

## Linking the global ambitions of social enterprise to our local context

Last week I was sat in Edinburgh's St Andrews Square discussing issues surrounding land reform, community ownership, grants vs. loans, community shares, and social enterprise. And, a month before that, I went out to visit nine new social enterprises I had never been to before, including a community-owned restaurant, a charity shop with a carwash, and a wood recycling workshop. The most interesting thing about that lunch and those visits was that Scottish Social Enterprises weren't the topic at hand. Instead I was meeting with a South African entrepreneur who was facing these issues 9,000 miles away, and visits to enterprises in Orebro County, Sweden.

What was striking about those conversations was that each of the topics and businesses had a Scottish equivalent. Whether we're comparing the Community Empowerment Act to the Black Economic Empowerment policy in South Africa, or a wood manufacturing workshop in Aberfeldy with young apprentices to a foam manufacturing workshop in Sweden also training young people, the questions are very similar. Only the contexts are different.

This potential for shared learning across borders is one of the key things to be gained from this year's Social Enterprise World Forum. In general, the forum provides a unique platform for Scottish social enterprises to meet up with, listen to, and learn from international enterprises facing many of the same issues. And this year in particular, with it being hosted in Edinburgh, not only do we have the opportunity to learn with enterprises from around the world, but we can show off our own context, showcasing what's good (and not so good) within the Scottish social economy, allowing us to gain new perspectives on the work we've been doing for the last 20 years.

We also get the opportunity look at examples and hear stories from people who are working on emerging global issues that affect us all. Many countries share common problems with young people leaving rural communities, manual labour vanishing through de-industrialisation, an increasing gap between the rich and poor, and rapid changes to the future of working through digitisation. Although the effect of those issues on local communities is huge, the responses to these need to be joined up globally.

Patrick Geddes, an Edinburgh resident, coined the term "think global, act local," and our Scottish social heritage provides an excellent, practical context for looking at how the social economy works on a global scale. I'm excited to be taking part in the event this year, and I hope that lots of other Scottish Social Enterprises will join me at the World Forum to join the conversation - linking the global ambitions of Social Enterprise to our local context.

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