewee makes the point that management styles practiced in the private sector tend not to be suited to reuse social enterprises.

6.3.3. Proactive

Two interviewees acknowledge the role managers play in seeking resources for reuse social enterprises. They both mention that some reuse managers proactively seek resources from a number of funding bodies. Interviewees comment on managers requiring the capacity to seek resources from different funding bodies. This can often require the message being altered to suit the funder. Another point made is that the approach needs to be made with confidence.

I went to the landlord asking him to give it to me, the building, for nothing and he told me to go away and don't bother him. Half hour later he rang me back and he told me come up and see him, the accountant, and he said, I won't give it to you for nothing, he said, but what I'll do, I'll give it to you for €1 a year for three years.

One manager refers to taking every opportunity to promote the facility in which the social enterprise is based.

As they're walking past the shop, I go out and bring them in and say, come on in now, have a look and see what you think, all the business people, anyone, even the man sweeping the streets, I'd stop him and bring him in, say come on in, have a look. It's all building relationships.

6.3.4. Influential

Three interviewees spoke of the importance of managers being able to influence different stakeholders to assist in developing the reuse social enterprise. With regard to staff, managers aim to motivate workers who can sometimes exhibit challenging behaviour.

I suppose a key role is to motivate staff and we're very lucky to have a very highly motivated staff. They are the frontline and the people who are selling the concept to the public which is very critical.

The same interviewees refer to managers having the ability to influence potential benefactors, including local authorities, to provide support. In particular, the manager needs to convince senior local authority officials that the reuse social enterprise is viable and attains the objective it sets.

Convincing local authority that this was something that was viable and that could be supported.

Two interviewees spoke of addressing and overcoming barriers associated with discrimination towards an ethnic group in Ireland.

You had to convince people, you see, there are prejudices against the X community. There was a number of buildings that they wouldn't rent it to me.

6.3.5. Empathic

Two interviewees emphasise how their having experienced discrimination allows them to be more effective managers. They spoke of this having an influence over how the social enterprise operates.

6.4. Resources

6.4.1. Facility

Five interviewees acknowledge how a facility can either enable the social enterprise to attain its objectives or can stymie it. Two interviewees comment on how acquiring a facility, at a reasonable rent, can strengthen the financial sustainability of the reuse social enterprise. In relation to design, if the facility has scope for either the building of an extension or inserting a mezzanine floor, this can enable the social enterprise to diversify its operations and handle a greater volume of material.

We're recently putting in another floor on it in order to increase the floor space in there to do a bit more of in-house, if you'd like to call it scavenging, or you know extracting components and so on, so we're gearing up better for that as well.

For two social enterprises, the lack of space in its facility results in having to turn down the offer of valuable discarded goods.

There are times there where we've had to just pass material on because we had no storage capacity and we would have made more money out of it if we had been able to do a better space.

This is adversely impacting on the financial sustainability of both social enterprises.

In addition to ample space, three interviewees comment on how the location of a facility has a bearing on a social enterprise attaining its objectives. One interviewee refers to the inability of securing a facility in its targeted marginalised area. The same person comments how this made it more difficult to promote recycling in its targeted marginalised area.

Ideally, we would have wanted a premises within the Rapid Area that we were set up to serve but there was nothing available, there was no premises whatsoever up there...

Three interviewees comment on how the location of a facility has a bearing on the financial sustainability of the social enterprise.

We were struggling last year while we were up in the industrial unit, we're now on the street and we're hitting our targets in terms of money.

One interviewee acknowledges how the design of a facility can impact on staff morale.

The environment wasn't great above either because we were in an industrial unit, there was no windows, there was no heating, you know this type of thing.

The establishment of reuse facility beside civic amenity centres would increase reuse rates in Ireland, according to one interviewee.

It's providing covered space, it's making it a priority in civic amenity sites. This entails properly protecting equipment and goods that go into civic amenities so they can be reused.

6.4.2. Credibility

Two interviewees speak of how they believe some senior local authority officials are sceptical of the capacity of reuse social enterprises to provide an efficient service on behalf of local authorities. One interviewee refers to how securing national funding enhanced the reputation of the social enterprise among senior local authority personnel. According to two interviewees, a social enterprise has to gain credibility.

Now we have established a good track record, which is good but had to be earned, and so that adds to your credit when seeking to expand.

Investor-owned businesses are wary of the entities to whom they are prepared to give surplus or unwanted good. This is due to potential reputational damage associated with their goods being illegally dumped.

6.5. Sustainability

6.5.1. Cost base

According to a number of interviewees, managers of reuse social enterprises are noting a significant increase in operational costs.

All of our costs have increased, so you have insurance costs which have more than quadrupled in the last couple of years. I'd say four years ago we were paying €1,900 in our insurance costs and we wrote cheques for €25,000 this year for our insurance.

Two interviewees stated that their social enterprise experienced difficulty in getting their insurance renewed.

6.5.2. Labour subsidy

Five interviewees acknowledge how funding received from the Pobal Community Services Programme (CSP) is critical to the financial sustainability of social enterprises. The same interviewees emphasise the negative impact on the financial sustainability of social enterprises of the wage grant not being pegged to increases in the national minimum wage.

You see, the minimum wage when we started was €8.65 and now it's €9.55, the government don't pay the difference.

The same interviewees assert that the Pobal CSP wage subsidy needs to be increased to keep pace with the minimum wage. Furthermore, three interviewees believe that Pobal needs to reinstate the material grant.

One interviewee refers to social enterprises having a replacement source of income as a contingency for the loss of the labour subsidy.

6.5.3. Labour market

Five interviewees acknowledge that with a significant reduction in unemployment levels, social enterprises are not able to provide the wage levels being offered by investor-owned companies. Consequently, reuse social enterprises are less likely to attract skilled staff in times of economic prosperity than during the period of the economic downturn when unemployment was far higher.

We cannot offer competitive salaries to the private sector and so that can be quite a challenge, people have to, you know, exist and support families so that can be quite a challenge for us.

A proportion of social enterprises utilise activation programmes, such as CE and Tús, to provide the necessary labour. A number of interviewees comment that this cohort can experience a range of personal issues which can affect their ability to be productive.

So the people who are being taken onto the Tús programme would have significantly more issues than we would have seen two or three years ago.

One interviewee refers to the challenge of supervising individuals with an addiction.

It can be a dangerous work environment so there's, so it's, the challenge, you know we've increased challenges in terms of, you know, staff management because of it, we either have no staff or we have staff where there's an awful lot of input needed, support needed that we traditionally wouldn't have made, you know, made allowances for if, you know what I mean or wouldn't have the skills maybe.

According to one interviewee, the economic climate informs policy priorities, which can result in a reduction in funding dedicated to social enterprises.

At the moment, there's not such a focus on labour activation programmes so Tús numbers and CE, Community Employment Programmes, are funded less than they would have been in the past.

6.5.4. Market segments

Interviewees detail how reuse social enterprises develop a number of segments of a particular market. For instance, in relation to refurbished furniture, interviewees note that private landlords and social housing providers have a demand for furniture on a consistent basis.

With regard to electronic and electrical recycling, two interviewees acknowledge how securing a contract with local authorities to collect waste underpins the financial sustainability of their social enterprise.

6.5.5. Context

Three interviewees mention that an economic downturn can provide a benign environment in which to establish a reuse social enterprise. They attribute this to there being: a surplus of commercial and industrial property available for rent; the availability of skilled labour; and the suppliers are prepared to offer cuts in their prices to retain business.

The point is made that if the location of a reuse social enterprise is characterised by high levels of inter-generational unemployment, and this is the only cohort of the labour force available to work, then this can affect the productivity of the reuse social enterprise.

Alterations to the design of products can have a significant adverse effect on the sustainability of a reuse social enterprise.

Because we're involved in waste, everything is measured by ton or by weight kilograms so. Now over the last five years and even a little bit earlier than that, we've noticed that the weights of materials is getting lighter so things are not just a bit lighter.

People have more personal appliances, the weight of those accumulated is much less than what it would have been five years ago, even though they had fewer appliances.

6.5.6. Specific approaches

Interviewees mention how they develop approaches to strengthen the financial sustainability of reuse social enterprises. In one instance, the parent structure of a loss-making reuse social enterprise subsidises the financial losses through the allocation of surplus income generated by another subsidiary social enterprise.

We have cross-subsidisation from our income-generating social enterprises keeping the reuse social enterprise afloat, which is making a loss.

One social enterprise has created a membership which entitles members to avail of reused material. This contributes to the financial sustainability of the social enterprise.

6.6. Relationships

6.6.1. Community

Four interviewees comment on the pragmatic reasons reuse social enterprises engage with their respective communities. Prior to a reuse social enterprise commencing operation, community engagement facilitates addressing mis-information pertaining to a new operation.

We had open days, we went all out with the council website, showing people what we done, we done small focus group to get the message across, we've been to all of the community groups and we invited all the councils here to let them see what we were doing.

For one reuse social enterprise, community outreach with residents in their target area enables a new business model to be implemented.

But we didn't have the money to go to printers or to go to graphic designers so it was very much, you know, whatever font we had on the computer ourselves, literally cutting it up and pasting it on a page and then running a hundred leaflets, you know, doing our own, cutting them up ourselves here and giving them to the lads to go out and deliver a hundred leaflets into houses to say you'll take, you'll collect whatever they have and within weeks of us...

Community organisations refer participants interested in taking part in accredited training courses being delivered by reuse social enterprises. One interviewee comments on how some community organisations only refer individuals who have undertaken some basic training courses.

6.6.2. Parent structure

A number of reuse social enterprises are controlled by a parent organisation, according to several interviewees. These can be local development companies or community organisations. Two interviewees mention how parent structures initiate the process of establishing a reuse social enterprise. One interviewee emphasises that without a parent structure, the reuse social enterprise would not be formed. The parent structure provides a range of expertise and finance which allows the reuse social enterprise to be formed, a facility to be leased and a manager to be hired before state funding is drawn down. For one interviewee, the reputation of the parent structure with a number of local authorities proves critical to the reuse social enterprise securing public contracts.

They had the reputation which we would not have had and that was a big thing at the start.

One interviewee acknowledges how a parent structure can cushion cuts in the state funding allocated to a reuse social enterprise.

6.6.3. Network

Two interviewees acknowledge the wide network of business relationships with individuals that they have cultivated from working in the waste industry.

I know a lot of people in waste industry who I can get advice from on a range of matters, including where to get the best price for recycled material.

Two interviewees note that a number of reuse social enterprises are networking in a number of ways. Firstly, more experienced managers of reuse social enterprises provide advice, informally, to less established reuse social enterprises dealing with the same discarded goods. Secondly, reuse social enterprises can transfer discarded goods to other reuse social enterprises, if the former is operating at full capacity. This ensures that reuse social enterprises do not have to refuse discarded goods.

6.6.4. State involvement

The state interacts with reuse social enterprises in several different ways, according to five interviewees. Local authority officials serve on the management committee of a number of reuse social enterprise. Three interviewees emphasise how having them on their management committee enables a range of supports and resources to be acquired from local authorities. One interviewee mentions how local authority staff on the management committees act as a conduit to the local authority. Indeed, two interviewees comment that the assistance they receive from the local authority and the EPA is a prerequisite for the formation of their reuse social enterprise.

Without the support from the local authority and the EPA, the project would not have happened.

There would have been no business had the council not been involved...

Three interviewees emphasise how local authorities assist in overcoming barriers at pre-development stage.

They gave us a grant to buy a crusher or a weighing platform, and they also assisted in terms of getting the lease on the premises because at the time, the landlords wouldn't give a lease to a company that had only been set up yesterday, we'll say.

Three interviewees mention how local authorities engage social enterprises on an annual contract basis. The contract is renewed if set targets are attained.

6.7. Values

6.7.1. Collaboration

Three interviewees mention how they aim to foster an ethos of collaboration between employees.

6.7.2. Solidarity

Solidarity exists within and between reuse social enterprises. Regarding the former, interviewees note how many staff are motivated to contribute to creating a more ecologically sustainable society by working in reuse social enterprises. Consequently, they are prepared to work for less remuneration than they could gain in the private sector. One interviewee refers to how workers are ideologically motivated to work in reuse social enterprises. However, two interviewees acknowledge that it can be difficult to recruit people with a commitment to addressing economic marginalisation.

Regarding the latter dimension of solidarity, five interviewees refer to the solidarity that exists between reuse social enterprises. Three interviewees note how the level of solidarity is strongest between reuse social enterprises dealing with the same type of discarded goods. One interviewee comments how the level of collaboration is aided by the large size of the market. He believes that if the supply of discarded goods is lower, then this could lead

to a lower level of solidarity. Two interviewees emphasise how solidarity between reuse social enterprises is driven by financial motives.

6.7.3. Customer focus

Three interviewees speak of the emphasis reuse social enterprises place on customer care. They mention that staff are expected to treat customers with the utmost respect and provide a customer-orientated service.

6.7.4. Self- sufficiency

Three interviewees comment that reuse social enterprises develop expertise to minimise the need for hiring external consultants. In doing so, this contributes to the establishment of a sustainable business model. Society needs to purchase reuse goods, to a greater extent, for reuse social enterprises to become self-sufficient.

6.7.5. Consumerism and consumption

A number of interviewees believe that there is a lack of value placed on reuse goods within Irish society. Instead, they should be viewed as assets. According to a number of interviewees, the point is made that the dominant culture of capitalist consumption and consumerism is a barrier to reuse. Consequently, two interviewees assert that there needs to be a change of attitudes and behaviour towards second hand goods and a concomitant attitude to consumption. This would contribute to increasing the demand for second hand goods to match the supply. Two interviewees believe that the circular economy can perform a central role in the transition to a more sustainable society.

6.8. Policy

6.8.1. EU directives

Four interviewees refer to EU directives on waste as providing the opportunity for Irish policy-makers to implement national policies that are supportive of reuse. However, one interviewee views the Irish Government as implementing elements of EU directives which undermine the financial sustainability of reuse social enterprises.

6.8.2. Innovative policies (national)

According to a number of interviewees, the Irish Government should introduce a number of producer responsibility initiatives (PRI) to promote the circular economy in Ireland. A further aspect to this point is that there should be specific PRIs for categories of goods and materials. Interviewees suggest the following policies be introduced.

- A repair tax on reused goods. This would be implemented via VAT.
- Recycling and reuse of bulky goods should be subsidised.
- Donations that investor-owned companies make to reuse social enterprises should be offset against their annual tax liability.
- The Department of Communications, Climate Change and the Environment should be given the responsibility for administering state funding allocated to reuse social enterprises.

6.8.3. Procurement

As part of the Government's green procurement strategy, a number of interviewees acknowledge the importance of local authorities procuring an increased amount of reused goods. In doing so, this would enhance the sustainability of reuse social enterprises. A further aspect of procurement beneficial to reuse social enterprises is the implementation of

social clauses. These have the potential to strengthen the financial sustainability of reuse social enterprises, according to two interviewees.

6.8.4. Regulation

Although, interviewees acknowledge the importance of regulation, the point is repeatedly made that regulations tend to be excessively onerous on reuse social enterprise. Indeed, the point is made that this is challenging for small-scale reuse social enterprises.

We would not be able to establish our social enterprise today with all of the regulations.

Regarding Community Service Programme (CSP), two interviewees emphasise the restrictions placed on who social enterprises can employ, which is affecting the productivity of reuse social enterprises – that are part of the CSP. One interviewee suggests that there should be streamlining of returns to several regulatory bodies.

On a positive note, two interviewees mention that charitable status benefits their respective social enterprises.

6.8.5. Animation

Five interviewees acknowledge the absence of social enterprise support workers in Ireland. A number of opinions are expressed on how such a resource would be governed. One perspective is for each of the local development companies to employ social enterprise support workers. Another is for a separate structure independent of the state, to employ them. This would address the lack of commitment some local development companies have to developing a vibrant social enterprise sector in Ireland. One interviewee suggests that although this would be the optimum approach, it would require the allocation of additional state funding which could instead be allocated directly to social enterprises.

6.8.6. Impact

A number of interviewees highlight how social enterprises have performed a pioneering role in the reuse of discarded goods and the promotion of the circular economy in Ireland. In doing so, they have employed and trained hundreds of individuals who would find it difficult to secure employment in investor-owned businesses. Two interviewees suggest policy-makers need to take into account the added value, outlined above, that reuse social enterprises contribute to communities throughout Ireland.

7. Discussion and conclusion

The principals of reuse social enterprises establish them primarily to achieve both social and environmental outcomes (Taylor, 2008; and Lucklin and Sharp, 2005). The research findings regarding the motives for the establishment of reuse social enterprises are consistent with the literature. Some reuse social enterprises are initiated to meet a combination of environmental, economic and social justice objectives.

The research identifies several obstacles and challenges that are encountered in establishing reuse social enterprises:

- Being restricted to employing lower skilled staff.
- The challenging behaviour of a proportion of staff that were formerly unemployed.
- The size of reuse facilities and the location of them is deemed inadequate.
- State funding, particularly labour subsidy, is at an insufficient level.
- Insufficient social enterprise supports.
- The lack of a range of policy supports to promote and support reuse.

- The dominance of values associated with consumption and consumerism.

The research points to the necessity of reuse social enterprises possessing: individuals with both strategic and operational expertise, appropriate facilities and adequate funding to commence operations. The research highlights the crucial role that the manager performs in engaging with state agencies, the community and other stakeholders.

There is a lack of support structures available to prospective promoters to establish reuse social enterprises. The proposed new Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment waste legislation – which will transpose EU waste directive into Irish law – could contain actions to support the development of reuse social enterprises.

Pringle's (2015) theoretical framework focuses on the capacities required for the successful implementation of community renewable energy projects in rural settings. Although this is a robust framework, when applied to Irish communities it may require some modification to detail the capacities required to successfully implement reuse social enterprises. With regard to individual capacity, urban communities, particularly marginalised communities, tend to have a smaller cohort of individuals with the skills, knowledge and values to initiate reuse social enterprises. In relation to social capital, some communities, particularly socio-economically marginalised neighbourhoods, may not have the knowledge on how to engage with the local government system in order to secure both land and other resources to establish a reuse social enterprise.

With regard to infrastructural capacities, given that the demand for land is higher in urban than in rural settings, the framework needs to take account of the challenges in securing land and property in which to base reuse facilities. In relation to cultural capacity, the majority of communities would not have a history of developing reuse social enterprises. The values underpinning them include self-sufficiency, environmental and ecological sustainability. However, these values tend not to be prevalent in Irish communities. Indeed, the framework also does not place much emphasis on the values that exist among residents living in the catchment areas of the reuse social enterprises, as opposed to those that pertain to individuals active among reuse social enterprises. This is an important factor when one considers the dominance of consumerism in Irish society.

The theoretical framework could be broadened to acknowledge the critical importance of management style. In addition, it does not place much weight on the importance of community engagement. Innovation within the reuse social enterprise is viewed as being important to address the barriers encountered. Therefore, innovation should be also included in the framework.

There is a wealth of research which outlines the societal benefits of reuse social enterprises (Brennan and Ackers, 2003; Brook Lyndhurst, 2009; and Gutberlet, 2016). Therefore, it is incumbent on the Irish State to develop policies in assisting communities to establish reuse social enterprises. These policy areas include procurement, the introduction of additional producer responsibility initiatives and altering the tax system to encourage reuse.

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Appendix

Core questions used in interviews