

LIVING IN THE CRACKS

Nadia Johanisova

A Look at Rural Social Enterprises in Britain and the Czech Republic

Living-and often thriving-in the cracks between the business world and the state system is an amazing variety of organisations which, according to some economists, theoretically shouldn't exist. That's because their goal is not to make profits but to meet social needs which both the market and government either can't meet nearly as well or have totally ignored.

There's not even a good collective name for these organisations, although Third Sector is often used and causes most people's eyes to glaze over. Yet, as this book shows, all human life is there. Based on dozens of interviews with people who have set up and run these organisations, it shows how their struggle to carry their ideals forward has led to lives with more joy, fulfilment and satisfaction than is normally found in commercial life or the civil service.

In a world increasingly dominated by giant companies for whom communities mean nothing, and in which the state sector is constrained by limited budgets and tight rules, organisations such as those described here are going to be needed everywhere if we are not to have major gaps in our lives and in the services available to us. Written in an entertaining personal style, this book will not only inspire and guide many of those who will decide to meet those needs but will also enable them to get in touch with some of the pioneers mentioned in its pages.

http://www.feasta.org/documents/living_in_the_cracks/index.htm

The real work of planet-saving will be small, humble, and humbling, and (insofar as it involves love) pleasing and rewarding. Its jobs will be too many to count, too many to report, too many to be publicly noticed or rewarded, too small to make anyone rich or famous.

Wendell Berry

FOREWORD

by Richard Douthwaite and Andrew Simms

Nadia Johanisova once told us that this book was about "*businesses with a difference*". Now that we've read it, we have to tell her that's only partly true. It's mainly about people making a difference to the lives of those around them by means of running a business. Instead of people "*being in business for themselves*" this book is about people who are in business for society.

The wonderful characters you will meet in its pages are all running social enterprises. These are not businesses run by society but ones which bring social benefits which their operators cannot capture in the prices they charge. In economic jargon, social enterprises deliver positive social and environmental externalities on top of the goods and services they provide.

This sets them in contrast to many conventional businesses which, deliberately or not, dump the costs of negative social and environmental externalities on to society, thus cutting their own costs in pursuit of "*improving their bottom line.*"

The fact that social enterprises cannot charge their customers (or nature) for all the good they do often means that those running them have to find subsidies to allow them to pay their way.

These sometimes come from the people running the enterprises who happily take less pay than they could earn elsewhere. In other cases, private benefactors and/or the public purse give grants to supplement the enterprises' commercial incomes. As this book shows though, the survival strategies of social enterprises go beyond the traditional subsidy/grant mentality. They include approaches such as using volunteer labour, selling direct to the public, growing one's own vegetables, exchanging one service for another, bartering, buying and selling on a co-operative basis and sharing capital expenses.

Another common feature of many social enterprises is that the benefits they deliver are local, going to the community or environment of a particular area. Most of the areas that benefit in this book are rural. Nadia says that this is because she lives in a rural area and has come to see the seeds of a more sustainable lifestyle there. *"The people in my village are more connected to the land than the city people, but the village is being destroyed by capitalism just as it was by communism," she says. "So in my research for the book in Britain I was looking for ways to fight back. I expected that the problem would be worse there but that there would also be more developed methods of tackling it. I tried to find out things about how to keep the local shop viable, how to get affordable housing for the locals, how to keep the public transport going and how to keep farms paying their way. The book sets out what I learned."*

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