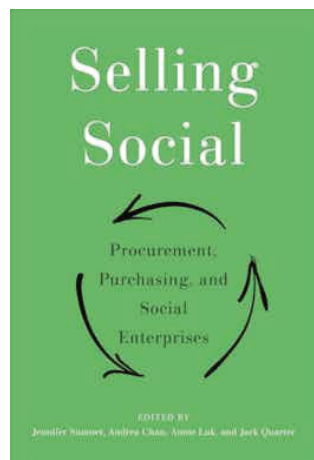


Book Review / Compte-rendu

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Selling Social: Procurement, Purchasing, and Social Enterprises. Edited by Jennifer Sumner, Andrea Chan, Annie Luk, & Jack Quarter. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2023. 296 pp. ISBN: 9781487524500.

This book is the result of a three-year Canada-wide research project investigating the state of social procurement and social purchasing in 19 work integration social enterprises (WISEs) providing training and employment to marginalized individuals. Part 1 of the book provides an overview of the literature, federal government policies for procurement and purchase with social value, and the results of a unique survey showing surprisingly low participation by Canadian social enterprises in pursuing formal social procurement. Part 2 is based on the study of four social enterprises that have secured large contracts by investing in what the authors call relationship

building. Part 3 details five cases where the role of a parent organization's support was key for social enterprises to bid on contracts. Part 4 focuses on the dilemma of five social enterprises regarding their decision to market or not to market the social value dimension of their work. Finally, Part 5 explores the challenges of five social enterprises in managing the concept of multiple bottom lines while pursuing social procurement opportunities. The conclusion discusses some future directions for the study of WISEs' participation in procurement and purchasing procedures.

This is an insightful book, and the reader will learn much from it. The focus is on the participation of social enterprises in the formal process of procurement, rather than in the more informal process of having its goods or services purchased by government agencies or authorities. That is because social enterprises have a better track record of participation in the latter than in the former. It appears that the size of the social enterprises (measured by total revenues) and their self-rated capacity for preparing proposals matter. However, making connections and building relationships with purchasers can also be helpful. Knowing how to demonstrate an enterprise's social value and impact is also an asset. But in all cases, many obstacles will be faced, and the cost of participating in procurement can be considerable. There is much to be said about funding and increasing capacity building of social enterprises in harnessing the power of procurement and purchasing procedures.

The potential for social enterprises is huge if governments truly consider social and environmental value or benefits when making purchasing decisions. But price and quality still dominate the decision process, social enterprises are hesitant and ill-equipped to prepare and submit bids, and there is a scale-up challenge in being able to fulfill a large successful order. However, breakthroughs are

possible, sometimes by having several social enterprises bidding together as a supplier to meet the scale of the order. A lot could be achieved with closer links being established between social enterprises and organizational purchasers to demystify the process and educate the social economy bidders on how to respond to the tender.

Social enterprise leaders and those responsible for purchasing and procurement decisions in the public or private sectors will gain much knowledge from reading this book about how to close the gaps that separate them still in establishing closer and tighter supply-chain relationships. Researchers and students interested in the social economy will also, by reading this book, deepen their understanding of how difficult it is to make the market economy work for organizations preoccupied by the conditions of citizens who are marginalized, disabled, or living in precarity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR / L'AUTEUR

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