

# Building Social and Community Cohesion: The Role of Social Enterprises in Facilitating Settlement Experiences for Immigrants from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds

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*Abstract: Australia is a nation of immigrants. Immigration brings much needed skills and labour to Australia. It helps creating a strong economy, drives prosperity and builds Australia's future. Diverse cultural expression enriches all Australians and makes the multicultural nation more vibrant and creative. Immigrants, including refugees, from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are vulnerable as they often have higher unemployment rates or are at an earnings disadvantage that may lead to disaffection and community unrest in the long run. Government agencies are facing complicated issues surrounding the design and implementation of strategies that facilitate the settlement of new arrivals in Australia. This paper critically reviews the literature and argues that social enterprises and social entrepreneurship can help to facilitate life satisfaction and self-reliance for NESB immigrants in Australia. In addition, the paper provides a better understanding of what research method may best suit to examine the role of social enterprises in NESB immigrant settlement experiences and how social enterprises may help to integrate the immigrants into a culturally diverse socially cohesive nation. Discussion of benefits of the proposed research method will also be provided.*

Keywords: Immigrants from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds, Social Enterprise and Social Entrepreneurship, Immigrant Settlement Services, Research Method

## Introduction

**I**NTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IS an increasingly important economic phenomenon (Cobb-Clark, 2003). Australia is a nation of immigrants. Among western nations Australia has received, in relative terms, one of the largest and most diverse intakes of immigrants (Collins and Low, 2010). Immigration helps create a strong economy, drives prosperity and builds Australia's future. The fiscal contribution of migrants is significant. It is estimated that by 2011–2012, the migrants from the 2008–2009 Migration and Humanitarian Program intake will contribute in excess of net \$800 million to Australian Government coffers (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010). The fiscal contribution continues to rise to around \$1.2 billion after 10 years of their arrival (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). Multiculturalism enriches all Australians and makes our nation more vibrant and creative (The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, 2011). Our diversity of cultures and our multilingual workforce give Australia a distinct competitive advantage in the global economy (The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, 2011). A sustained multicultural Australia requires an ongoing commitment based on a shared vision of a 'fair go' for all the people of the nation and a socially cohesive society. A 'socially cohesive society' is one where all groups have a sense of 'belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy' (Jenson, 1998).

The Australian Government is unwavering in its commitment to a multicultural Australia and thus has an interest in policies that enable all immigrants to develop a sense of belonging to the wider community, participate in all aspects of social, cultural and economic life, and be confident that they are coming into the country that is able to accept their difference and value their contribution (Spoonley, et al., 2005). This sense of belonging and acceptance is an important part of an immigrant's sense of settlement success as well as acceptance by the Australian community (Spoonley et al., 2005). Among all, immigrants, including refugees, from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are particularly vulnerable as they appear to face greater difficulties transferring prior labour market experience into the Australian labour market, and thus often have higher unemployment rates or are at an earnings disadvantage that may lead to disaffection and community unrest (Green, Kler and Leeves, 2007). Government agencies are often facing complicated issues surrounding the design and implementation of strategies that facilitate the integration of NESB immigrants into the Australian society (Cobb-Clark, 2003). One way of addressing the issues is to facilitate life satisfaction and self-reliance of NESB immigrants through social enterprises and social entrepreneurship.

Very little research today has been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of utilising social enterprises and social entrepreneurship to facilitate immigrant settlement experiences in Australia. This paper aims to fill these gaps by examining the role of social enterprises in facilitating life satisfaction and self-reliance for NESB immigrants in the Australian community. It helps to provide a better understanding of what research method may best suit to examine the role of social enterprises in facilitating NESB immigrant settlement experiences in Australia.

The paper is organised as follows. First, an overview of the contemporary challenges to NESB immigrants is provided. This is followed by a brief review of social enterprise literature. Then a short outline of the possible role of social enterprises in facilitating life satisfaction and self-reliance for NESB immigrants in Australia is presented. After proposing a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationships between social enterprises and NESB immigrant settlement experiences, the paper suggests a research method that best suits the examination of the role of social enterprises in facilitating successful settlement experiences. Finally, limitations and directions for future research will also be provided.

### **Contemporary NESB Immigrant Challenges in Australia**

Over the years the Australian Federal Government has changed its immigrant settlement policies, which has impacted on immigrant minorities and their opportunities in the labour force and society at large (Collins, 2003). The policy of assimilation that was adopted in the first three decades of post-1945 immigrant settlement meant that Federal and State Governments in Australia did not provide resources to help new immigrant minorities in areas such as education, health, social welfare and the law. Rather, a wide range of community services was delivered by the non-profit sector (Kong and Ramia, 2010). Multiculturalism, as a policy, replaced assimilation in the mid-1970s (Collins, 2003). New policies and programmes to assist immigrant minorities to settle in the country were introduced in areas such as language, education, welfare, the labour market and the law (O'Neill and McGuire, 1999). These policies and programmes were established on the assumption that they would make it easier for immigrant minorities to overcome linguistic and credential barriers to entry to many areas of the Australian labour market (Collins, 2003). However, government agencies are

facing complicated issues surrounding the design and implementation of policies and strategies that facilitate the settlement of new arrivals into the Australian society (Cobb-Clark, 2003).

Immigration to a different country and adjustment to a new way of life affect immigrants of all ages and backgrounds (Choudhry, 2001). Todorova, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2008, p.346) argue that ‘immigration is an arduous journey’ that often breaks family ties and social networks in the country of origin and entering a society that often does not welcome the new arrivals. For most immigrants, the sense of settlement success often depends on a successful transition into the receiving-country labour market (Cobb-Clark, 2003). Immigrants, including refugees, from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are particularly vulnerable as they appear to face greater difficulties transferring prior labour market experience into the Australian labour market (Green et al., 2007). Although most NESB immigrants have met English language proficiency requirements, ‘accent ceiling’ may create employment, earning and promotion barriers to the immigrants (Collins and Low, 2010). Green et al. (2007) also suggest that NESB immigrants have higher unemployment rates or are at an earnings disadvantage, which may lead to disaffection and community unrest (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2006). Issues related to language and accent often shape minority immigrant experiences in the labour market and devalue their human capital (Collins and Low, 2010). While NESB immigrants are in many ways like their English speaking-immigrant counterparts, their language differences and different social and community networks suggest that they may not be able to participate equitably in the society (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010). This may affect their confidence to join social events such as those connected to children’s schools or religious activities; local sports clubs; and general community activities (Burnett, 1998). Burnett (1998) argue that immigrant parents’ non-participation in mainstream society may affect their children’s confidence to perform and interact with others in schools. The feelings of isolation from the community and economic disadvantage may lead to other problems such as immigrant health and mental health problems (Henderson, 2004), and domestic violence (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002). Thus, the impact of social and economic exclusion is profound as it may extend from one generation to another. This paper argues that social enterprises can play a significant role in facilitating life satisfaction and self-reliance of NESB immigrants in the Australian communities.

### **From Purely Philanthropic Non-Profit Organisations to Social Enterprises**

The policy of assimilation that was adopted in the first three decades of post-1945 immigrant settlement meant that Federal and State Governments in Australia did not provide resources to help new immigrant minorities in areas such as education, health, social welfare and the law. Rather, a wide range of community services was delivered by the non-profit sector (Kong and Ramia, 2010). Today, the activities that traditional, purely philanthropic, non-profit organisations involved influence almost every imaginable human need or interest in society (Lyons, 2001, p. xi). However, diminishing fiscal supports in the form of public funds and donations is increasingly becoming a critical challenge to traditional non-profit organisations (Alexander, 1999; Craig, Taylor and Parkes, 2004; Eisenberg, 1997). In addition, significant strategic pressures are added to traditional non-profit organisations as a result of growing competition for service delivery with for-profit organisations (Kong, 2008), declining volunteer support (Jamison, 2003; Lyons, 2001) and losing commitment from non-profit

employees (Eisenberg, 2000; Kim and Lee, 2007). Traditional non-profit organisations are increasingly seeking alternative financial sources, such as fees or service charges and other essentially commercial forms of income as volunteering and charitable contributions are unable to fill the financial gaps (Fowler, 2000; Salamon, 1999). An example of traditional non-profit organisations that are increasingly relying on alternative financial sources can be found in the Salvation Army's Store Division. The organisation's Store Division has opportunity shops in different areas generating income for the broader social purpose. Despite of this business-like operations, traditional non-profit organisations remain heavily dependent on donations and grants for achieving their social missions as they are restricted from using trade as a means to raise capital (Mason, Kirkbride and Bryde, 2007).

In the recent years the study of corporate social responsibility has seen some strategic partnerships between business corporations and traditional non-profit organisations (See e.g. Husted and Allen, 2007; Lee, 2008; Lichtenstein, Drumwright and Braig, 2004; Matten and Moon, 2008; Porter and Kramer, 2006). However, communities require long-term commitment and financial support rather than spare cash to resolving social problems (Jamali and Keshishian, 2009; Kanter, 1999), particularly in times of global economic crisis. Indeed, as many corporations are struggling with financial difficulties themselves, traditional non-profit organisations are already facing sharply lower corporate charitable contributions (Brock, 2008). Thus, corporate social responsibility does not seem to be able to provide long-term solutions to traditional non-profit organisations, in particular at a time when the organisations need them most (Kong, 2010b). This suggestion also indicates that social problems require long-term commitment and solutions.

The increasingly competitive environment has forced traditional non-profit organisations to place great emphasis on innovation in all their social value creating activities (Kong, 2010b). Many argue that social enterprises have emerged as a strategic response to many of the mentioned challenges that traditional non-profit organisations are facing today (See e.g. Dart, 2004; Dees, 1998; Gray, Healy and Crofts, 2003; Hitt, et al., 2001; Sullivan-Mort, Weerawardena and Carnegie, 2003; Thompson, 2002; Weerawardena and Sullivan-Mort, 2006).

Social enterprises are not entirely philanthropic and yet, they are not entirely commercial (Kong, 2010b). They represent a hybrid form of organisations that involve taking business-like, innovative approaches to deliver public services (Dart, 2004; Fowler, 2000). The organisations characterise an alternative for resourcing new services, particularly service innovations that do not fit neatly within government funding guidelines (Gray et al., 2003). Social enterprises can take a number of legal forms, such as not-for-profit associations, partnerships, proprietary limited companies, or cooperatives (Talbot, Tregilgas and Harrison, 2002). Their primary objective is to create social value for the community that they serve through innovative business approaches (Pomerantz, 2003; Thompson and Doherty, 2006).

Organisations that fall neatly into the category of social enterprises conform to several criteria that include: having a clear social purpose (which is often their primary objective), using assets and wealth to create benefit to its community, pursuing social purpose with (or at least in part) trade in a market place, being seen as accountable to both its members and a wider community, involving members or employees in decision making and/or governance, being non-profit-distributing to its shareholders and owners, and having either a double- or triple-bottom line paradigm (Thompson and Doherty, 2006). Gees' (1998) Social Enterprise



ingly, the organisations have a long-term commitment in solving social problems and solving social problems is the primary objective of this form of organisations. This unique characteristic also distinguishes social enterprises from corporations that carry social responsibility as profit-making remains the primary objective of for-profit organisations.

The Grameen Bank, which was founded by an Economics Professor Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh in 1976, is a notable example of this form of organisations. The Bank has a unique philosophy towards its clientele. It aims to improve the condition of its clientele by extending unsecured loans to the poorest villagers, primarily economically and socially impoverished women, who would not normally qualify as customers of established banks. The Grameen Bank has adopted an innovative group-based credit approach utilising peer-pressure within groups to ensure that borrowers eventually repay their loans and develop good credit standing (Seelos and Mair, 2005). The primary responsibility of a social entrepreneur is to achieve social mission, but not to simply meet financial performance. Had the Grameen focused primarily on financial results, it would be extremely difficult for the Bank to improve the condition of economically and socially impoverished women in the society. Today the Bank is so profitable and sustainable that it can fund many other social projects that other established banks do not normally fund. The example of the Grameen Bank evidences that innovation can occur through mainstream work activities for the purpose of improving efficiency and tightening control, but not merely related to research and development (R&D) of new products. The success of Grameen Bank suggests that social enterprises and social entrepreneurship may be used to overcome the challenges that traditional non-profit organisations are facing today.

### **Social Enterprises and NESB Immigrant Settlement Experiences**

Hasan (2005) argues that social entrepreneurship helps to formulate social capital in societies. Social capital is defined as something of perceived benefit to individuals and communities at large (Thompson and Doherty, 2006). It testifies to the critical level of trust among the members of a society that makes collective action possible (Putnam, 1993). In the social sphere, generalised trust facilitates life in diverse societies and fosters acts of tolerance and acceptance of otherness (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003). Trust-based social capital often fosters greater communication which improves social interaction and learning in a diverse society (Hasan, 2005). Thus, NESB immigrants likely live in a life that is easier, happier and more confident in the diverse society if they are involved in social enterprises during their settlement as they have the opportunity to practice day-to-day English, gain necessary skills for social interaction and networking, advance their knowledge and skills for employment or of becoming entrepreneurs, and participate equitably in the society.

With this in mind, a social enterprise community café, for example, may predominantly hire NESB immigrants with a social mission to offer employment to the immigrants in the food and hospitality industry. The on-the-job training not only presents NESB immigrants an opportunity to a successful transition into the Australian labour market, but also assists them to gain self-esteem, confidence and emotional security in the society. This is because interactions with the local community will likely assist the immigrants to gain confidence, especially through the practice of day-to-day English at work.

Confidence is related to factors such as competence or past performance (Siegrist, 2010). NESB immigrants having problems in expressing themselves in English in the past (i.e.

competence and past performance) will likely be having confident issues in communicating the language with other people. Although the Department of Immigration and Citizenship offers free English training to eligible new immigrants, practising day-to-day English in the workplace will likely benefit the NESB immigrants more as they will have to response in English instantly. Besides, most NESB immigrants have met English language proficiency requirements. It is the confidence that they require through practising English in a safe and open environment. Social enterprises can provide such a place to NESB immigrants to overcome their confident barriers and yet, they can advance their knowledge and skills for employment or of becoming entrepreneurs, and participate equitably in the society.

Self-esteem reflects the perception individuals have of themselves as important, meaningful, effectual, and worthwhile within their community and society (Mayer, Fraccastoro and McNary, 2007). The ability to contribute to the Australian society through social enterprises will likely enhance the immigrants' self-esteem as the immigrants may feel that they are making a living with their own efforts.

Resettlement is not simply a matter of adapting to a new culture but at the same includes the challenge of maintaining lifelong beliefs and practices, and learning new ways to establish a harmonious life in the receiving-country (Choudhry, 2001). NESB immigrants may find uprooting and resettlement more difficult. A better understanding of the Australian culture will help the immigrants to feel more emotionally secure as they are likely less susceptible to bouts of depression that are being triggered by cultural differences when they are interacting with local people in the community (Deumert, et al., 2005). In other words, social enterprises may help to integrate the immigrants into a culturally diverse socially cohesive nation.

This is not to say there are no other forms of organisations which can assist NESB immigrants to settle in the Australian community. However, social enterprises are likely to offer knowledge and skills for social interaction, employment, and entrepreneurship; and allow the immigrant to participate equitably in the society simultaneously. This paper, after critically reviewing the literature, argues that social enterprises are likely to benefit more to NESB immigrants in terms of their settlement experiences. Figure 2 shows a conceptual framework that indicates the close relationships between social enterprises and NESB immigrant settlement experiences.

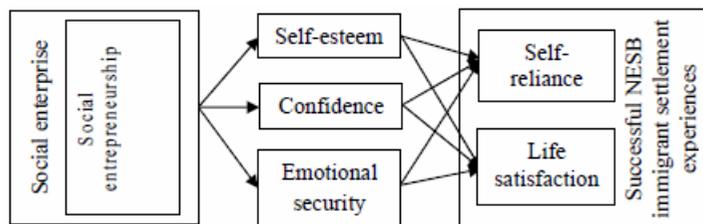


Figure 2: Relationships between Social Enterprises and NESB Immigrant Settlement Experiences

Without the 'first step' opportunity to engage in the Australian labour market, it might be difficult for the immigrants to enhance their life satisfaction and self-reliance in the community. In other words, social enterprises will likely help NESB immigrants to create a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy, and increase their chances

of being employed or becoming successful entrepreneurs. Accordingly, NESB immigrants' involvement in social enterprises may help to provide the immigrants a successful transition into the Australian labour market by providing them the opportunity to gain self-esteem, confidence and emotional security in the community. Today, very little research today has been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of utilising social enterprises to facilitate immigrant settlement experiences, and the way social entrepreneurship may lead to sustained social and community cohesion in Australia. This paper proposes a research method and argues that the method may best suit the examination of the role of social enterprises in facilitating NESB immigrant settlement experiences in Australia.

### **Proposed Research Method**

As highlighted already, very little research today has been conducted to investigate the role of social enterprises in facilitating immigrant settlement experiences in Australia. Although the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) is currently undertaking a survey, namely Continuous Survey of Australia's Migrants (CSAM), of new Family and Skill stream migrants in Australia, the survey does not focus on a particular immigrant group such as NESB immigrants. Only two out of 35 questions in the CSAM survey were related to English proficiency of migrants. Thus, even though the CSAM does provide significant data and information regarding migrants from the family and skilled migration streams, very limited information can be extracted from the survey for a study like this one. Besides, humanitarian entrants are not included in the survey and thus very little information is available in relation to how well humanitarian entrants are settled in Australia.

As an investigation of the role of social enterprises in facilitating successful settlement experiences for NESB immigrants is a relatively new area of scholarly inquiry. A qualitative, exploratory approach is therefore necessary for gathering data for the project as it allows flexibility to tap the expected richness of data (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2000; Lee, 1999). Also, qualitative research is arguably better to answer questions that stress how people's experiences are created and changed; and how meaning is given to events, processes, and structures of their normal social or organisational settings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Skinner, Tagg and Holloway, 2000). Todorova *et al.* (2008) argue that narrative, story-telling, and other communicative forms are appropriate tools for gathering data across cultures capturing alternative modes of thought and ways of conceptualising the world. This paper argues that an innovative qualitative approach adopting narrative, in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews is considered to be most appropriate for a research study like this one. This will enable the interviewees to provide factual information, and to express points of view and personal explanations of events, relationships, trends and potential developments in the form of narratives. This approach has the advantage of enabling the researchers to understand and explain the informants' perspectives as expressed in their own words (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984) and how the perspectives changed over time (Todorova *et al.*, 2008). Walker (1985) argues that a qualitative approach has advantages in that researchers has the opportunity to interpret the language used to describe how change has occurred. Allan and Skinner (1991, p.177) have also suggested that use of such an approach is suitable where there is a need for an understanding of the 'world views of the actors involved'. They argue that the approach has the advantage of being 'flexible' and 'personal' in these circumstances.

Accordingly, a qualitative approach adopting narrative, in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews is deemed to best serve the purpose of a study like this one; that is to examine the role of social enterprises in facilitating life satisfaction and self-reliance of NESB immigrants in the Australian communities. Face-to-face interviews are particularly encouraged as they allow researchers to establish rapport with interviewees and this helps to ensure that the interviewees will continue to participate in follow up interviews. A study of the role of social enterprises in facilitating NESB immigrant settlement experiences will supplement the CSAM results providing significant insight to policymakers for decision-making and advance our knowledge with a comprehensive qualitative view on how NESB immigrant settlement experiences have changed, how current services to the immigrants are performing and how the services can be improved.

This paper suggests that the use of two sets of face-to-face interviews, namely social enterprise participant interviews and NESB immigrant interviews, will be important for the success of this study. Social enterprise participant interviews include people such as Board of Directors, senior executives, staff and volunteers in social enterprises who have had some involvement with NESB immigrants are included in this set of interviews. These participants will provide significant insights regarding the operations of social enterprises and what services are currently available to the immigrants, how the services are performing and how they can be improved. It is suggested that the participants will be interviewed within 12 months of the study and then follow up interviews will be conducted within 24 months after the study has commenced. The follow up interviews allows the researchers to examine how changes have occurred within the time period.

For NESB immigrant interviews, NESB immigrants who have arrived in Australia within 12 months are recommended to participate in this proposed study. Again, all interviews should be conducted within 12 months of the project. This paper suggests that follow up interviews are to be conducted 24 months after the project has commenced in order to understand how changes have occurred during the study period. It is important to compare the changes of settlement experiences and determine if new services may need to be designed and developed. Face-to-face interviews allow the researchers to build good relationships with the interviewees. Also, they help to ensure that interviewees will continue to support the research study. This analytical procedure is kept with recent developments in narrative theory and qualitative data analysis methods (Maxwell and Miller, 2008). Relevant documents and archival data such as newspapers, mission statements and websites are also suggested in which they provide triangulation of reference material for thematic analysis and for post-research inquiry (Creswell, 2003). Any ethical issue which may impact on research participants as a result of the data collection process is strongly suggested to be considered prior to data collection.

## **Implications of Research on Social Enterprises and NESB Immigrant Settlement Experiences**

This paper argues that social enterprises and social entrepreneurship are useful in facilitating NESB immigrant experiences in Australia. The paper has advanced our knowledge in the area in three aspects. First, as compared to the research conducted in the United States, United Kingdom, continental Europe and Canada, 'social enterprise' and 'social entrepreneur' are relatively new terms in Australia (Barraket, et al., 2010). The report prepared by Barraket

and her colleagues (2010) is the first attempt to document the diversity and scope of social enterprises in Australia. However, as the researchers have highlighted, the report is a ‘conversation starter’ and more social enterprise research is needed (Barraket et al., 2010, p.9). The suggestions provided in this paper likely not only improves public and government awareness of the role of social enterprises in the Australian society, but also advances our knowledge by providing a better understanding of how the enterprises may contribute to NESB immigrant settlement in Australia; that is enhanced life satisfaction and self-reliance through strengthened self-esteem, confidence and emotional security.

Second, social enterprises come in a variety of forms and organisational structures, and can be managed and governed differently depending on their registration and incorporation (Talbot et al., 2002). Research on social enterprises and how this form of organisations can assist sustaining a socially cohesive nation is under research. A better understanding of the governance of social enterprises in the Australian context is necessary if we are to manage the organisations effectively. The paper provides a first step to advance our knowledge in relation to the governance of social enterprises in Australia.

Third, research on the role of social enterprises in facilitating NESB immigrant settlement experiences helps to supplement the CSAM results, provides significant insight to policy-makers for decision-making, and advances our knowledge with a comprehensive qualitative view on how NESB immigrant settlement experiences have changed, how current services to the immigrants are performing and how the services can be improved. This is important to the future development of social enterprises in relation to the success of NESB immigrant settlement experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Australia is a nation of immigrants and immigration helps creating a strong economy, drives prosperity and builds Australia’s future. NESB immigrants, including refugees, are particularly vulnerable as they often have higher unemployment rates or are at an earnings disadvantage that may lead to disaffection and community unrest in the long run. This paper critically reviews the literature and has argued that social enterprises can help to facilitate life satisfaction and self-reliance for NESB immigrants in Australia. The paper has also provided a better understanding of what research method may best suit to examine the role of social enterprises in NESB immigrant settlement experiences and how social enterprises may help to integrate the immigrants into a culturally diverse socially cohesive nation. Discussion of benefits of the proposed research method has been provided. The paper contributes to the literature by providing researchers a better understanding of the issues in relation to social enterprises and NESB immigrant settlement experiences. The conceptual framework proposed in the paper offers a visualised framework that assists researchers to conduct future empirical research in the area.

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