

Introduction

This book focuses on ten social economy projects with which we are familiar, all operating in disadvantaged areas of Belfast and all of which are, or hope soon to be, 'making good money'.

They are certainly not the only social economy projects operating across the city, and have not been chosen because they are the best, but because we believe that they have much to teach us about running a social enterprise. They have been chosen because they appear to be working effectively and may inspire or provide practical ideas and help to others who are thinking of starting similar activities.

The social economy is diverse and much has already been said and written about how to define it. That is not a debate we intend to enter here but suffice it to say that the projects in this book, apart from operating in disadvantaged areas of Belfast, have at least two things in common: (1) they operate on a non-profit taking model; that is, any profit made does not find its way into the pocket of any private individuals, but is used for some community benefit; and (2) they are all providing a product or service on a commercial basis.

Some are indeed standalone businesses operating freely in the marketplace and 'making good money' for their 'owners', which are usually charities addressing social needs within the city. Others, such as the Orchardville Business Centre, are achieving their social aims through the business activity itself, and while they may not be 'profitable' in the full sense, they are making a very significant and 'good' contribution to their own sustainability.

The book is structured into three sections. The first and main section includes the stories of the ten social economy companies, presented in a manner to be practically helpful and informative. We hope each article will provide enough information to give you some idea of whether you want to find out more, and we have enclosed some detailed contact information to allow you to follow this up in whatever way you think appropriate. All the projects covered in this book have comprehensive websites and all can accommodate 'good practice visits', usually at a modest cost.

The second section of the book addresses some issues and themes which the authors have come across in managing their own social economy business and in talking to other social entrepreneurs as they have researched this book. These articles are by no means intended to be the last word on the various topics but are primarily based on personal experience and as such may add something to the ongoing debate about managing social economy activities.

The third and last section tries to provide some practical information in terms of organisations, further reading and websites that we have come across in trying to find information for our own use and in preparing this book.

It is perhaps also worth saying, though hopefully not by way of excuse for any poor quality workmanship, that this book has been researched, written and printed within a period of about six weeks. The main reason for this was the restricted time available within which the funding could be used to cover the cost of printing.

Associated with this book is a website which you will find at www.makinggoodmoney.org. On the website you will find a downloadable PDF version of this entire book as well as PDFs of the individual chapters. We will also shortly be adding other stories of similar projects in Belfast and beyond that we were not able to include in the printed book.

You will also find direct links to the websites of all the social enterprises mentioned in this book and others that we have since come across.