

# U.K. Financialization of Public Service Delivery Goes Global

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## ABSTRACT

Rather than social innovation or the promotion of social and environmental justice, amplified by notions of “global Britain,” the British state continues to propagate a series of aging public service delivery initiatives, mostly based on private funding. Although before Brexit there was strong British influence on European Union policies for social investment, this influence also extends globally. At the heart of these initiatives is the British Council’s Global Social Enterprise program with its reports, mapping exercises, U.K. study tours, and resources available for social entrepreneurs. The Council supports regular articles in the online *Pioneers Post*, which extol the benefits of impact investment using private funds.

## RÉSUMÉ

L’État britannique, plutôt que de promouvoir l’innovation sociale ou la justice sociale et environnementale, amplifiées par des notions de « Grande-Bretagne mondiale », continue à propager une série d’initiatives vieillottes consistant à offrir des services publics financés principalement par le secteur privé. Avant Brexit, la Grande-Bretagne exerçait une forte influence sur les politiques en investissement social de l’Union européenne; cette influence avait aussi une portée mondiale. Au cœur de ces initiatives se trouve le programme « Global Social Enterprise » du British Council, avec ses rapports, exercices de cartographie, voyages d’étude en Grande-Bretagne, et ressources disponibles pour les entrepreneurs sociaux. En outre, le Council appuie régulièrement la publication sur le site *Pioneers Post* d’articles qui prônent les bénéfices d’investissements à retombées sociales au moyen de fonds privés.

**KEYWORDS / MOTS CLÉS :** public service delivery, private funding, British Council, impact investment / prestation des services publics, financement privé, British Council, investissements à retombées sociales

## INTRODUCTION

The global propagation of support for impact measurement and social investment in health, social care, and welfare represents the last throes of British colonialism, using a “Third Way” or liberal approach. A strong British Council emphasis on financialization, often without any reference to decided domestic politics or their required governance structures, in many countries enables private companies and sole traders to self-identify and to be represented and reported as “social enterprises.” This recomposition of the political space generates a vast infrastructure, providing a platform for *philanthrocapitalism* (McGoey, Thiel, & West, 2018), with much of it funded and directed by the U.K. Government through the Global Steering Group for Impact Investment and the Cabinet and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Offices. This policy thrust is now being incorporated within new U.K. trade agreements, for example with Australia, using their emphasis on professional services (British High Commission, Canberra, 2021).

Initially, social investment and impact measurement have featured in a U.K. domestic trajectory for driving nonprofit structures into the delivery of regressive public policies. By-products from this mixed economy of welfare now render social investment and social enterprise polysemous (Jenson, 2017, 2019) and may ultimately return both recipient communities and countries to a pre-welfare fate.

This article examines various theoretical contributions on social investment, many of which may have overlooked the outsourcing motives of successive U.K. Governments’ using private finance. It also provides a brief history of policy steps in this direction, which have had influence in the European Union and internationally through the British Council.

## SOCIAL INVESTMENT NEEDS PUBLIC SUBSIDY

Much literature on social investment begins with differing interpretations of Anthony Giddens’ (1998) “Third Way” guidelines on “investment in human capital whenever possible, rather than direct provision of economic maintenance” (p. 117) or *Why We Need a New Welfare State* by Gøsta Esping-Andersen, Duncan Gallie, Anton Hemerijck, & John Myles (2002). But despite frequent and widespread acknowledgement of a separate identity for the U.K.’s “Third Way” approach (Deeming & Smyth, 2015; Jenson, 2019; Kersbergen & Hemerijck, 2012; Morel & Palme, 2017), few of these contributions focus on financing social investment from private sources as a longstanding U.K. policy ambition. It is also significant that neither the “social origins” approach (Salamon & Anheier, 1998) nor Esping-Anderson’s (1990) typology assigned countries from Central and Eastern Europe to various welfare regimes (Meyer, Moder, Neumayr, Traxier, & Vandor, 2017). Though funding from public sources is still very important in the Visegrád countries of Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics, and Hungary, this has been shrinking since the financial crisis of 2008 so that “foreign funders have gained importance” (Meyer et al., 2017, p. 19). British Council contributions described below, which seek to influence these changes, have previously been underreported.

Christopher Deeming and Paul Smyth (2015) warn that “shifting the emphasis of social policy towards social investment in human capital policies and labour market integration may well come at the expense of social protection and inclusion for all” (p. 314). Esping-Anderson et al. (2002) criticized Tony Blair’s New Labour approach as supply-sided and argued for a “truly effective and sus-

tainable social investment strategy ... biased towards preventive policy” (p. 5). Jane Jenson (2017) described this shift to social investment as public funding going to non-public and nonprofit actors to develop services needed to implement the social investment perspective in areas previously provided by the public sector or commercially where neoliberals held sway. She laments that the consensus has disappeared that state-designed policy instruments and the public delivery of public services are the best kind of investment. Instead, “states, international organisations and the supranational EU are directing their spending to a myriad of social entrepreneurs and NGOs to provide the services, in one of the multiple legal forms that social enterprises might take” (p. 43). Jensen (2019) also describes a “third stream” for social investment from policy communities analyzing welfare regimes with challenges from social and economic trends generating demographic problems and new social risks, but she asserts that all streams of social investment still feature the “need to combat neoliberal ideas figured in all three” (p. 60). Jensen (2009) had written earlier that “neoliberals’ obsession with redesigning macro-economic and financial structures by slashing the social protections of some and failing to provide for others ... is a detour Europeans must resist” (p. 42). Even Kees van Kersbergen and Anton Hemerijck (2012) who believe that a social investment strategy is the best possible route for welfare state adjustment, are also wary that its generation of flexible labour tends to increase wage differentials and that “maximising the chances of earning an income on the labour market tends to generate inequalities and risks” (p. 489).

Few of these contributions reflect on the U.K.’s encouragement of private finance from the 1990s onward. Though Alex Nicholls and Simon Teasdale (2017) describe the aggregate size of the mixed economy of welfare as being reduced, with the proportion of public services delivered by social enterprises and the private sector increased, they offer few explanations of alternative funding sources. Nathalie Morel and Joakim Palme (2017) seek to fashion a normative foundation for social investment based on the social cohesion aims of European social investment in the Lisbon Strategy, but they pay only lip service to policy developments and academic research “where a focus on economic indicators has tended to prevail when measuring policy outcomes” (p. 154) with a focus on human capital investments rather than income security.

Jean-Louis Laville and Philippe Eynaud (2019) are more critical of a “Third Way” approach as the relegitimization of capitalism. This “venture philanthropy,” mindful of the evaluation of the social results of its financial contributions, prefers “individual engagement and ethical awareness over norms emanating from public authorities and political questions” (p. 13). “The cross fertilization of public action and civil society by a common reference to the democratic society has to be the main conduit for strengthening solidarity” (p. 14).

Elsewhere, considerable theoretical and practical evidence highlights difficulties in pursuing a philanthropic funding approach, since the encouragement of private investment in social outcomes needs subsidies and support, usually from public funds. Ito Peng (2014) compares social investment developments in Japan and South Korea. While Japanese investment was largely publicly funded, South Korean expansion used the public funding of private and third sector organizations. New jobs created in social service sectors provided low-wage and non-standard employment, with little evidence that these jobs can provide adequate income security for families.

Nicholls and Teasdale (2017) also mention New Labour's Social Investment Task Force and Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR). But to enable their thesis that the neoliberal macro paradigm and social enterprise micro paradigm remain intact, they seem unable to follow logically Charles Leadbeater's (1997) original prescription of a role for private finance. "(T)he private sector should consider what role it might play in providing start-up and growth finance for social entrepreneurs. ... If a set of corporate sponsors develops a close, committed, long-term relationship with a scheme it should be possible for the scheme to use these relationships as financial assets, as security to borrow funds" (p. 81). With considerable U.K. influence, the European Union (2013) later more specifically advocated public subsidies to private providers of social services, offering public funds in exchange for meeting objectives set by the state and contracting out and paying for a specific service according to parameters set by the state. This provides an apt summary of the British Council's policies and actions globally, in many cases supported by Social Enterprise UK, to which reference is made below.

A significant but often rose-tinted United Nations Research Institute for Social Development overview of the global solidarity and social economy briefly mentions but fails to analyze "filling gaps in service provisioning or whether it is part and parcel of broader trends associated with the privatization of public services and substituting for states" (Utting, van Dijk, & Matheï, 2014, p. 35). Above all, this contribution veers away from any conclusion that private finance for social investment requires continuing public subsidy.

There are not enough financially promising companies in which impact investors might invest. The "Monitor Report" (from Michael Porter's consultancy) on impact investing (Koh, Karamchandani, & Katz, 2012) shows that "(t)he rosy picture of abundant opportunities to make high returns that many have drawn from the hype may be obscuring the challenges faced by investors seeking to deploy capital into inclusive businesses" (p. 3). "Organisations abound that appear to offer social benefit – but whether they can offer market-based returns is questionable ... because for-profit investors are uneasy about investing in risky financial ventures, 'truly realizing the impact in impact investing will require more, not less, philanthropy'" (McGoey, 2014, p. 116). The practical difficulties of promoting external social investment from private sources are shown below. Even less attention has been paid to the ways that think tanks and civil society organizations, including philanthropic organizations, draw selectively on self-serving evidence (McGoey, Thiel, & West, 2018). Reflecting Laville and Eynaud (2019) this "new philanthrocapitalist rhetoric advances an even more extreme notion of market superiority than Friedman did because, unlike him, they make an explicit normative case for using public money to subsidize the corporate sector's 'social work'" (McGoey et al., 2018, p. 20).

## **BACKGROUND TO PUBLIC FINANCE FOR SOCIAL INVESTMENT**

In June 1989, as the former Soviet Union collapsed, the U.K. Government introduced a program of "Know How Funds" in Poland. Other funds were developed for Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. These funds were designed to help erect the framework for a market economy based on British banking, capital market development, financial services, privatization, and other critical areas. British experts soon filled key positions in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Central and Eastern European countries. "The main objective of Britain's programme of bilateral technical assistance to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was to help countries in transition to a free-

market economy by providing advice and expertise. Total expenditure in 1994-95 was £77.2mn” (Hanley, 1995, n.p.). In his Parliamentary Reply as a Foreign Office Minister, Jeremy Hanley (1995) acknowledged “the great contribution of the British Council in working alongside the Know How Fund.” The British Council continues this free-market emphasis through its ongoing promotion of social investment.

After Leadbeater’s (1997) “The Rise of the Social Entrepreneur” contribution on welfare reform, an effective marrying of third sector organizations with external private funding for public services was amplified by the Social Investment Task Force (SITF), set up by Gordon Brown in 2000 and led by Ronald Cohen, a venture philanthropist. SITF (2000, 2003, 2005, 2010) reports outlined a role for private social investment. Coalition and Conservative Governments used recommendations in the SITF’s (2010) *Social Investment Ten Years On: Final Report of the Social Investment Task Force* as a basis for the “Growing the Social Investment Market” White Paper (Cabinet Office & HM Government, 2011) and, based on Labour’s *Dormant Bank Accounts Act* in 2008, set up Big Society Capital as a social investment wholesale bank in 2012. From 1997, Leadbeater had originally projected that it might be among the original intentions of New Labour that reductions in public spending could be achieved through an increase in the private financing of social investment. The recent history of U.K. national third sector organizations shows not only their compliance with this policy shift but their prominent role as its policy entrepreneurs (Huckfield, 2021).

The SITF (2010) Final Report laid out all necessary foundations for privately funded social investment, with substantial claims for using private money to deliver public services:

The scale of this opportunity is significant. If just 5% of the £65.6bn of capital in UK philanthropic foundations, and, over time, 0.5% of institutionally managed assets in the UK, were devoted to social investment, this would unlock over £5.5bn of financing for social projects. ... Taken together, these four sources – philanthropic foundations, institutionally managed assets, grant funding and individual savings accounts – could generate £14.2bn for social investment. (p. 16)

Social investors, according to Cohen, “harness the most powerful forces of capitalism: entrepreneurship, innovation and capital to tackle social issues more effectively” and “connect [social sector organizations] to the capital markets” (Chiapello & Godefroy, 2017, p. 178). They are “the way to bring the private sector to finance non-profitable activities of a social nature, through redirection of public funds and philanthropic finance into for-profit entities that are put in charge of social activities” (p. 181). Arising from this, “states can dedicate public resources to organising incentives to attract private investors and extend their action. In fact they are actively encouraged to do so by new actors who propose to use the mechanisms of finance to do good, and are also on the lookout for new asset classes to expand their activities” (Chiapello, 2015, p. 32). The British Council—supported and funded by the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—supports key mechanisms around the world to further these aims.

But these attempts to marry the interests of external private investors with socially motivated public deliverers do not always work well. A 2020 “Investing for Impact Survey” of 112 mainly Western

European impact investors shows their lack of appetite for taking risks and their need for the supporting actions, programs, and policies of the European Commission and British Council (Gaggioti, Gianoncelli, Piergiovani, & European Venture Philanthropy Association, 2021). This survey shows that though people suffering from poverty represented the most targeted beneficiary category (50%), 59 percent of investment resources were devoted to Western Europe, 92 percent of investment was done at a “validation stage” (the final stage with less risk before maturity), and 68 percent of respondents only supported “social purpose organisations with a potentially financially viable self sustainable business model” (p. 12). Further, 87 percent had already co-invested once, with 62 percent of co-investments done with foundations (Gaggioti et al., 2021). These findings echo those of Porter’s “Monitor Report” (Koh, Karamchandani, & Katz, 2012).

These financing difficulties were also reflected dramatically in evidence to a House of Lords Select Committee by the Chief Executive of Social Investment Business, a major social investment financial intermediary. “The sub-£150,000 marketplace needs subsidy. ... I think it is no different from mainstream investment; the valley of death of investment is £50,000 up to £250,000 for normal commercial businesses” (House of Lords Select Committee on Charities, 2016).

Alongside SITF (2000, 2003, 2005, 2010) reports, Labour Governments of 2001 and 2005 invested significant sums in social investment support, including over £400 million in programs such as Community Builders, Future Builders, the Social Enterprise Investment Fund, and mixed grant/loan funds to support potential investees. But the sector was not ready for this investment. Evidence from Triodos and Charity Bank on conversion rates among social investors show that they appear to sit between 5 and 15 percent. At one extreme, Community Builders had 4,000 enquiries leading to 200 applications and 37 investees—equivalent to less than a one percent conversion rate—a significant mismatch of perceptions between investors and applicants (Gregory, Hill, Joy, & Keen, 2012). But despite this minimal interest, subsidies for social investment have continued. There is so far a total of £1,062,720,000 from the main programs funded by various government departments and Big Lottery Fund (Floyd, Davis, & Merryfield, 2017), through 120 social investment intermediaries (Floyd, 2017).

“After the Gold Rush,” a report by the Alternative Commission on Social Investment, found that “the current model of a ‘social investment market’ promoted by the UK Government and Big Society Capital is not actually increasing social sector organisations accessing repayable finance” (Barraket, Barth, & Mason, 2015, p. 13). Because this market is still immature, “social enterprises often seek other forms of repayable finance such as loans from family and friends, unsecured loans from ‘angels,’ soft loans and quasi-equity investments from trusts and foundations which all exist at the margins of the ‘social investment market’” (Barraket et al., 2015, p. 13).

Attempting to remedy these difficulties, the Coalition Government set up an Investment and Contract Readiness Fund (ICRF) in 2012.

ICRF was a grant fund that aimed to ensure that promising social ventures were better equipped to compete for public service contracts and secure repayable investment. It was delivered by the Social Investment Business from May 2012–March 2015 on behalf of the

Cabinet Office. Originally set up as a £10mn fund, the fund grew to £13.2mn. (Ronicle & Fox, 2015, p. 1)

The ICRF Evaluation Report concluded that “the VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise) market is further from being investment ready than was envisaged” (Ronicle & Fox, 2015, p. 23). With U.K. influence, the European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (CEGES, 2016) later invited the Commission

to set up a pan-European investment and capacity building funding program, following the example of the UK Investment and Contract Readiness Fund, by defining a list of pre-approved, specialised service providers that social enterprises can call on to gain access to high-quality and appropriate capacity building support, financed through the fund. (p. 26)

Most U.K. Government domestic social initiatives are now underpinned by Big Society Capital as a social investment wholesale bank and by funding directions given to the National Lottery. Having used dead people’s or “dormant” bank accounts to support these initiatives, these funds may now be augmented using £800 million in assets from dormant charities (Weakley, 2021). As shown below, the British Council, High Commissions, and Embassies are now global ambassadors for these developments.

### **U.K. SOCIAL INVESTMENT GOES GLOBAL**

Following New Labour’s re-engagement with the European Union after a previous Conservative Government opt out from its Social Chapter, the U.K.’s influence was soon revealed by the European Council of Ministers in March 2000. The European Union’s main social investment framework is laid out in the Lisbon Strategy, which includes

preparing the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society by better policies for the information society and R&D, as well as by stepping up the process of structural reform for competitiveness and innovation and by completing the internal market. (European Commission, 2004)

Few commentators have focused on the European Union’s newfound emphasis on private finance. After its omission from discussions during the previous Conservative Government’s opt out of the European Union’s Social Chapter, under New Labour Governments of 1997, 2001, and 2005, the influence of the U.K. in the European Commission’s social investment policies spread rapidly.

The initial EU Social Business Initiative in 2011 was dominated by U.K. input and opened the door more widely for private investment. “It offers a description based on principles shared by the majority of the Member States, while respecting their diversity of political, economic and social choices and the capacity for innovation of social entrepreneurs” (European Commission, 2011, p. 4). In its Key Action 3, the EU’s initiative proposed:

a €90mn European financial instrument be set up to facilitate access to funding for start-up, development and expansion of social enterprises by way of investment in solidarity

investment funds, which provide own-capital and debt-financing instruments, under the European Union Programme for Social Change and Social Innovation. (European Commission, 2011, p. 8)

The same Commission Communication proposed to follow the U.K. precedent of using bank accounts of deceased persons under Labour's 2008 *Dormant Bank Accounts Act*, developing access for venture capital and tax relief for social enterprise (European Commission, 2011). In essence, the EU's Social Business Initiative adopted the British model.

The European Commission's Expert Group on Social Enterprise and the Social Economy (GECES) included six U.K. members, more than from other states, and recommended capacity building, alleviating regulatory hurdles, and tax incentives.

Dominated by U.K. input, this Expert Group provided a roadmap for the British Council. GECES Working Group 1 on "Improving Access to Funding" was led by the European Venture Philanthropy Association and its U.K. officers. GECES Working Group 1 (2016) produced a manifesto for private investment in social enterprise, with support for the "impact community," the relaxation of regulatory hurdles, encouraging solidarity savings from pension funds, more tax incentives, and public support for private investors to take on more risk. The report was quickly followed by another supporting further private investment (European Venture Philanthropy Association, 2017). The final report from the whole Expert Group included representation and observers from solicitors Bates Wells and Braithwaite, which had pioneered legislation for the U.K.'s Community Interest Companies (Lloyd, 2010), Social Business International, Social Finance, the U.K. Cabinet Office, and the British Council (European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship, 2016).

British influence continued in "Empowering People, Driving Change" through the Bureau of European Policy Advisers, which included Geoff Mulgan, who had been head of the U.K. Government Downing Street Policy Unit from 2001, when social investment and procurement from third sector organizations had been promoted. "Another such barrier lies in a general culture that views the solution to social demands as a prerogative of public institutions, thereby giving only a passive role to citizens, stakeholders and users ..." (Hubert & Bureau of European Policy Advisers, 2011, p. 115).

After the projection of these policies in a series of U.K. and European Union policy documents, they are now amplified by the Global Steering Group for Impact Investment, chaired by Ronald Cohen, as an international version of his Social Investment Task Force, with many of its activities funded by U.K. and U.S. Governments during austerity. The Task Force Leaders' Declaration from its September 2020 online meeting emphasized "incentives to accelerate impact investment, which seeks social as well as financial returns in order to create sustainable jobs, advance education, improve healthcare, and fund the expansion of non-profit organizations that support the most vulnerable" (Global Steering Group for Impact Investment, 2020, n.p.).

The irony of all this is that the British Council itself had previously recognized difficulties in this approach:

And as the funding pendulum swings away from grants towards loans and venture capital, priorities start to be assessed based on which social outcomes can be profitable, monet-



ised or marketised. Social issues where it's difficult to put a financial value on the outcomes will become much harder to fund. This will lead to a new 'underclass' of social causes. (Catherall & Richardson, 2014, p. 4)

The British Council's conclusion of its own review of social enterprise was that "there may well not be a recognisable 'social enterprise sector' by 2020. Certainly any attempts to confine social enterprise to specific legal structures or models of governance will have ceased" (Catherall & Richardson, 2014, p. 7).

### **BRITISH COUNCIL "MAPPING"**

Much of the remainder of this article is devoted to the British Council and U.K. Governments' global amplification of its domestic policies to promote social investment, often in circumstances where providers and investment infrastructure are ill-equipped and where there is still considerable political debate about regulatory legislation for social enterprises and their projected role in public service delivery and wider society. Following a domestic U.K. history of social investment—underpinned by the Social Investment Task Force reports from 2000 onward, Big Society Capital as a social investment wholesale bank in 2012, and the National Lottery—these initiatives are now being replicated globally by the British Council and Ronald Cohen's Global Steering Group for Impact Investment, with their retinue of international bankers and financial intermediaries. This mitigates against any emancipation by grassroots communities and undermines attempts at social justice.

In Central and Eastern Europe,

institutional actors ... such as new political governments, international donors, right-wing parties or EU regulation standards ... shifted prevailing power relations within society and resulted in changes in the institutional environment and legal framework for CSOs (civil society organisations). (Meyer et al., 2017, p. 15)

Beyond Europe, British Council "mapping" reports on social enterprise in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines are typically characterized by a vagueness in social enterprise definitions, including self-identification by private enterprise and sole trader entities and the infusion of private capital and pressure for their greater involvement in public service delivery (British Council, 2013, 2017a, 2017b). In a similar vein, proposals for China, Vietnam, and Southeast Asia have emerged in other contributions (Defourny & Shin-Yang, 2011; Jia, 2020; Nguyen & Seymour, 2013). These typically blur differences in governance and encourage private financial involvement in public service delivery.

### **U.K. INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL INVESTMENT: POLAND**

British Council social enterprise mapping, supported by Social Enterprise UK, often does not recognize the changing political and economic context in Eastern Europe. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, "the relationship between civil society and the government has been challenged by several changes in government since 1989. Centre-left or centre-right political parties have alternated, resulting in ever-changing attitudes toward CSOs" (Meyer et al., 2017):

Most recently, authoritarian right-wing parties have come into the government in Hungary (in 2010) and Poland (in 2015), and a neo-Nazi political party massively increased its votes in parliamentary elections in Slovakia (in 2016). In Hungary, this resulted in repression and sanctions against CSOs, including the defamation of international CSOs and foundations. (p. 16)

Poland is acutely divided politically and provides a good example of U.K. influence on social enterprise and social investment within a context of disputed internal policies. Following the proposal by the Civic Platform Party of a *Draft Act on Social Enterprise and Support for Social Economy Entities* in June 2015, resistance from social economy organizations led to the suspension of its Parliamentary Committee. After this, no further steps were taken (Paczynski, Pacut, Potkanska, Pazderski, & ICF Consulting Services, 2016, p. 21).

Though L'Emergence de l'Entreprise Sociale en Europe (EMES) Research Network and Ashoka were active, their intervention has neither resulted in building a universal definition or resolved the problem of how to define economic activity carried out by a social enterprise (Paczynski et al., 2016). Though this “business-activity approach” has been adopted on a wide scale in Poland, including in policy schemes for social enterprises, such as the National Programme for Social Economy Development and the *Draft Act on Social Enterprises*, this approach excludes many organizations that do not conduct business activity from public funds (Paczynski et al., 2016).

Within this ongoing debate, Agnieszka Pacut (2020) describes an EMES “business activity approach” to produce a reformist institutional analysis. The role of social entrepreneurship as a potential provider of public services in light of the limitations and inefficiency of the public sector regarding financing and meeting social needs and changes in public services provision should be recognized, with a shift of emphasis from government to governance with delegation of service delivery. “This is a premise to seek new forms and methods of operation by social organizations, including entrepreneurial solutions that offer various forms of income generation and contribute to their sustainability” (p. 16).

Though one of the first reports on social enterprise in Poland, “Social Enterprise: A New Model for Poverty Reduction and Employment Generation” (EMES, ERN, & United Nations Development Programme, 2008), was not written directly by British Council, it was influenced by U.K. and U.S. precedents in the same vein. The report is couched in welfare reformist terms. Social transfers and black market work “entail a specific lifestyle, wherein it is really hard to promote, especially among excluded people, the attitudes of self-reliance and pro-activeness” (p. 79).

Everywhere, the “end of welfare as we know it” has become evident, which explains the widespread efforts to find some new model that would lead from a welfare state to a welfare society, or from welfare to workfare. Increasingly, a “privatization of responsibility” is needed. (p. 80)

The report proposes a new legal registration, based on the U.K.'s Community Interest Company legislation, and recommends the precedent of the U.K. social finance intermediary UnLtd. UnLtd is a pre-eminent U.K. vehicle for introducing private funds into social enterprise.

Deepening divisions in Polish society are reflected in NGOs. There is the national-religious-populist camp associated with the new government, and there is the liberal, pro-European opposition. “Both of them have deep roots in Polish society, a fact reflected in the relative ease with which they can mobilize large groups of people to support their respective causes, also at the level of civil society” (Ekiert, Kubik, & Wenzel, 2017, p. 89).

Against this background of strident political debate within civil society, the British Council’s “Active Citizens” program has operated alongside the Polish Foundation for Social Economic Initiatives, supported by Social Enterprise UK (British Council, 2016). The “Active Citizens” program hardly seems fine-tuned to local Polish sensitivities.

## **SERBIA**

For Serbia, which is not a member of the EU, though the advent of social enterprise is even more recent, the “Social Enterprise: A New Model for Poverty Reduction and Employment Generation” report (EMES, ERN, & United Nations Development Programme, 2008) is equally prescriptive, again showing continuing U.K. influence. There is no institutional framework for the social economy, and no single ministry for the social economy. Instead, “national policies should promote welfare pluralism, welfare partnerships, the co-production of services and local development partnerships with social enterprise actors” (p. 191).

A later Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on Serbia included similar U.K. policies from New Labour’s “Third Way” aimed at the renewal of social democracy but strongly emphasizing the market (Spear, Aiken, Noya, & OECD, 2012). The report included several references to the British Council and social value in procurement. “Social clauses could be used to support a niche strategy which would give possibilities of sustainability and growth of social enterprise public service providers” (p. 74) with “loan guarantee systems, and specialist financial institutions to act in a venture capitalist type role supporting growth of the social enterprise” (p. 75). These recommendations to support private investment are made despite a highly centralized Serbian state, including

the financing of civil society by the state ... in many cases, members of political parties are establishing government-friendly NGOs which are being awarded the majority of funds (if “their” party is in power) and therefore creating a parallel, non functional civil society driven from the top down. (Spasojevic, 2017, p. 277)

## **CZECH AND SLOVAK REPUBLICS**

Social enterprises in the Czech and Slovak economies experienced growth from 2009 to 2014, with subsidies from the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund (Placek, Vacekova, Svidronova, Nemec, & Korimova, 2021). However, the Czech Republic has not passed any direct legislation on social entrepreneurship.

The main catalyst for its development in the Czech Republic is the non-profit sector, in a bottom-up approach to establish the social economy sector. By contrast, a top-down approach dominates in Slovakia, with socio-democratic governments in 2008 and 2016 pro-

mising to establish a system of SEs (social enterprises) into their manifesto declarations and converting this promise into real action. (Placek et al., 2021, p. 11)

Placek and others warn of difficulties through importing different Western approaches. The findings indicate that the development of SEs (social enterprises) cannot be supported simply by importing Western European approaches. Unless the different approaches are embedded, SEs will just be “replications of formulas that will last only as long as they are fashionable” (Defourny, Hulgård, & Pestoff, 2014, p. 60). The historical background of social economy in the Czech Republic and Slovakia explains the critical and distinct aspects of the Czech and Slovak experiences in comparison to the historical patterns and developments in Western countries (Placek et al., 2021).

In the Czech Republic, “we are not witnessing the Anglo-Saxon ideal of the pluralism of independent and self-sustainable actors competing with each other and with the state” (Navratil & Pejcal, 2017, p. 54). “The government has treated CSOs as a supplement to its own policies” (p. 54). The Slovak Republic has seen “the rise of ‘uncivility’ and polarization in society and the growth of right-wing political movements ... and it remains to be seen how pro-democratic civil society will respond to them” (Strecansky, 2017, p. 104).

Despite the cautionary advice above against importing different policies, the British Council operates its “Active Citizens” program in the Czech Republic. “Boosting Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Creation: Unlocking the Potential of Social Enterprises in the Czech Republic” (Galera, Alexopoulos, Noya, & Aisenberg, 2016) included similar recommendations to those made by the British Council elsewhere, to “facilitate the channelling of investors/private funds to social enterprises through fiscal incentives, including tax credits, subsidies and enabling tax legislation” (p. 73).

## GREECE

Though Greece has been a member of the European Union since 2001, despite deep political divisions, the British Council is similarly active. “[A] notable difference in Greek legislative and administrative documents is the preferred use of the term ‘social and solidarity economy organisation’ over ‘social enterprise’” (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos, 2019, p. 11). Based on this wider concept, following the election of a new Greek Government led by Syriza in 2016, Law 4430/2016 prepared for the development and broadening of Greek social enterprise fields of activity. The new Law allowed greater flexibility for legal forms based on each social enterprise’s needs and “broadened the meaning of *social aim* to include a series of activities for the general public as opposed to being exclusively focused on vulnerable and/or special social groups” (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos, 2019, p. 12).

These developments had been influenced by the “Movement of the Squares” in 2011 in most Greek cities and led to the multiplication of solidarity ventures (Varvarousis & Kallis, 2017). Much of the current development of social enterprise in Greece is indistinguishable from these solidarity movement activities, which “popularised practices previously regarded as marginal, de-stigmatised poverty and promoted social cooperation to combat devastating effects of the crisis” (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos, 2019, p. 24).

Syriza's 2016 Law sought a "Social and Solidarity Economy" with social enterprise considered an important tool for broader societal transformation. The new law explicitly referred to

an alternative form for organising social, productive, distribution, consumption, and reinvestment relations in a democratic manner based on the principles of solidarity, equity and cooperation with respect to the human and the natural environment. (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos, 2019, p. 38)

The 2016 Law also included workers' cooperatives for the first time and "activities of collective and social benefit" (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos, 2019, p. 39), and it included tighter rules on internal democracy and wage equality. This was "a new economic model beyond the imperative of economic growth" (p. 84), with a role for social enterprise in reducing unemployment, empowering local communities, and interacting with new social movements.

Despite the Syriza government's clear preference for a new direction, though the British Council's "Greece Social and Solidarity Economy Report" (Temple, Varvarousis, Galanos, & Bekridaki, 2017) does not apply a European Union operational definition, it shows an "analogous but different picture for these sectors of Greek social enterprise economic activity" (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos, 2019, p. 54). Though the report describes the small scale of Greek social enterprises—with 54 percent having less than €10,000 turnover, 81 percent taking decisions through a general assembly, and 20 percent having only one employee—the British Council recommends a program of activity synonymous with the recommendations of the EU's GECES Working Group and the European Venture Philanthropy Association, as though recipient organizations were sophisticated in loans, equity, and social investment.

The British Council report was written with Social Enterprise UK and included recommendations in which Social Enterprise UK features prominently (Temple, Varvarousis, Galanos, & Bekridaki, 2017). Other recommendations include the convening of a social finance task force, including "social bonds" and changes in legislation to permit private companies to contribute to "social impact projects" (Temple et al., 2017, pp. 84, 85). In a telling recommendation based on the U.K.'s dilution of democratic accountability, the report also recommends that the U.K.'s Community Interest Company structure is "less restrictive on sectors of operation and democratic practices" (p. 88). Though all of this may represent routine policies for British Council and the standard Social Enterprise UK fare, it varied significantly from political policies already decided in Greece.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

Much of the groundwork for British Council mapping reports on countries in Southeast Asia had been laid previously, during considerable historical U.K. influence. The Korean government imported the concepts of *workfare* and the British New Labour Party's "Third Way," which became labelled "the productivist welfare capitalism in Korea" (Bidet & Hyung-Sik Eum, 2011, p. 79). Many actors in the field also contested the government's intention to get private companies involved in social enterprise development (Bidet & Hyung-Sik Eum, 2011). Kim Dae-Jung's productive welfare sought to forge a Korean version of the "Third Way" policy reform (Peng, 2014). The *Social Enterprise*

*Promotion Act* in 2007 supported communities and NGOs to develop local services for excluded groups (Peng, 2014). The common denominator in all East Asian countries has been state power playing a key role in the emergence and development of social enterprises, with market forces also playing a critical role. “[M]any public policy measures tend to push social enterprises closer to the regular market and various initiatives are also launched in partnership with traditional private companies” (Defourny & Shin-Yang, 2011, p. 106). In Vietnam, others emphasize balancing the role of social enterprises’ contribution to solving environmental and social needs with the need for stakeholders to come together to support impact investment (Nguyen & Seymour, 2013).

While the British Council’s latest report on Southeast Asia contains glowing tributes to the growth of social investment, which rose by 34 percent to US\$30.7 trillion in 2019 (British Council, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific & Social Enterprise UK, 2021), there is continuing difficulty in recognizing investees. The self-identification of social enterprises predominates. Over 85 percent of survey respondents tended to recognize themselves as social enterprises in Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Hong Kong, China, while “only 38.6 percent of respondents did so in Vietnam, with the highest proportion of private companies in Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, with over half of social enterprises, or more, taking this form” (British Council, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, & Social Enterprise UK, 2021, pp. 21, 32).

Many social enterprises have no employees, including Thailand and Hong Kong, China, where 28.7 percent and 17.6 percent, respectively, of social enterprises fall into this category (British Council et al., 2021). Despite these wide differences in what constitutes a social enterprise, the British Council continues to emphasize the role of external investment. “(A)ccess to investors was the most frequent barrier, especially in Hong Kong, China, and the Philippines and for over 90% of social enterprises in each country or territory” (British Council et al., 2021, p. 50).

## **OTHER BRITISH COUNCIL REPORTS AND ACTIVITIES**

Owing to shortage of space, this article only summarizes British Council reports and contributions on the Caribbean (British Council, 2019), Indonesia (British Council, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific & Asia Venture Philanthropy Network, 2020), the Philippines (British Council, 2017a; European Union, British Council, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, Social Enterprise UK, & UnLtd, 2017), Vietnam (British Council, United Nations ESCAP, Centre for Economic Management, & Social Enterprise UK, 2019), Myanmar (British Council, 2013); Bangladesh (Anwar, Khan, Athoi, Islam, & Lynch, 2016), and South Africa (British Council, Simamya Consultancy, & Social Enterprise UK, 2019). Most of these are typified by similar recommendations for private finance expansion shown above in previous reports, often within legislative and political frameworks where social enterprise is considerably less developed.

## **CONCLUSION**

While other contributions may have identified a distinct U.K. “Third Way” or liberal approach, many have neglected an underlying motivation of U.K. Labour and Conservative Governments to replace public with private financing. Though there is little evidence that this approach can be viable without

extensive public subsidy and support, British Embassies, High Commissions, and the British Council continue to propagate these similar solutions globally, often with little regard for existing policies that have been decided nationally and locally. These promotions show little effort to match domestic policy aspirations and instead portray social investment to amplify third sector roles in public service delivery. Until Britain's exit from the EU, many London-based institutions—including Social Finance, the Cabinet Office, and British Council—have further channelled their involvement through various European Union structures as experts or observers. Many of these are supported by Social Enterprise UK, which has written or co-written many of their reports. The British Council has endorsed external, often private, investment for a variety of social enterprise structures, many based on self-identification and including sole traders and private companies. Through its mapping and Active Communities programs, the council continues to recommend private investment with its supporting infrastructure, regardless of whether these policies and programs are politically eligible, acceptable, or should be prioritized.

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*Pioneers Post*, <https://www.pioneerspost.com/>  
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