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New Subjects, New Communities, New Formats: The Library Collection in the Digital World

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New Subjects, New Communities, New Formats: The Library Collection in the Digital World

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Abstract:
This paper provides an overview of collaborative research with the British Library, which aims to develop a conceptual approach to the collection in the digital world, using a case study of collections for social enterprise.

Based on this research, the objective of this Lively Lunch session was to facilitate discussion, using audience voting and a paper survey, of three broad issues affecting collections in the digital world:

- The impact of emerging interdisciplinary subjects.
- The challenge of identifying and engaging with potential user communities, including virtual communities.
- The growth of new formats, including those informally published online, and their implications for library collections.

This paper outlines the research. Social enterprise is a relatively new interdisciplinary field—business with a social purpose—which draws on much older ideas, for example from the co-operative movement, or from the non-profit sector. This raises questions about how latent existing collections of relevance to these emerging subject areas can be identified and exploited.

The communities interested in information about this subject are highly networked and geographically distributed and share valuable information resources using informal online publishing tools, creating challenges for traditional collection development and management processes from community analysis to collection evaluation.

Introduction

This paper is based on a collaborative research project with the British Library, which aims to use a case study of the library collection for social enterprise to develop a conceptual approach to the library collection in the digital world, exploring stakeholder perceptions of collections, terminology and collection development and management processes.

Although social enterprises are "radically different" to other types of business (Pearce, 2003: 93) the problems which lead them to seek information may be similar to the financial and management issues facing other types of business. Like small businesses, social enterprise stakeholders may "see 'business problems' not 'information problems'" (Webber, 1999: 186). Social enterprise also poses particular problems for library collection development and management because of its interdisciplinary nature, the role of virtual communities and networks in the field and the significance of more transient content generated by the social enterprise community itself.

Defining Social Enterprise

Social enterprise is a relatively new field—in the United Kingdom, use of the term has grown considerably over the course of the last decade. There appear to be two main approaches to defining social enterprise:

- Social enterprise as something that an individual social entrepreneur may do (Nicholls, 2006; Bornstein, 2007).
- Social enterprises as organisations with a social purpose which display particular characteristics (Defourny and Nyssens, 2006; Pearce, 2003).

Teasdale (2010: 4-5) summarises these perspectives by making a distinction between the use of the term "enterprise" either to describe a type of action, or to refer in a concrete sense to an organisation. For the purposes of this paper, the definition used will be taken from the UK government's Department of Trade and Industry (2002: 7):

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> "A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners."

This identifies two key aspects of social enterprises—they have social objectives and any profits should be reinvested in the business or in a social purpose. However, another important aspect of many social enterprises is their governance structure—they may be employee-owned, mutuals or co-operatives, or have community-based individual shareholders. Different governance models, potentially crossing boundaries between public, private and not for profit or voluntary sectors, aim to harness the creativity of motivated individuals to accomplish a social good.

One helpful typology of social enterprises is provided by Spear et al (2009) and identifies four main classes of social enterprise within the UK: mutuals, "trading charities", "Public-sector spin-offs", and "New-start social enterprises" (2009: 265-266), each facing distinct challenges.
Most of the audience at this Lively Lunch session had some knowledge of social enterprise – of the survey completed during the session, 7 out of 12 people indicated having some awareness of social enterprise before the session.

The Research Project
This research began in October 2010 and has so far involved three strands of data collection:

- Strand 1: a case study of British Library collections for social enterprise, including a catalog search for relevant materials, as well as statistics from the library's website and Document Supply Centre.
- Strand 2: searches in 88 other UK library catalogs (51 from public libraries, 35 from academic libraries and 2 health library union catalogs), with results compared to those items located in strand 1.
- Strand 3: 11 interviews have been conducted with people involved in or supporting social enterprises, librarians and academics working in the subject area. The interviews will be followed up by a questionnaire to a larger sample of stakeholders.

Although data analysis from these strands is continuing, some initial findings have emerged and will be shared in this paper.

New Subjects
The growth of interdisciplinary subjects presents particular challenges for library and information services (Witt, 2010). Equally, in individual universities, the availability of databases from a wide range of disciplines can facilitate interdisciplinary information seeking by scholars (Hérubel, 2010: 36). Interdisciplinary subjects often emerge with a focus on addressing complex social or scientific problems; this process may involve individuals and organisations from beyond the academy in a more active way than would be found in traditional research fields (Witt, 2010: 14-15). In relation to the field of social enterprise, this adds an additional layer of complexity to locating the subject: social enterprise in practice has further contestable boundaries, based more on economic sector than academic discipline. For example, a public sector spin out social enterprise may locate itself towards the public sector, whilst a social enterprise consultancy may locate itself between private and voluntary sectors.

The language of interdisciplinary subjects is often characterised by "insinuating ambiguities" (Bliss, 1952: 102) and this seems to be true of the vocabulary of social enterprise. Parkinson and Howorth (2008) and Birch and Whittam (2008) discuss some of the ambiguous terms in the subject; Parkinson and Howorth (2008) suggests a tension between UK policy rhetoric which emphasizes the entrepreneurial aspect and the significance attached to social or community-focussed language and values by social enterprise practitioners. Teasdale (2010: 9) suggests that the term social enterprise was favored by the Labour government following the 1997 election as a way of avoiding more politically loaded terms, such as those associated specifically with the co-operative movement. The meaning of the term appears to have expanded relatively rapidly between 1999-2005, with an increasing focus on "business solutions to social problems" (Teasdale, 2010: 11-13).

As an interdisciplinary subject for academic study, social enterprise may be located broadly at the intersection between business and a range of social science subjects. Many university programs relating to social enterprise or social entrepreneurship are located in business schools, such as Harvard Business School and the Said Business School of Oxford University. However, the catalog searching carried out as part of Strands 1 and 2 of this research project has revealed a wide spectrum of interest in social enterprise from other disciplines beyond these key subject areas. Some of these fields are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Agriculture	Health	Publishing
Architecture	Intellectual capital	Religion
Banking	Journalism	Research
Confectionery	Leisure	Science
Construction	Lifelong learning	Sculpture
Engineering	Music	Sport
Environment	Nursing	Sustainability
Fair trade	Philanthropy	Tourism
Globalisation	Property development	

The problem focused nature of interdisciplinary subjects may also make collection development and management in these fields politically charged (Searing, 1996: 333-336). In general, developing library collections may be seen as "a political task" (Perdue, 1978: 123) although Broadus suggests that the role of politics in collection development and management was "slow to be recognized" (1991: 10). In the case of interdisciplinary subjects, this might include general political issues such as—in the case of social enterprise in the current UK context—political debates about the provision of public services in times of economic austerity. It may also give rise to local political issues within a library or a university, as negotiations about funding and selection decisions take place between librarians and departments from different disciplines (Searing, 1996: 318). Lee (2003) describes some of the political and social factors involved in developing interdisciplinary women's studies collections.

The problems of developing library collections for social enterprise were highlighted during an interview with a librarian:

> "A whole problem in itself is [...] how subjects are seen and whether they're seen as important or not. That's the problem. It's quite difficult."

A social enterprise support manager observed that "the library element of it is sort of catching up," with a small number of initial publications in the field beginning to be followed by more significant evaluative studies of social enterprise implementations. Another social enterprise practitioner echoed this with the prediction: "I suspect that in two or three years' time that library will be much better populated." These quotations both suggest a perception of library collections as retrospective and reactive, rather than pro-actively addressing emerging information needs.

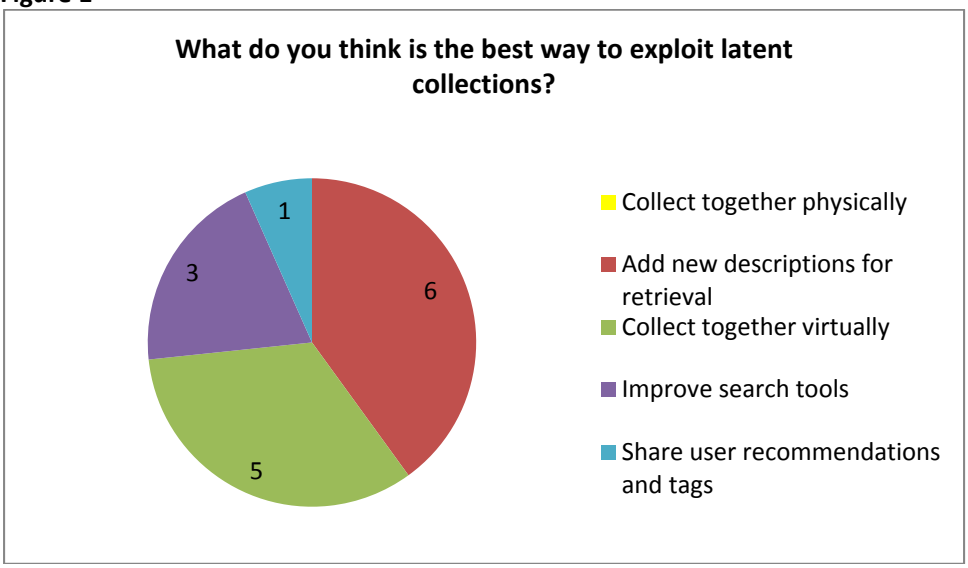
A growing focus on interdisciplinary subjects also encourages the exploration of existing library collections in new ways, evaluated from the perspective of meeting the needs of a new interdisciplinary program (Searing, 1996: 336). This also offers interesting parallels with museum studies and what might be described as the latent collection; Pearce (1995: 21) describes how "an interesting group of material"—without having been planned as a collection—may prompt a collecting impulse once "their potential collectionhood is perceived"; interesting objects may pass through "a phase of... 'passive collection'" (1995: 26). In many cases, useful library materials for interdisciplinary studies may pass through multiple phases of active collection—initially on the basis of their primary discipline and subsequently through use in an emerging interdisciplinary field. Searing (1996: 318) describes this

process in relation to the emergence of women's studies—initially "attention was focused on rediscovering forgotten texts by and about women and reassessing the classics, from Shakespeare to Freud" before the field began to generate an original literature of its own. This may add further complexity to evaluation and deselection processes in libraries. One academic interviewee talked about the relevance to social enterprise research of historical collections about similar topics such as "co-operatives in the 1980s and 1990s" stressing that "There's a lot of work that's already there."

The majority of the audience either strongly agreed (2) or agreed (8) with the statement "It's difficult to identify emerging interdisciplinary subjects". However, this question prompted discussion about differences between how such subjects may be identified in different types of library: in an academic library, such emerging fields of interest would usually be highlighted by faculty.

The audience gave a range of different responses to a question about how latent collections could be exploited by libraries. These are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



The most popular methods for dealing with this sort of material were to add new descriptions for retrieval and collect materials together virtually. Some people offered more than one response and all responses are included here. It is interesting to note that none of the participants in this session indicated a preference for collecting such materials together physically, although this has been done in the past with the creation of branch libraries for emerging interdisciplinary subjects such as women's studies (Lee, 2003: 25) or refugee studies (Robb, 2010: 43).

New Communities

The role and nature of the library collection is dependent on the communities it serves. Library textbooks such as Evans and Saponaro (2005: 20-46) describe the process of assessing the information needs of a public library community based in a particular geographic area. However, the increased significance of interdisciplinary subjects creates challenges in identifying communities of researchers grouped around individual interdisciplinary problems—possible methods for analyzing these communities include bibliometric and network analysis (Witt, 2010: 16-18). In the case of the British Library, the organisation of collecting activity has shifted from a geographic to a subject based focus, including the delivery of management and business studies content through an online subject portal (England, 2010: 72), arguably reflecting the way in which the digital age has led to a proliferation of new types of community, based online or around separate communities of practice. Locating

such communities and assessing their needs represents a new challenge for collection development and management. It may also be a source of controversy—for example, in a public library environment, there may be significant issues about the provision of expensive resources for particular practice communities, such as business people, particularly if the amount of resource use is likely to be low (Wilson and Train, 2006: 51). This perhaps highlights one respect in which public library collection provision differs from academic or special library provision: in these libraries users are also, broadly speaking, members of congruent communities of practice.

O'Sullivan (2009) shows how the concept of a community of practice can be applied to influential historical groups—including the scholars of the Mouseion at the Library of Alexandria, the founders of the Royal Society and the creators of the Oxford English Dictionary. The concept of a community of practice is defined as a community of people who "pursue collaboration in shared practice" (2009: 183). The groups use innovative contemporary technologies to communicate and share their work (2009: 32); examples of modern communities of practice can be seen collaborating and sharing through Wikipedia. Historically, library and information services often develop for communities of practice, as was the case at the Royal Society and other learned associations.

Mawson (2010) explores issues relating to the creation of networks to promote strategic social enterprise development and to support local social enterprises. The context of fragmented and low profile formal information and advice provision emphasizes the importance of informal social enterprise support networks. Such networks can be used to develop communities of practice to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaborative learning. Davenport (2001) describes three examples of online communities not restricted to a single organisation and how these can facilitate knowledge creation. This includes a description of issues involved in creating "'engineered' communities of practice", where small and medium enterprises need to work together across organisational boundaries (2001: 68), as well as the "floating communities" of consumers, which emerge through shared use of particular internet retail sites (2001: 70). These examples contrast with other studies of communities of practice, which tend to focus on communities within individual organisations. Although Wenger et al (2002: 219-231) do describe those communities which exist between organisations, between companies and customers and in wider society—"a constellation of communities of practice" (2002: 229)—the main case studies focus on communities within organisations. Similarly, Sharp et al (2003) and Urquhart et al (2010) both focus on the role of communities of practice within the UK's National Health Service. However, Lin and Hsueh (2006) provide a useful example of a distributed professional community of practice and show how technology can be used to support and automate information management processes within the community. Communities of practice provide new opportunities for library and information professionals to engage with customers. Huwe (2006) argues that academic librarians should integrate more closely into student and academic communities and should use the communication tools provided by these to push information about new content out to the community. Urquhart et al (2010) also emphasize the importance of intensive engagement by library and information professionals with the communities of practice they aim to facilitate. Both these approaches suggest a potentially more proactive role for librarians in communities of practice than one which focuses solely on managing information created by the community (Wenger et al., 2002: 103).

All five social enterprise practitioners and both academics interviewed in the strand 3 of this research project discussed the importance of networks and personal contacts for obtaining information about social enterprise topics.

The Lively Lunch participants were asked where their user communities were located, with a fairly even split between being located in the local area (4) and a mixture of local and geographically distributed remote users (5). Both vendors described their user communities as mostly geographically distributed, remote users.

New Formats

Communication within emerging social enterprise communities is often facilitated through online sys-

tems. All social enterprise interviewees from strand 3 of this project mentioned the usefulness of current awareness emails. However, opinion was divided about the potential value of social networking sites. One academic interviewee described them as a potential source of research data, or a tool for building an understanding of key figures in the field, but there was no discussion of how or whether social media material could be included in a library collection, although one librarian described creating current awareness briefings with links to relevant blogs or other web 2.0 resources. However, interviewees generally seemed to offer a fairly inclusive approach to materials of different formats within a collection. A social enterprise support manager suggested:

> "There could be books in there, there could be website facilities in there, there could be e-documents, there could be video equipment, say DVDs... models of various things."

Some of the potential preservation issues raised by new formats such as blogs and tweets may be seen as a new iteration of older issues relating to the collection of grey literature (Banks, 2010). Indeed, alongside discussions of web based materials, one interviewee also described his collection of grey literature and social enterprise ephemera: "a drawer full of leaflets, booklets, pamphlets, business cases and all sorts from existing organisations." Some of the issues surrounding the collection of grey literature, including lack of bibliographic control, uncertainty about the authority of document creators, difficulty locating materials and their transient nature are described by Tillett and Newbold (2006).

Newbold and Grimshaw (2010) explore the particular challenges of managing born-digital grey literature, including potential loss of access to web documents, intellectual property and copyright restrictions on archiving and the use of online repositories to preserve access to materials. Projects such as the UK Web Archive are described as a way of preserving and making accessible web based materials from the UK, but require painstaking permissions requests and raise complex legal issues (Newbold and Grimshaw, 2010: 62-63). The UK government has yet to approve regulations to facilitate the legal deposit collection of online materials. There are also particular issues raised by the abrupt switch from print to electronic publication of government documents, as more are published only in electronic format (Newbold and Grimshaw, 2010: 57). This was echoed by comments from interviewees in this research project. All five social enterprise interviewees mentioned government publications as significant sources of information. Two library interviewees also discussed issues around providing effective access to government publications including those which are available electronically and likely to be missed by library customers browsing printed material on the shelves and those historical government publications which have not been digitized and are only available in print format, sometimes in only one library.

In addition to issues surrounding accessing this type of material, all five social enterprise interviewees discussed creating information themselves, often in the form of grey literature and reports. Although in a couple of cases this included outputs from collaborative projects with universities, these did not seem to be captured by any system which could make them more accessible to others, such as institutional repositories. One interviewee involved in the creation of an online resource which does aim to capture this sort of material described its preservation role as a "lifeboat for information," evoking well the perilous state of much relevant documentation. These are issues which have long been discussed in library and information science literature. Ranganathan (1957: 374), influenced by the development of documentation studies, discussed the organizational "inefficiency of keeping every worker informed properly of every new achievement of every other worker, which may be at least partly or remotely germane to the pursuit of many others" – suggesting a role for the library in the improved management of internal reports. Key questions in relation to social enterprise information must be whether and how libraries can help to minimize inefficiencies between individual organizations by facilitating information sharing.

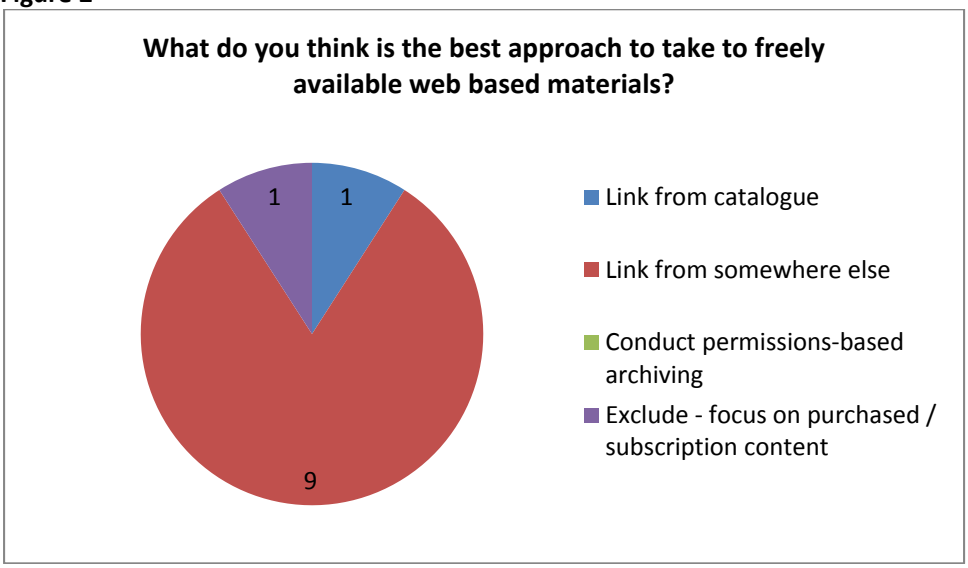
In addition to documentation, social enterprises both use and create data. Examples include a need for meteorological data for a social enterprise with an environmental purpose, and the collection of

data to explore the social value of the work the organisations carry out. Emerging approaches to data curation and data sharing have largely focussed on the academic context (Research Information Network, 2008; Buckland, 2011) but the significance of data to social enterprises suggests a wider challenge for managing and providing access to data for people beyond the research sphere.

Further format issues were highlighted by strands 1 and 2 of this research. In the OPAC searching process, pamphlets and even individual newspaper cuttings were retrieved – especially in public library catalogs, where this material had local relevance. Additionally, nearly 150 unique items out of a total of 747 items located were available in an online format from at least one catalog. These materials included e-books, e-journals, free online documents, electronic theses, and course materials, although there was considerable variation in the availability of these materials in different library catalogs. Only one relevant e-book was located in a public library catalog, whilst more than 80 online items were located in a single academic library catalog. A small number of e-books in an academic library were also identified as having been selected using a patron driven acquisitions system.

The members of the audience were asked to indicate their preferences for how to deal with freely available web-based materials. The survey responses are shown in Figure 2.

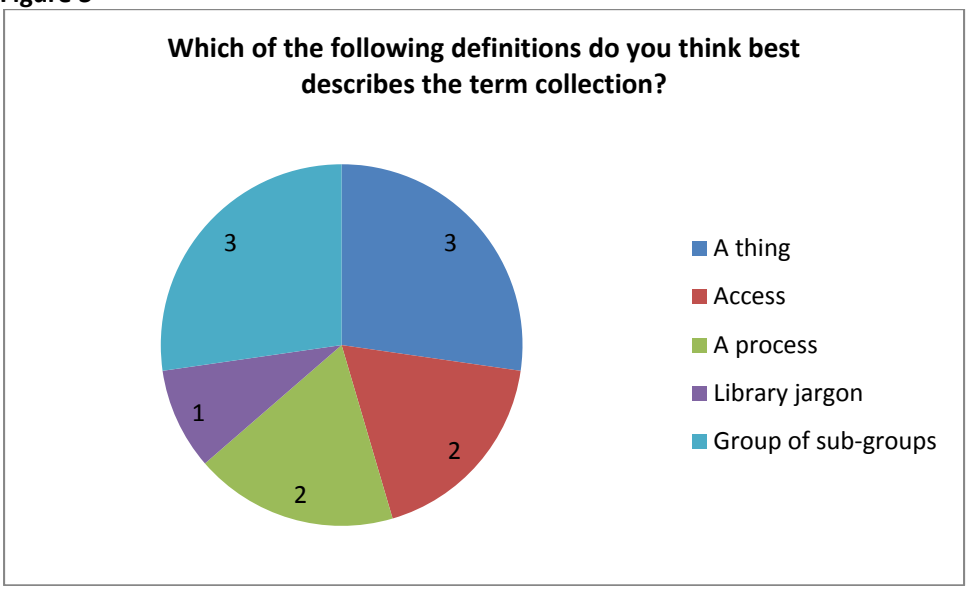
Figure 2



The overwhelming majority of responses to this question suggested that such materials should be linked to from somewhere other than the library catalog: only one reply suggested linking to these materials from the catalog. Important issues such as the lack of control over such resources were raised in the discussion which followed. However, searches of OPACs for a range of different types of library have identified a number of examples of catalogs which do link to this sort of freely available material, including official publications, PDF reports, and electronic theses.

The audience was also asked to indicate how they would choose to define the term collection. Each of the five options had emerged from interviews with those involved in social enterprise, academics, and library and information practitioners. Responses are shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3



Here, the majority of responses seem to be clustered around the idea of collection as "A thing" or as a "Group of sub-groups"—these may be seen as the most tangible ways of defining collection.

Discussion

The discussions during and following the presentation highlighted a number of issues. For example, some of the questions asked by the researcher might have been better addressed to a particular sector: in academic libraries, new or emerging subjects are highlighted through academic liaison and course development processes, with timescales for collection development set by the requirements of the accreditation process. Alternative and related concepts to social enterprise were also discussed, including public scholarship or public sociology which explore topics of public interest.

Although not a primary focus for the research project, the idea of social enterprise involvement in the provision of library and information services was also discussed. Opinion seemed to be quite evenly divided: 5 people agreed and 1 person strongly agreed that social enterprise should be used to deliver library services, whilst 4 people disagreed and 1 person neither agreed nor disagreed. One comment suggested that social enterprise involvement may be a more practical option in public libraries than in the academic sector. Organizations such as library Friends and the web based information service Radical Reference were mentioned as very different examples of existing types of social enterprise involvement in the delivery of library and information services.

Conclusion

This paper has described a current research project which aims to develop a conceptual approach to the library collection in the digital world. Three specific issues emerging from this study have been discussed, including the challenges of developing and managing collections to meet the needs of new interdisciplinary subjects, locating and identifying the needs of new types of user community, and the continuing challenges posed by the emergence of new web based formats. As well as presenting some initial findings from catalog searches and interviews, it has also summarised responses to questions asked of the audience and discussions which took place during the Lively Lunch session.

In addition to suggesting new ways of approaching the concept of the collection, this project aims to encourage a wider awareness of the challenges and opportunities presented by social enterprise, the information needs of these organisations, and how library and information services can best support them.

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