The Role of Social Enterprises in Building Community Resilience in Victoria, BC

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Background

- As climate change, globalization, geopolitical crises, and economic uncertainty have promoted frequent and intense changes to community structures, extensive literature has been written on community resilience[1]
- Community resilience is the latent and built capacity to respond to and influence change, sustain and renew systems, and develop trajectories for the future, using available resources and processes[2]
- There are roles for many stakeholders to contribute to community resilience[3], but the contributions of social enterprises have not been studied in Canada. This role has been studied in Greece[4] and Scotland[5]
- Social enterprises are revenue-generating organizations that use market mechanisms to fulfill a core social purpose as its top priority[6,7]

Research Question

What role do social enterprises have in building community resilience in Greater Victoria, BC, Canada?

Greater Victoria, Canada

Findings

Common Definitions

How did participants define and understand social enterprise and community resilience?

- There are many definitions and diverse formats of social enterprises in Victoria, as is the case across Canada[8]
- While some organizations were more aligned to non-profit and some were closer to for-profit, all agreed with the definition of social enterprise used in this study
- Respondents identified both assets (e.g., infrastructure) and processes (e.g., "bringing people together") to define resilience
- The processes identified were more salient to participants than the assets, which aligns with the assertion that building latent resilience in a complex system leads to resilient actions during a crisis[9]

Alignment to Indicators

Social enterprises in Victoria were found to have:

- significant roles in increasing the number and strength of relationships (i.e., social capital) though varying activities
- minor roles in creating new channels for two-way communication, despite their success at sending one-way messages
- significant roles in empowering diverse and underrepresented people to take on leadership roles
- moderate roles fostering collective action by attracting people to the organization through events
- minor roles in sharing messages that foster positive outlook for a better future; however, many 'showed through action"

Emergent Roles

Three additional key roles of social enterprises emerged from the findings: partnership brokers, non-profit supporters, and impact amplifiers.

- Participants established relationships between complementary organizations in other industries and sectors to prioritize collaboration over competition
- Participants had a direct role in either funding a specific non-profit partner organization with their revenue or serving non-profit organizations as their primary clientele
- Participants took advantage of the positive feedback loop of purpose-driven revenue-generation and the support of other organizations to amplify the positive impacts that were already created in the community

Methods

- This exploratory study included an initial literature review and a qualitative analysis of six place-based social enterprises in diverse industries using available reports and semi-structured interviews
- The Zoom interview guide assessed the social enterprise's contribution to five key community resilience-building indicators from the literature
- Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically using NVivo software to code the data and identify strengths and limitations across the indicators
- The data was also analysed to identify emergent themes and roles of social enterprises that were not captured under the five indicators

Community Resilience-Building Indicators

Social Capital   Communication   Leadership

Collective Action   Outlook

Applications

Applications in Theory

- While this study is place-based and does not demonstrate global applicability, it has provided exploratory insights which can be tested and applied to other urban communities across Canada
- The findings contribute to the discourse on bounce-back versus bounce-forward resilience[10] and show how alternate business models have a unique angle to promote the transition to a more just and equitable future
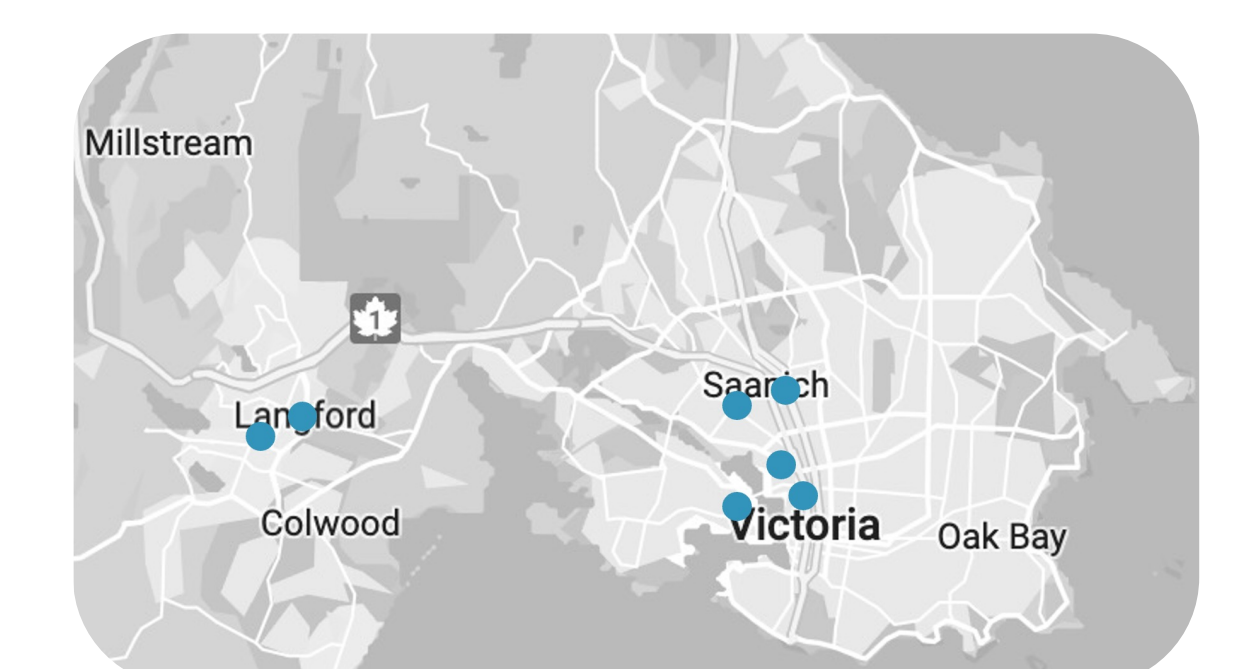
Applications in Practice

- Victoria's current resilience plan[11] does not have targets or plans for the social enterprise sector in helping achieve its resilience goals
- Victoria's social enterprises should be uplifted to develop youth leadership, support small business by brokering partnerships, and host community-building within an innovation ecosystem, all of which would contribute to the resilience goals of the City

VICTORIA 3.0 Recovery Reinvention Resilience – 2020-2041

City of Victoria Resilience Plan

Conclusion

Social enterprises have an important and unique role in building community resilience in Greater Victoria, BC, Canada. The participants in this study contributed to the underlying processes within the community that connect, uplift, and empower both individuals and institutions. This helps Victoria respond to crises and changes to create a more positive trajectory for the future.

Map of social enterprise participants

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