

## Article

# Social Enterprise as a Broker of Identity Resources

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**Abstract:** Social enterprises often transmit pro-social values to their staff, volunteers, stakeholders, and communities. Research also shows that social enterprises can improve aspects of beneficiaries' identity and self-worth. However, knowledge about identity-construction dynamics among social enterprises, their founders and other stakeholders, and the communities and cultures in which they are situated is undertheorized and fragmented across fields. This is attributable, at least in part, to the lack of a theory that can explain identity construction across micro-individual, meso-organizational, and macro-cultural levels. This study makes two major contributions. First, we advance a novel, multi-level theoretical framework for understanding identity construction based on assemblage theory. Second, we use that framework to interpret data from our ethnographic study of a social enterprise based in a Canadian fishing village. Our study reveals that the social enterprise actively curates identity resources from local culture and heritage and brokers those resources to stakeholders for their personal identity projects. It suggests that the impacts are greater for people with transitional or problematic identities. It also shows that identity-resource brokerage can result in generativity whereby staff and volunteers "pay it forward" with the effect of scaling the social impact of the enterprise. The findings support the usefulness of the identity-as-assemblage construct for understanding complex identity dynamics across multiple levels of analysis. They also open the door to a number of provocative research questions, including the role of narrative transmission in the flow of identity resources and a potential identity-mirroring role for social enterprise in shaping or reinforcing elements of place identity.

**Keywords:** social enterprise; identity; identity resources; narrative; assemblage theory



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## 1. Introduction

Social enterprises are catalysts for, and important to, sustainable local and regional development [1,2]. Social entrepreneurs often transmit their pro-social values to their staff, volunteers, stakeholders, and communities [3–5]. Research shows that social enterprises improve the well-being of local communities [5], including by enhancing the identities and self-concepts of beneficiaries [6–8]. However, knowledge about identity-construction dynamics among social enterprises, their founders and other stakeholders, and the communities and cultures in which they are situated is fragmented across fields. This fragmentation in identity research is attributable, at least in part, to the lack of a theory that can explain identity construction across micro-individual, meso-organizational, and macro-cultural levels.

Understanding identity construction, that is, the evolution of the “who” in social enterprise, is as least as important as the study of the “what” “where” “why” and “how.” As Barraket and Collyer [9] (p. 6) state, “... understandings of social enterprise are intimately bound up with identity construction, through which the meaning of enduring values and distinctive characteristics are negotiated” (cf. [10,11]). Who starts these organizations? Who participates in them? Who benefits from them? Who are these people as individuals, as members of the organization, and/or as members of the larger collective? Cutting through all these “who” questions are matters of identity. At the micro level, personal, role, and

social identities are constructed as individuals negotiate their self-concepts over time [12]. At the meso level, the enterprise identity is an ongoing construction process as well, as the venture begins, grows, and pivots in attempts to survive [13]. At the macro level, the collective identity of the community, place, and culture in which the organization is embedded is similarly an emergent process as societal circumstances evolve [14].

Identities and their interactions are not fully understandable from a single level of analysis because these micro, meso, and macro-level processes of identity construction work upon each other in multi-directional flows. The organizational identity of the business acts upon the individual identities of employees who, in turn, may support or challenge the organizational identity. The community and culture in which the business is embedded act upon the business and the individual. Both the business and the individual act upon the community and its collective identity. The concept of identity construction on multiple levels is central to making sense of beginnings, ends, successes, failures, and evolutions of social enterprise organizations.

This paper is structured around two separate but interdependent contributions. In the introduction section, we review the scant literature related to identity construction and social enterprise, revealing a knowledge void with respect to the interconnected identity-construction dynamics of individuals, a social enterprise, and a community. To investigate such identity dynamics requires a theory of identity and identity construction that functions equally well at each analytical level and makes sense of the interactions. We conclude the introduction by presenting and explaining a novel theory of identity construction based on assemblage theory. Our first contribution, then, is theoretical. We then move to the empirical portion of the paper. We describe our ethnographic research methods, including the research site and context, the data construction methods, and the data analysis, using our assemblage-theoretic understanding of identity as an analytical framework. Our findings detail the emergent process of crafting an identity for a social enterprise from the individual identities of its founders and their experiences of local-regional identity. We then reveal an important and previously undiscovered role for social enterprise, i.e., acting as a curator and broker of identity resources for multiple stakeholders, including beneficiaries, employees, customers, and partners.

### *1.1. Identity in Social Enterprise*

#### *1.1.1. Individual Identity Construction in Social Enterprise*

Scholarship on individual identity and social enterprise has largely focused on the founders of social enterprise. We know that founders can be categorized into identity-related typologies [1,3]. We know something about the identity antecedents to founders' entrepreneurial endeavors [15]. We know some of the ways in which founders adapt to changing role-identities [16]. We know that founders negotiate their personal, role, and social identities within their enterprises through ongoing narrative construction [3,17,18]. While the individual identity of founders is unambiguously important to understanding the identity of a social enterprise, little, if any, work has been done to examine identity construction processes of other individuals in the social enterprise, (e.g., volunteers, staff, customers, and beneficiaries) or to examine how these other stakeholders' identity projects may influence the identity of the organization.

In exploring social enterprise founder identity, a debate has formed over the relative advantages of personal identity, role identity, and social identity theories of individual identity, often finding these theoretical lenses incommensurable. One view is that personal identity is relatively stable after role identity has transitioned and, therefore, that the theoretical study of the social identities of founders is of little value [18]. Others eschew the use of social identity theory in preference for individual and role identity analysis [3]. However, by focusing on the differences in these approaches and finding them to some degree incommensurable, the scholarship corpus has precluded a holistic view of founder identity. This impedes the discovery of important identity dynamics in a social enterprise's formation, operation, and impact.

### 1.1.2. Collective Identity in Social Enterprise

Identity construction scholarship in social enterprise has been explored at the meso level, in the evolution of organizational identity. Here, extant work is focused on the creation of hybrid organizational identities concerned with both social mission and commercial success [19–24]. Although the study of individual identity within this corpus takes into account participants as well as founders, the work has been chiefly concerned with the impact of individual identities vis-a-vis the development of this hybrid organizational structure [25]. Beyond that rather narrow view, which exhibits a clear strategy bias, the dynamic interactions of organizational and stakeholder identities remain unexamined. Furthermore, theories that help to understand individual identity construction have less explanatory power in the realm of institutions such as social enterprises.

Despite abundant and widely distributed literature on the importance of place to social enterprise, if we turn to questions of how the collective identities of place and culture inflect the identities of social enterprises situated within them, or how they influence the identities of founders' or other stakeholders, the literature is mute. There is similarly no relevant research into whether and how the identity dynamics of social enterprises and their stakeholders may influence place or regional identity. The one near exception deals with a major corporation, not a social enterprise [14]. These voids in the literature may reflect an attitude among social enterprise scholars that the questions are unimportant. What is more likely, and what we strongly suspect, is that they reflect the lack of a theory of identity that encourages, or even allows, the analysis of identity dynamics across all levels of analysis from the micro to the macro.

### 1.1.3. Research Objectives

This research tackles double jeopardy in studying the intersection of social enterprise and identity construction, making contributions to our understanding of both theory and phenomenon. At the level of phenomenon, we seek to understand the complex and possibly circular co-construction of identity among a social enterprise, its founders, and other individual stakeholders within the context of a distinctive local-regional identity. To do this requires a theory of identity that is equally explanatory at all levels—micro, meso, and macro—of the phenomenon. Because such a theory does not exist, our first order of business is to construct a theoretical framework.

## 1.2. An Assemblage-Theoretic Understanding of Identity

The organizing construct of this paper is the identity-as-assemblage. An assemblage, as explained by Manuel DeLanda [26,27], is a bounded, yet emergent, social entity comprised of various components—human and non-human—interacting and exhibiting a distinctive identity. An assemblage is, by definition, identifiable and distinct from other assemblages—that is, it has an identity. Most work in assemblage theory focuses on identifiable social groups. However, the fact that personal identity is both a social construct [28–31] and a complex affective-cognitive structure with multiple components [32,33] also entitles us to analyze individual identity through an assemblage-theoretic lens. As we shall see, assemblage theory, as applied to identity and identity construction, resolves many of the problems of scope, reduction, and incommensurability that have limited previous research. Our most basic application of the theory is to define the identity-as-assemblage at the relevant levels of analysis.

First, we conceptualize an individual's identity as an assemblage of physical and psychological components—including one's body, roles, possessions, creations, beliefs, attitudes, and values—interacting in cognitive, emotional, and social spaces and managed actively by the individual through conscious thought and behavior [12,34]. Martin and Schouten [35] point in this direction from a standpoint in actor-network theory, a close cousin to assemblage theory in the neo-materialist family tree. They write: "It is no stretch to conceptualize consumer identity as an actor-network in which the individual, as the

obligatory point of passage, problematizes the self and manages the human and nonhuman resources of identity construction” [35] (p. 868).

Second, we view an organizational identity as the prevailing understanding, from within and without, of an assemblage of human, material, and discursive components bounded by some logic of membership and unified, generally, around a particular reason for being.

Third, we regard a local or regional place-identity as the prevailing understanding, from within and without, of a particular geographically situated assemblage of people, organizations, built and natural structures, practices, laws, norms, and other governing discourses.

#### 1.2.1. Identity-as-Assemblage Functions across All Levels of Analysis

One advantage of assemblage theory over other theories of self and identity is that it operates at any level of analysis from the micro to the macro. It is a flattened ontology [36], which means, among other things, that micro and macro distinctions are blurred. For example, as an employee, I am a component of an institution, contributing to its mission, capacities, and identity. At the same time, the institution, through processes of organizational identification [37], is a component of my personal and professional identity. I am part of the institution, and the institution is part of me. Every component of an assemblage is an assemblage in its own right, and every assemblage can interact with other assemblages in ways that affect each other and the more encompassing assemblages they help constitute. Returning to the example, I am also part of an overlapping assemblage called family, and my experiences in both family and work affect my identity and performance in both contexts. The non-human components of an assemblage may be material or discursive, and they exhibit structuring agency. Extending the previous example yet again, as an employee I tend to follow the rules and norms of the organization of which I am a part; ergo, the institutional discourses are agentic components of my behavior and, thereby, of my identity.

Despite ontological flattening, assemblages are nested such that traditional micro, meso, and macro distinctions do have meaning. An individual is part of an institution which, itself, is a key component of a community, a region, and a nation. The nested nature of assemblages suggests that organizational identification may also extend to organizations and their emplacement in communities; that is, institutions may identify with and incorporate local or regional place-identities in much the same way as individuals incorporate organizational identities.

From this perspective of interconnected identities, we explore how the identities of individual social entrepreneurs, the identities of the social enterprises they create, and the identities of the places they inhabit may interact for the benefit of individual stakeholders, the organizations, and communities. This interest requires us to dig a little deeper into the structure and dynamics of assemblages.

#### 1.2.2. Stability and Change in the Identity-as-Assemblage

DeLanda [27] explains that the identity of an assemblage emerges from the relations among its constitutive components (relations of interiority) and the relations between it and other assemblages (relations of exteriority). He further explains that the relations develop through the capacities—functional and/or expressive in nature—of the components to affect and be affected by each other.

For an individual identity, relations of interiority form through reflexive processes of emotion, cognition, and behavior, and through narrative construction [38], whereas relations of exteriority form through social interactions. They are not independent processes, nor is individual identity-as-assemblage a static self-understanding. We constantly process social stimuli and feedback (from relations of exteriority), relating them to our internal schemas of knowledge, emotion, and action. A good deal of individual identity (re)construction occurs through the identification, elaboration, evaluation, and incorporation or avoidance of salient possible selves [12,33], which are also components of identity.

Depending on the input we get through relations of exteriority and the effects of that input on our thoughts and emotions, we may make adjustments to our relations of interiority, usually in the service of some goal, such as a desire for inner stability, harmony, growth, self-protection, or change. For example, if I receive an unfavorable performance review at work, I may alter my relations of interiority—e.g., by revising personal narratives and actions—and thereby my identity, to be more in line with organizational expectations. Alternatively, I may alter my relations of exteriority through actions such as avoidance, conflict, or ingratiation in an effort to protect my relations of interiority. The most salient occurrences for individual identity, and those most likely to precipitate change, are the ones that happen in assemblages, such as family or work, in which we are more integrated as components, and which we have more fully integrated into our own identities. The cross-boundary integration of identity components—“I in it” and “it in me”—is inherent in the flat ontology of assemblage theory, and it highlights places where identities are most open or vulnerable to influence.

In assemblages such as organizations or communities, relations of interiority consist of interpersonal relationships and the interactions of individuals with various structuring objects and discourses. An organization’s relations of exteriority tend to be collaborative, transactional, or reputational relationships with entities outside its boundaries. The boundaries are maintained by actions such as hiring, firing, merging, buying, marketing, publicity, and so forth. Organizations may also draw on aspects of place, importing cultural narratives for their own identity-construction purposes. By managing their relations of interiority and exteriority, organizations attempt to communicate clear and positive identities, both inwardly and outwardly. The relations of interiority and exteriority in a community are less easily managed than those of an organization because boundaries are more porous, and norms are more difficult to enforce.

To understand identity change in and by individual and collective identities requires us to understand two additional properties of assemblages. DeLanda [27] describes two parameters—territorialization and coding—that are especially useful for understanding the interactions of actors within and across assemblages. The first parameter, territorialization, is a manifestation of the stability of an assemblage’s identity. Territorialization is a product of an assemblage’s relations of interiority and the relative clarity and permeability of its boundaries with respect to other assemblages. A highly territorialized assemblage exhibits relations of interiority that are well established, ordered, and understood—perhaps even harmonious—among components that are interdependent. Its boundaries are well defined and may control passage by outside entities. A less territorialized assemblage exhibits internal relations that are more unstable or poorly defined, perhaps even contentious. Its boundaries are likely to be more permeable, even to the extent of allowing the free coming and going of participants and, perhaps, allowing for a margin of ambiguity about the identity of the assemblage.

Much of the internal ordering of component relations in an identity-as-assemblage occurs through narrative construction [38]. The power of narratives to territorialize identity lies in their paradoxical combination of persistence and plasticity [39,40]. The persistence across generations of cultural narratives, such as myths or heritage stories, makes them powerful organizers of an assemblage’s relations of interiority over time. The plasticity of narratives, which adapt and change in the retelling, makes them more robust, resilient, and relatable to individual or organizational identity needs.

For a highly stable identity to change often requires some deterritorializing force—which may arise from either inside or outside the assemblage—to disrupt its relations of interiority. For example, if an individual suddenly loses a job or a relationship that has been central to identity, it can deterritorialize self-understanding to the point where significant identity reconstruction may be necessary. Collaborations between highly territorialized organizations may only be possible if the organizations voluntarily deterritorialize by opening their boundaries or relaxing certain internal relationships.



The second parameter, coding, also has profound impact on relations of interiority and exteriority. Coding refers to communication and the limitations it places on membership and participation. The extent to which we can thrive or even survive in a given assemblage depends on how well we understand its signs, symbols, and speech. Individuals that understand the language and logic of an assemblage can engage in it more deeply and to greater advantage. Some speech is welcoming, whereas other speech is designed to exclude. Some codes, such as DNA or computer codes, are precise and unforgiving, whereas other codes, such as speech or styles of dress, are far more open to interpretation and yet may still require specialized cultural capital to interpret correctly. Generally, as the coding of an assemblage increases, it requires more specialized knowledge to fully understand it, participate in it, and, perhaps, benefit from it. It is a potentially difficult task for two assemblages to merge or interact productively if they can't understand each other's codes. Acculturation—such as an immigrant integrating into a new country or community—is partly a process of one assemblage (the immigrant) apprehending and mastering the codes of another (the new place).

Drawing on assemblage theory, we have conceptualized the identity-as-assemblage with implications for identity (re)construction at the levels of the individual, the organization, and the place. Identity-as-assemblage suggests that narratives, as key discursive actors and identity-structuring components, may be important vehicles for identity transfer and (re)construction among individuals, organizations, and communities. It also suggests that an organization, such as a place-based social enterprise, may be able to manage migrations of identity resources—material and meaning—in order to bring about positive changes in stakeholder identities. To more fully investigate these propositions, we studied the identity dynamics of two individual social entrepreneurs, the social enterprise they created, and the place they inhabit.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This paper is part of the work-product of an ethnographic study of Fishing for Success, a social enterprise located in the village of Petty Harbour, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Fishing for Success was founded by Kimberly Orren and Leo Hearn in 2014 with the initial mission of linking Newfoundlanders—youth, women, and immigrants especially—with the island's fishing practices and heritage. It is both a social and an environmental mission. Socially it strives to imbue people with psychic benefits, such as greater senses of belonging and self-efficacy, through meaningful contact with nature, with fishing and foraging skills, and with the sea as a source of food and inspiration. Ecologically it promotes sustainable fishing practices, such as traditional, inshore, handline fishing and jigging, which, unlike commercial trawling and drift-netting, do not decimate fish stocks or cause damage to marine habitats. Petty Harbour is a historic fishing village dating from about 1500 surrounding a small, protected harbor opening onto Motion Bay on the eastern coast of Newfoundland. Motion Bay is special among Canadian cod fisheries for its relative sustainability; it has prohibited, since 1895, any types of fishing other than traditional cod traps (now hardly used) and single-hook-and-line methods. Gill nets and trawls have always been prohibited.

The authors first met Kimberly and Leo, and were introduced to Fishing for Success, in 2016 at a meeting about social enterprise and innovation at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. We expressed interest in learning more and were soon making regular visits to the site of the enterprise. In 2018 we secured a grant to fund a formal study. The authors moved to Petty Harbour in July 2019 and June 2020, respectively, and have become embedded in the community. As participant observers we have engaged actively with Fishing for Success in many aspects of its operations. We have accompanied numerous fishing trips hosted for tourists, which constitute one source of revenue for the organization. Guests come from the local metropolitan area of St. John's, from around Canada, and in fewer numbers from other parts of the world. An outing may consist solely of handline fishing for cod (we have never seen anyone return empty handed) from a small,

open fishing boat. Even a simple fishing trip, however, is augmented with colorful stories about the place, its history, its geography, and the mysteries of navigation by compass and visible landmarks. Typically, guests enjoy a full day of activities that include not only catching fish, but also demonstrations of filleting, tongue-cutting, and more elaborate fish processing, lessons in codfish anatomy and behavior, a non-stop stream of storytelling, the making of colorful transfer-prints from paint applied to fresh-caught cod, and a meal of fish stew and homemade muffins shared in the fishing shed or by a bonfire to round out the day.

In service of its social mission, Fishing for Success delivers programs for people with particular needs or challenges. We have observed several of these programs in action. Youth Cod Fishery is a weekly summer school for clients of a youth-support agency in the capital city. Girls Who Fish is a program for introducing women of all ages to fishing. WiSH, which stands for Women Sharing Heritage, introduces immigrant women to Newfoundland's cultural and fishing traditions. Boats to Bowls is a program for single mothers offered in conjunction with a local support agency and an acclaimed local restaurant. It teaches the young mothers to catch, clean, and process cod, to create fish stock from the normally discarded carcasses, and to cook and serve dishes using the fish and stock. Basically, it gives them hands-on knowledge of an entire value chain. Like much of what Fishing for Success does, these programs are collaborative and subject to a host of variables, such as weather, bureaucratic vagaries and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to such frontstage activities, we also routinely engage in backstage work. This includes maintenance of the fishing stage at Island Rooms (the place-name of the site), doing such things as placing and anchoring a new floating dock, scraping, repairing, and painting wooden dories, winterizing dories and docks, decorating for the holidays, attending educational workshops, and discussing elements of marketing and service delivery. In the course of such activities, we have forged neighborly friendships with Kimberly and Leo and also have gotten to know the many student interns, workers, and volunteers that help make the operation run. Opportunities for conversation add rich texture to the observation. More than simple information gathering, in-field conversations help us construct deeper understanding of the thoughts, motivations, experiences, emotions, and relationships behind the social enterprise in all its human facets. Participant observation also reveals a wealth of understanding about the materiality of the enterprise. It has been especially interesting to see how and to what extent various items are scavenged, used, and repurposed. For example, the entire fishing stage (an elevated platform over the water) is constructed of "rinded sticks", which are native juniper poles that have had the bark stripped off with a homemade, two-handed drawknife. Fish pans (heavy, rectangular plastic containers for cod) are used for everything from storing protective gear to hauling gravel. Even the humblest scraps of rope are saved as materials to demonstrate traditional crafts such as marlinspike work. Seldom does a week go by without some new evidence of entrepreneurial bricolage.

To round out our data for this paper, we also conducted formal interviews (via Zoom and telephone in line with COVID-19 interview protocols) with select Fishing for Success stakeholders. These included previous and current volunteers, interns, and student workers, leaders from collaborating social-service organizations, and select tourism customers from the provincial capital. The purpose of these hour-long interviews was to explore themes of identity with greater granularity than was typically possible in contextual conversations. We also augmented our participant observation with archival data that includes items such as customer testimonials and thank-you letters, news stories, local histories and museum exhibits, the transcript of a TEDx talk delivered by Kimberly in St. John's, and the content of Fishing for Success's various social media accounts (<https://youtu.be/Mi9so8FHZy4>; accessed on 5 May 2021).

As is consistent with ethnographic work, our data analysis has been iterative and largely concurrent with data construction. We have conducted intratextual analyses to make sense of individual informant narratives and intertextual analyses to examine similarities

and differences across informants and reveal unifying themes and boundary conditions. In the interim, and after data construction, we have pored over field notes, archival records, and interview transcripts at various times, individually and in concert, making sense of first-level themes, aggregating to second-level themes, and abstracting to possible third-level constructs. As new data have presented, we have revisited previous conclusions, challenged assumptions, and sought to define the boundaries of our developing conclusions. For the purposes of this paper, we reexamined all our data once again through the theoretical lens of identity-as-assemblage. In summary, the ethnographic method entails constant comparative analysis and inductive theme-building as ongoing parts of the field work. Approximately three years of ethnographic work produced a substantial corpus of data, which we then augmented with formal in-depth interviews. Once the interviews were complete, we examined all the data through the lens of our theoretical framework of identity-as-assemblage. It was that final analysis that yielded our findings. The findings, reciprocally, lent support to the theory. The findings are as follows.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *The Emergence of Individual and Organizational Identity*

Identity is emergent. In assemblage theory terms we can say that the Fishing for Success assemblage has an emergent identity, as do its component assemblages (e.g., the identity-assemblages of the founders, staff members, etc.). The organizational identity emerges within a macro context, which is also emergent. It coexists, competes, collaborates, and/or exchanges components and capacities with other assemblages that co-constitute more encompassing assemblages of community, region, and province. The relations among these emergent identity-assemblages are dynamic. Assemblage theory as an organizing framework allows us to see and describe the emergent identity formations at these micro, meso, and macro levels, and to analyze and theorize the dynamic relations between them. In the following analysis, we proceed roughly from micro to macro, but note that the interactions within and among assemblages is anything but linear.

##### 3.1.1. Individual Founder Identities

Kimberly Orren—The Educator-Scientist. When Kimberly Orren decided to move from her home in Florida back to Newfoundland, the place of her birth and the site of one of the world's great cod fisheries, she had a vision. As an educator and a scientist with a keen interest in oceans and fishing, she longed to revive the beleaguered Newfoundland cod fishery in the hearts and lives of young Newfoundlanders. She came by the vision early. As a little girl she learned to fish and, simultaneously, to love science and nature. That love led her to study biology and chemistry and, later, to make a career as a high-school science teacher. A watershed moment in her teaching career came when she took a class of jet-ski-loving teenagers to learn about manatees, up close and personal, snorkeling with them in a protected inland waterway. The students learned a lot about manatees that day, but, more importantly, they learned to love and respect the big, gentle creatures. Several even took action to protect the manatees from the dangers of jet skis and other pleasure craft. To further her own knowledge and interests, Kimberly began doctoral studies in marine science and fisheries, which led to long periods of field work on the Florida coast. During all this time she had also been taking yearly vacations to visit her mother in Newfoundland, often with her adult son. On one of those trips, her son hired Leo Hearn, whom he had met on the wharf at Petty Harbour, to take them cod fishing.

Two principal problems bothered Kimberly when she thought about the current state of her childhood homeland. First, she felt that the mere fragments that remain of the once abundant cod fishery were still being fished unsustainably and treated as an industrial commodity. In Kimberly's words, "They scoop up the cod, strip the fillets, and sell them to the US and China to make frozen fish sticks, which then get shipped back here to grocery stores. How does that make any sense? Why shouldn't Newfoundlanders be buying fresh fish right from the wharf?" Second, she felt that the people of the North Atlantic island



have lost their once-vital connection with the sea. This is especially true, she believes, of young people whose interests may often run more to social media and flat-screen gaming than to Newfoundland's wild and rich natural environment. She identified what she felt were a host of challenges facing today's youth, including many that have been associated with nature-deficit disorder [41], biophobia [42], videophilia [43], disconnects with family and community, lack of place-identity [44], and other challenges to identity and wellbeing.

Kimberly withdrew from her PhD program and returned to Newfoundland with the intention of teaching kids to fish. The identity she had assembled was comprised of roles (educator, researcher, scholar, fisherman, mother/daughter), place-identity (Newfoundland and Florida coasts), and personal capacities (tenacity, self-confidence, environmental awareness and understanding, research skills, pedagogy, and some savings), among other components. She had chosen Petty Harbour—with its more than half a millennium of fishing heritage, its protected fishery, and its proximity to the capital and its major airport—as the place to settle and get to work.

Leo Hearn—The Fisherman-Raconteur. Leo Hearn grew up in Petty Harbour. So did his father and his grandfather and his great-grandfather. He traces his patrilineage back through at least two-hundred and fifty years of Newfoundland fishermen. Leo's childhood home, shared with his parents and seven older siblings, was an 800 square-foot saltbox on the main road through town. Leo's front yard was the harbor, and his back yard was the huge expanse of undeveloped woods, bogs, and ponds that constitute the majority of the Newfoundland countryside. The Hearn got by like many others in the village—making do with creative use of the limited resources available to them. Nothing went to waste. Most things that needed done, they did themselves. As a boy, Leo worked on the wharf, cutting out cod tongues, which many Newfoundlanders consider a delicacy, and which the fishermen would otherwise throw back into the sea with the rest of the carcasses that feed the ever-present swarms of gulls. From fishing with his father, he knew every cod-rich shoal in Motion Bay and how to navigate there by triangulating landmarks on the distant shore. He knew how to extract all the value from a codfish, from the prized fillets to the often depreciated and discarded tongues, livers, cheeks, breeches or britches (roe sacs), and even the skins and bones.

To Kimberly, an outsider looking for a place to set up a social enterprise with fishing at its core, Leo was an affable, ruggedly handsome, highly skilled carrier of local knowledge. He embodied the last elements of a life that she felt Newfoundland had mostly forgotten. The massive cod fishery had all but collapsed, and the province had largely turned away from fishing in order to romance the moneyed interests of offshore oil. Kimberly felt that most of Newfoundland considered cod to be a quaint symbol divorced from life and emblematic of a dying industry. In Leo, however, Kimberly saw someone for whom cod remained central to identity. Cod was food. Cod was life. Cod was home. It was more than just cod. It was all the embodied skill required to catch and process them: netting capelin and squidding for bait; maintaining a boat and all its gear; navigating the depths and shoals of Motion Bay; locating fish; hooking them with baited handlines and jiggers; cleaning, filleting, and carving out all the edible parts of the fish; drying the skins to make treats for his dogs; and, at the end of the day, cooking up a pot of fish stew or frying up a pan of cheeks, tongues, and breeches.

Fishing is indeed at the core of Leo's identity. However, other roles also share that space. Leo is a raconteur. For every scrap of local lore in Leo's ken there's a story to be told, and he can tell a spellbinding story at the hint of an invitation. Leo is also a builder and a bricoleur. With a shed full of tools and a lifetime of making do there is practically nothing he can't fix, nothing he can't put to good use when an occasion arises, and nothing he won't try. The one thing Leo lacked was a sense of greater purpose and direction. After meeting Kimberly and sharing a few conversations with the moody North Atlantic as a backdrop, her vision became his.

### 3.1.2. Organizational Identity: Fishing for Success

The emergent identity of an organization is dependent upon the relations among its component identity-assemblages—in the case of Fishing for Success, the identity-assemblages of the founders and staff—and upon the context within which it operates. The assemblage theory concepts of relations of interiority and exteriority are useful for understanding the interdependencies. Organizational relations of interiority occur within the assemblage, for example, interpersonal relationships between founders and staff. Organizational relations of exteriority occur as the assemblage interacts with entities outside its boundaries.

**Relations of interiority.** The emergence of the organizational identity of Fishing for Success began with the merged individual identities of its founders. The resulting assemblage aggregated the capacities of both Kimberly and Leo and organized them around the mission of teaching kids to fish. As a couple they have become a kind of interpersonality of fisher-educators as they developed capacities in each other's areas of specialization. The term interpersonality was coined by Sidney J. Levy (1921–2018)—an old friend of both authors and a seminal consumer behavior scholar—to mean the social and emotional entity that emerges from a close, ongoing relationship between two people. It captures nicely the identity-as-assemblage perspective of a couple. Since moving to Newfoundland, Kimberly has been taking courses and logging sea hours to gain full certification as a professional fish harvester, in effect taking on capacities that were predominantly in Leo's purview. The certification is symbolically important for Kimberly who passionately promotes gender equality in ocean fishing, which has historically excluded women from the boat. The fact that Fishing for Success's gender message also reaches beyond cisgender categories is plain from their prominently displayed "rainbow dory", a wooden dory painted in the vivid color scheme of the rainbow flag and named for Leo's recently deceased brother and his lifelong partner. Kimberly's certification is also important instrumentally. Only commercial fishing is permitted in Newfoundland waters most days of the week. Leo, although a lifelong cod fisherman, lost his commercial rights after the 1992 cod moratorium, when a regulatory shift to snow crab harvesting forced small-scale, handline cod fishermen out of the commercial fishery. To date, Fishing for Success has only been able to conduct fishing excursions on days—mostly weekends—designated for "recreational" fishing. This creates barriers to social programming because program administrators from various agencies tend to be available only during weekdays. Certification as a professional fish harvester and an official quota for commercial cod fishing would allow the organization to fish more flexibly and fulfill its mission more easily.

In the meantime, Leo has also developed capacities that were primarily in Kimberly's domain. His transition from storytelling to teaching has occurred naturally in the context of both tourist expeditions and social programming. We have observed a seamless sharing between Leo and Kimberly of teaching activities in all aspects of their interaction with the public. Leo's pedagogy often occurs at the helm of the boat, where he commonly talks about everything from navigation to weather patterns to wildlife and other natural phenomena. Both he and Kimberly demonstrate fishing techniques and assist novice fishermen in bringing in their catches. At the fish-cleaning table Leo demonstrates the techniques for deconstructing cod, which includes active supervision as guests and program participants learn to cut tongues and fillets. Together, he and Kimberly give lessons in codfish anatomy, demonstrating the various edible portions and such wonders as the swim bladder, the crystal-clear lens of the cod's eye, and, occasionally, the stomach contents of a large specimen.

The fisher-educator interpersonality of Kimberly and Leo is reinforced by a strong sense of local place-identity, which they have also constructed with focused intent. As a base for Fishing for Success, Kimberly used her savings to buy a long, narrow tract of land that occupies one side of a spit extending into Petty Harbour. Resurrecting the name Island Rooms (a name historically attached to the site), she and Leo built a traditional fishing stage. Their 26-foot Seabreeze fishing boat, Grace, moors at the waterside, and on the land

border behind the stage they have constructed a shed that is large enough to store all their safety equipment, fishing gear, and art supplies along with a small refrigerator, propane cookstove, and fish-cleaning station. Sanitary facilities, a field office, and other storage are located in a smaller shed near the entrance to the property from the main road. The path from the entrance to the far end of the spit winds through stacks of firewood, wooden picnic tables, fish-drying racks, and the several wooden dories that they use and maintain as part of their educational programming. At the end of the spit is a floating dock that facilitates getting people safely in and out of dories and, seasonally, serves as a sunning platform for a pair of local otters. Attention to historical authenticity has made Island Rooms visually captivating and a popular place for photographers and filmmakers seeking to capture a sense of Newfoundland tradition.

Once established, Fishing for Success became a desirable provider of work and training for young people. With the help of federal funding, the organization has hosted a constant stream of summer workers, interns, and volunteers. During their time with Fishing for Success, these young workers form close relationships with Kimberly and Leo, with each other, with the organization, and with all the material and cultural content of Fishing for Success and Island Rooms, adding new links to the relations of interiority that define the organization. The relations are maintained by reciprocity. For example, one young woman who volunteered for a summer several years ago was so changed by the experience that her father, a prominent building contractor, has been a generous material contributor to Fishing for Success ever since. Recently, when it was necessary to remove the floating dock from the water for winterizing, the father sent a boom truck and operator to Island Rooms at his own expense to do the heavy lifting.

Many of the summer workers stay on for multiple years, leaving only when their funding eligibility expires. As we will soon see from their individual stories, Fishing for Success becomes core to their identities. They gain whole encyclopedias of personal capacity; they develop stronger place-identification; and they develop close personal relationships that they expect to be lifelong. In our interviews with current and former staff we found that, while employed, they formed close interpersonal relationships with Kimberly and Leo, which they equated with family ties in their importance and emotional quality.

Relations of exteriority. Fishing for Success depends on its relations of exteriority in order to accomplish its mission. The following excerpt from a provincial newspaper [45] illustrates a few of the working ties between Fishing for Success and other organizations in the broader community:

... the Fish For Friday project [is] made possible thanks to a number of local organizations. Fishing for Success purchased the cod from Petty Harbour fishers and processing plants; Stone Soup, Community Centre Alliance, the Social Justice Co-op, and the Jimmy Pratt Foundation identified the families in need through their "COVID-19 Food and Services Hotline;" Get Stuffed restaurant prepared the meals; the YYT Food Aid Coalition delivered all 200 meals; and Too Big To Ignore offered assistance in planning, organizing and promotion.

Fishing for Success spearheaded the Fish for Friday project as an effort to reinforce the practice of eating local and sustainable fish as a partial solution to Newfoundland's fragile food security, and they engaged a wide range of other organizations to help pull it off. Each of the organizations represents a critical tie to the broader community; each has its own mission, structure, and boundaries; and each is embedded in a growing social-entrepreneurial ecosystem. The actual list of Fishing for Success's partner organizations and collaborations is much longer than what is captured in the above excerpt.

Beyond their instrumentality to particular projects or programs, relations of exteriority also help Fishing for Success expand its overall influence and reach, and they constitute potential conduits for additional inbound resources. For example, the relationships with Memorial University, the province's only university, have proven crucial in that regard. Kimberly's previous experience as a doctoral student and researcher taught her the codes of scholarship, teaching, and outreach. Her fluency in the logics and language of academia

have allowed her to interact as a peer with university-based researchers and outreach organizations and to take advantage of grant opportunities. Grants, such as the one funding this research, form part of the revenue stream that helps the social enterprise survive. Other contributions to income come from hosting academic events. For example, in July 2019 Fishing for Success provided the venue, food, and activities for an international workshop on marketing and social enterprise. In October 2019 they co-hosted with the Harris Centre, Memorial's primary outreach organization, a conference for community champions and policy makers about the importance of place in social enterprise and community development. They also host more touristic events for organizations that run the gamut from non-profit (e.g., Girl Guides) to for-profit (e.g., a regional car dealers' association).

Desire and effort do not automatically result in productive relations of exteriority. A crucial part of any social-entrepreneurial ecosystem is its regulatory environment [46,47]. Orren and Hearn see the primary barrier to Fishing for Success accomplishing its mission as regulatory. Canadian policy strongly favors treating the cod fishery as an economic resource in a game of international trade (<https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/international/issue-enjeu-eng.htm>; accessed on 5 May 2021). The collapse of the Newfoundland cod fishery, which led to the 1992–2017 cod moratorium, is marked in Newfoundland history with the compelling narrative of massive job loss. Newspaper accounts, books, and memoirs of the time reveal heart-rending stories of the hardships of almost-overnight loss of lifelong (and sometimes generations-long) livelihoods. The emotional, cultural, and personal identity trauma of this loss still haunts the province. The cod moratorium was made necessary by unsustainable fishing methods, such as gillnets and trawls, that were and remain supported by Canadian policies that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has called “managed annihilation” [48]. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the federal governing body headquartered in Ottawa, has the authority to grant a special purpose license, or even a commercial license, to Fishing for Success, but multiple applications by the social enterprise over the course of six years had been either rejected or ignored. For Leo and Kimberly, the reluctance of DFO to support micro-scale, sustainable inshore fishing for purposes of education, community renewal, and food security was a vexing mystery and a continuing disappointment. Finally, in 2021, after six years of persistent importuning and a great deal of positive press about Fishing for Success, DFO granted the organization a limited, experimental license to extend its calendar. Whether this experimental license will lead to more systematic access to fish for Fishing for Success or, even better, to changed policy regarding small inshore fisheries, remains to be seen. In either case, Fishing for Success exhibits what Moore, Riddell and Vocisano [49] call “scaling up”, their term for upward influence on policy and laws.

Taken together, Fishing for Success's relations of exteriority define a good part of its social-entrepreneurial ecosystem. Relations with other social-benefit organizations are somewhat institutionalized and mostly stable. Relations with tourists and tourism, being fleeting, require constant outward communication to replenish. Relations with regulatory bodies, and in particular DFO, require a long game of persistence in presenting arguments and evidence to overcome resistance that may be rooted in inertia, risk aversion, or the underlying power and influence of commercial interests.

### 3.1.3. Local and Regional Identity: Petty Harbour and Newfoundland

A core element of Fishing for Success's identity is its relations of exteriority with place. The social enterprise is inseparable from its central position in iconic Petty Harbour. The half-millennium of Newfoundland cod-fishing tradition is the organization's cultural wellspring. In Petty Harbour, as in all of Newfoundland, the codfish is a prominent representation of the culture. A worldwide market for salt cod drew intrepid fisherman to Newfoundland and Labrador's plentiful Grand Banks as early as the fifteenth century [50]. For centuries the cod fishery provided virtually every job in Newfoundland, either directly or indirectly. Even in the wake of the fishery's collapse and a 25-year moratorium on cod fishing, and with only three percent of the population currently involved in the fishery,

cod remains a powerful symbol of Newfoundland identity. Tourists to the province are routinely invited to become honorary Newfoundlanders through a ritual that involves a shot of rum and kissing a codfish. It is reenacted every day during tourist season in bars and tour boats across the province, and it is even depicted in the Broadway musical “Come From Away”.

In many ways Petty Harbour, with its protected fishery and its tourist appeal as a traditional, working fishing village, is one of Newfoundland’s last bastions of cod-fishing tradition. The waterfront is dominated by a cooperatively owned fish processing plant and individual fishing sheds. Mooring spaces on the wharf are allocated to fishing boats. On most days during the commercial season, a walk along the wharf reveals the open doors of sheds where two or three rubber-aproned men bend to the chore of filleting fish and sluicing the carcasses into the harbor. Their ages average about sixty years. The dialect they speak with each other is mostly incomprehensible to an outsider. Even here in Petty Harbour, however, the tradition is slipping away. New residents to the community, the authors included, have jobs “in town”, and many treat Petty Harbour as a charming bedroom community with a short, stunning commute into the capital. The majority of public-facing businesses on the main road—including a restaurant, an ice cream shop, a zipline operator, a heritage craft shop, and an adventure-tour provider—are tourism-supported.

Despite the power and omnipresence of Newfoundland cod as a cultural symbol, its centrality to the regional identity is greatly diminished in everyday life [51]. The task facing Fishing for Success was no simple matter of tapping into a rich flow of current culture. It was, rather, a matter of reconstructing the past in the present in a way that makes it real and accessible for tourists and locals alike. The corollary task is constructing a present that not only honors the past but also brings forward elements of it that can help sustain the future. With its emphasis that combines traditional fishing methods and modern eco-tourism, Fishing for Success has assembled an identity that reflects the local culture’s present and possible future in a way that links it with a more sustainable past. It is this ongoing process of curating elements of Newfoundland’s traditional regional identity and making them accessible to tourists, employees, program beneficiaries, and collaborators that we find the emerging theme of social enterprise as a broker of identity resources.

### 3.2. *Social Enterprise as a Broker of Identity Resources*

Our observations and interviews with volunteers, summer workers, and non-profit partners reveal that participation with Fishing for Success provides people with valuable components for identity construction, especially if they perceive their existing identity projects to be in some way ongoing or incomplete. The following individual cases depict various but similar arcs of identity work.

#### 3.2.1. Deborah: From CFA to NBC

Deborah’s story illustrates some of the relevant identity-construction dynamics. Deborah, like the authors, is a CFA, Newfoundland shorthand for “Come From Away”, that is, anyone not Newfoundland-born. She came here from California at the age of 18 to study folklore at Memorial University. She viewed herself as “just passing through.” Her college experience taught her a lot about the local culture, but she still felt like an outsider and found that “Newfoundland was just a hard place to live.” She says, “I always loved nature, and connecting with nature was important for me. But I had no way to do that here.” In 2016, conducting research for a podcast for a California public radio station, she found Kimberly Orren via a web search for women and fishing. It was the last day of fishing season, so Kimberly and Leo took her out to fish for cod. Deborah found the experience to be transformative. Being on the ocean in a small fishing boat gave her the connection to nature she had been missing. She returned to Petty Harbour a few days later to conduct her interview and learned about Girls Who Fish. She began to volunteer with Fishing for Success, helping out with tourist excursions and with Fishing for Success’s various social programs. Her own involvement increased continually. She said, “I would arrive two hours

early and go up into the hills to pick berries and then return for whichever program was on the schedule.” Her Toronto-born boyfriend also got involved, mostly with the operational side of the enterprise, and became a member of the organization’s board of directors.

When we asked Deborah to what extent she now considered herself a Newfoundlander, she sat up, her face brightened, and she said, “Oh a whole lot! I fish for cod! I pick berries! I’ve skinned a moose! . . . While I was skinning the moose, Leo’s friend, H., asked me what part of the Bay I’m from (laughs)!” The Bay refers to all of rural Newfoundland, and especially outport towns and villages. Newfoundlanders recognize two major regional identities—Baymen and Townies—in their version of a rural-urban divide. Townies reside in the St. John’s metro area and have “milder” accents and more urban sensibilities than baymen. Being mistaken for a bayman was a source of surprise and pride in being accepted as a local. Deborah went through the permanent residency process and now intends to stay on indefinitely in the province. Once we had concluded the interview, we asked her if there was anything she would like to add. She said, “Just that Kimberly and Leo have become our family. They are our Newfoundland parents. We hang out. We have Christmas dinner together.”

Clearly, Deborah has constructed a personal identity as an adoptive Newfoundlander or NBC (Newfoundlander By Choice) using resources brokered by Fishing for Success. Her identity-assemblage has grown and reterritorialized to include Fishing for Success and a Newfoundland place-identity.

### 3.2.2. Joni: From Lost Girl to Grounded Woman

Joni, unlike Deborah, is a native Newfoundlander. At the age of fifteen she was informed by her mother that she needed to get a summer job, and that her mother knew, through a friend, of an opening at Fishing for Success. Joni took her resume to Island Rooms and, upon looking around, decided, “It was not for me. It was foggy and outdoors . . . I never went outdoors . . . But my mother basically said, ‘You’re going to do it.’” That was five years ago, and Joni has worked for the organization every summer since then, paid initially by a grant from the Canada Summer Jobs program. Says Joni, “It just sparked something in me . . . The more I learned about what they do . . . I just fell in love with it . . . I’ll stay on as long as I can.”

The change in Joni’s identity from age fifteen to age twenty has been remarkable, and she attributes it to Fishing for Success. Although we know Joni as a friendly, self-possessed, and confident young woman, it was not always so. The product of a “rough childhood”, she describes her fifteen-year-old self as “lonely”, “dark”, “sad”, “anxious”, and “lost”. She describes her experiences with Fishing for Success as “life-changing”. On her first day of work, she learned to “weave a withe” (pronounced with-ee), a traditional skill by which a piece of rope is woven into a loop to function as an oarlock on a dory. Later that day she was helping sixty kids from a summer camp to learn the skill themselves. The summer campers’ withes became bracelets and elements of a ring-toss game. Learning and teaching that skill to a bunch of children was the beginning of Joni’s self-transformation.

Fishing for Success has helped Joni to embrace a Newfoundland place-identity. Asked if being a native Newfoundlander was a source of pride for her, she said:

It is now. Fishing for Success gave that to me. Growing up, I was kind of like, “I was born here. I’d rather live somewhere hot (eye roll).” I was pessimistic about it. But after being (with Fishing for Success), and learning the heritage, and being involved with it, I’m proud to live here. I love it here. I’m grateful to be here.

Referring to the heritage, she said:

At first, I thought it was just fish, but it’s a lot more than that. It’s about weaving rope, and learning different knots, and learning the markers when you’re out on the ocean . . . Fishing is huge, of course—I mean hand-lining, not the big trawls and such—so, bringing them in, learning how to fillet them, learning all the traditional words and dialect . . . how to salt the fillet, and all the different



ways to split a fish, and how to cook it traditionally ... I have learned how to tar a roof ... how to paint a shed ... how to use a drill ... how to chop and split wood ... There's just so much! It goes on and on and on. And it all really spoke to me. Especially the way that Fishing for Success alters [the heritage] ... to make it more inclusive.

Joni explains that Fishing for Success has interpreted Newfoundland heritage and broadened it to make it more accessible, fun, and relevant. She repeats a phrase that we have often heard from Kimberly, "Back in the day, women were not allowed in the boat, cuz they were bad luck."

When we asked Joni how she felt her summers with Fishing for Success had changed her, she paused to think about it, saying that it was hard to put into words. Her answer, finally, was:

I can feel the change in myself as a person ... I feel the biggest part is, like, learning your heritage and being able to interpret it, it gives you roots into the world and where you live. That is very grounding ... It definitely gave me more confidence ... I can talk to people better ... it just gave me the confidence, and the freedom, to be myself ... I'm comfortable with myself now. I don't feel as insecure. I definitely have a stronger sense of self.

Through her experiences with Fishing for Success, Joni has learned to understand and appreciate her home place and her place in it in ways that may never have been possible otherwise. Key components of her identity developed and changed as she spent time in nature, learned traditional skills and taught them to others, felt the appreciation of both tourists and program beneficiaries, and overcame her own fears and anxieties. In assemblage terms, she opened the boundaries of self, allowed her old "lost" self to be deterritorialized, reduced the capacities of negative components (such as fear) to affect her, and incorporated new components from the resources on offer by Fishing for Success. The new components allowed her to assemble an identity with expanded capacities, new understandings of place, and more positive evaluations of her overall identity. Her increased self-esteem and self-efficacy have broad implications for her willingness and ability to engage with the world.

### 3.2.3. Molly: The Birth of a Social Entrepreneur

Fishing for Success's first employee, Molly, is an outdoorswoman from childhood, growing up in a Newfoundland family that camps and fishes religiously, and working in the family's outdoor equipment store. At nineteen, in her second year of university, she saw an online job announcement and decided to apply because it was outdoor, recreation-related work. She "fell in love" with Kimberly and Leo and the work they were doing. Together with Kimberly, she ideated and co-founded the Girls Who Fish program, which spoke to her personal frustration with cultural assumptions about women's second-class roles in outdoor recreation and employment. She helped run the Youth Cod Fishery. She learned heritage fishing skills, which she then taught to others. In retrospect, she holds that Fishing for Success influenced her identity in fundamental ways. It broadened her concept of family, which now permanently includes Leo and Kimberly. It created capacities and desire for working with at-risk youth. It strengthened her nascent entrepreneurial resolve, and it deepened her work ethic.

Molly's experience with Fishing for Success was generative. Along with her business education, it gave her the skills and confidence to establish her own social enterprise. Following a stint of volunteer work in Haiti, she recognized a deep need for job creation for the country's at-risk youth. She returned to Haiti from Newfoundland with money from a silent-auction fundraiser and started an enterprise that trained and employed Haitian youth as local tour guides. The non-profit business provided guided hiking, snorkeling, and fishing excursions to tourists and provided several young Haitians with steady incomes. Their training also included classes in English and financial literacy.

#### 4. Discussion

The experiences of Deborah, Joni, and Molly are all indicative of the identity benefits that can be derived from prolonged engagement with a social enterprise such as Fishing for Success. Each of these women underwent significant growth and re-territorialization in their personal identities, incorporating identity resources assembled, interpreted, and brokered by the social enterprise. For work-integration social enterprises (WISE), such identity-construction benefits may be even more pronounced, given their express missions “to directly support vulnerable community members who are facing exclusion from the labour market”. (<https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/page/work-integration-social-enterprises>; accessed on 5 May 2021).

Our data help us to draw the boundaries of the phenomenon of identity-resource brokerage. Kimberly tells multiple stories of at-risk youth overcoming fears and becoming more socially interactive through participation in the Youth Cod Fishery. Joni, likewise, believes she has seen real identity change in program beneficiaries. Speaking of the YCF, she said:

The shift in some of the at-risk youth was amazing . . . It was basically the same thing I had experienced—being *enh* (makes a gesture of standoffishness and resistance), not really into it, like ‘What are we doing here?’—and by the end of (the program) they were so much more open, so much more talkative . . . super hands-on. And it just happens, in like a week. They’re just different. It’s so cool what it can do to people.

She is careful to mention that not all the kids in YCF are “closed off” and reluctant to participate in the beginning, but she is emphatic that those who are eventually come out of their shells and gain observable levels of increased confidence, sociability, and willingness to learn and take pleasure from the programs on offer. We conjecture that they, too, may experience the deterritorialization of problematic identities and draw from new identity resources to construct something more positive. The extent to which this happens is unclear, but it is likely to depend, at least in part, on the length of time spent engaged with the organization and its programs.

Not all Fishing for Success employees experience identity (re)construction equally. For example, Jack—a summer-jobs worker, native Newfoundlander, and Townie—reported a deepened appreciation for nature and for Newfoundland history and culture as a result of his employment, but not a major shift in identity. Jack has, however, modified his ambitions. He is currently undecided about his future plans—law school or history studies are likely paths—but he is sure that any path he takes will prioritize Newfoundland culture and wellbeing, the appreciation for which he attributes to Fishing for Success. Some impacts on Jack’s identity are evident to observers. It was Jack’s initiative that led to the creation of the rainbow dory as a symbol of inclusivity in the fishery. His obvious pride in the dory and his devotion to its maintenance indicates that it has attained material significance as an identity component reinforcing his creativity and gender expression. The whole rainbow dory project appears to have reinforced Jack’s identity as a confident gay male.

Identity dynamics may also be limited to the reinforcement and validation of an existing identity. Mary, the daughter and granddaughter of commercial fishermen, desired to try city life, and so she moved to the capital right after high school to work and eventually attend college. She tried to escape her rural bayman identity, taking deliberate steps to “townify” her accent and lifestyle. Despite those efforts, she found city life to be a poor fit for her. She connected with Kimberly online in response to a “Twitter troll” who was disparaging Girls Who Fish and the idea of women as fishers. Mary responded by posting pictures of her mother and grandmother, who were both commercial fishers (and obvious exceptions to the “no women in the boats” narrative). Her subsequent interactions with Fishing for Success led her to embrace her heritage and identity as a fisherwoman, to return to her home village, and to take up commercial fishing along with her father and mother. Mary’s identity as a cod fisher was deterritorialized by social forces that place Townies

above Baymen and frame the latter as quaint and rustic. Her involvement in Fishing for Success and the identity resources it provides allowed her to reframe and reterritorialize her bayman identity as valued, valuable, and a source of strength.

The identity dynamics we've written about for our informants, above, appear more pronounced in young adults. Children, with their identities still in formation, might be even more readily influenced than their adult counterparts. Kimberly talks about children who have overcome strong aversions to touching fish in a single excursion, ending up completely comfortable handling whole fish (e.g., for painting) and fish parts (such as otoliths or the lens of the eye). This potential variation of identity shifts between adults and children may owe something to the fact that adult customers choose to book with Fishing for Success—self-selecting by interests they already hold—whereas children may participate hesitantly at first in activities that are very unfamiliar and, therefore, not accommodated by current identity construction. It appears that these potential age-related boundary conditions may have boundary conditions of their own. For example, even an adult with short exposure to a social enterprise can experience identity-related shifts, even if they are mostly identity-affirming. The following is excerpted from one of many letters Fishing for Success has received from prior tourist guests. The writer is a Canadian woman from a prairie province, who visited with her Ukrainian-born father:

It's been over four months since we spent a day with you at Petty Harbour. My dad . . . had what he refers to as "a trip of a lifetime" . . . Learning heritage skills from you was an absolute treasure . . . My dad continues to rave about his "new friends Kimberly and Leo" in Newfoundland. If we lived there, he would be there every day helping with whatever chores you could assign him. We both admire your commitment to keeping the proud history and heritage skills of the resilient communities of Newfoundland alive.

Interviews with the adult administrators of two pro-social non-profit partner organizations did not reveal personal identity shifts; however, they both reported having observed important changes in their program beneficiaries. The administrator of an immigrant support agency, herself an immigrant, reported profound identity and adaptivity benefits to participants in the WiSH program. The administrator of an agency for at-risk youth, himself a native Newfoundlander, similarly reported observing positive identity changes among participants in the Youth Cod Fishery.

In summary, the benefits of identity-resource brokerage appear to be greatest for individuals with transitional identities. For individuals with more stable identities, the social enterprise offers experiences that are enjoyable, educational, and meaningful, but not necessarily identity altering. This is consistent with an identity-as-assemblage theorization. Identities that are highly territorialized are resistant to change. Identities that are not highly territorialized can more easily incorporate new components that ground them to nature and culture in ways that are stabilizing. In the emergent identities of children, formative memories may anchor important new relations of interiority. Identities that are fragile, such as those of at-risk youth, may be strengthened and stabilized as a result of developing new, more positive relations of interiority, such as increased feelings of efficacy, and more positive relations of exteriority, such as may be established through support and approval from adult role models. People with transitional identities, such as immigrants, may find that identity construction in a new place is enhanced by experiences that link them in relations of exteriority to the cultural traditions of that place. Even people with stable identities may experience meaningful affirmation from interacting with a social enterprise. Finally, in light of abundant evidence that connectedness to nature enhances happiness and wellbeing [52–54], we propose that experiential links to nature, such as those provided by Fishing for Success, may be especially valuable as identity resources.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Contribution to Identity Theory: Identity-as-Assemblage

Social enterprises often transmit pro-social values and practices to their staff, volunteers, stakeholders, and communities, all of whom may be changed, at the level of identity, by the process. Focusing on identity as the locus of such change, our research sought to understand the complex and multi-directional flows of identity co-construction among a social enterprise, its founders, and other individual stakeholders within the context of a distinctive regional cultural identity. This required analysis at all levels—micro, meso, and macro—of the phenomenon. Because no extant theory could account for identity construction all three levels with any nuance or complexity, we constructed a theoretical framework using DeLanda's assemblage theory. Theorizing identity-as-assemblage allows us to study identity interactions and dynamics across all levels of analysis. Moreover, in its dealing with relations of interiority and exteriority, identity-as-assemblage subsumes other theories of identity, including those that prioritize social interaction and those that focus on cognitive processes. The identity-as-assemblage construct accommodates such identity components as roles, relationships, social feedback, possible selves, and introspective soul searching with equal alacrity, making it uniquely suitable for analyzing identity (re)construction.

### 5.2. Contribution to Social Enterprise Theory: Identity-Resource Brokerage

We used our original theoretical framework of identity-as-assemblage to interpret our data from an ethnographic study of Fishing for Success, a social enterprise based in Petty Harbour, Newfoundland, Canada. Our study revealed that the social enterprise curates identity resources from local culture and heritage and brokers them to a wide variety of stakeholders for their personal identity projects.

The curation of identity resources is selective. It is not an attempt to recreate a bygone culture in microcosm or even to perpetuate a particular traditional lifestyle. It is, rather, a reinvigoration of certain symbols, practices, and stories designed to bring sustainable elements of the past into the present, fostering stronger connections to place, nature, and culture. Certain historical elements viewed as negative or discriminatory, such as a reported bias against women in fishing boats, are actively deselected and countered. Selectivity applies not only to the compilation of identity resources by the social enterprise. The curated elements are also interpreted selectively in terms of contemporary life and issues, making them easier to incorporate into an ongoing identity project.

The real power of identity-resource transfer appears to reside in the combination of experiential learning and narrative transmission. The experiences on offer are, for many participants, novel or even extraordinary. They are made more so by the interpretive narration, which takes place in real time on the water and at the fishing stage, and which is reinforced through traditional and social media. We believe the novelty of the experiences and the attendant memory-making make cognitive space for new self-schemas, the structure of which are influenced by the organizing narratives.

Moore, et al. [49] have identified three kinds of scaling associated with social enterprise: scaling out, which refers to growth by replication; scaling up, which refers to favorably influencing policymakers; and scaling deep, which refers to embedding principles in people's hearts and minds. We found evidence of all three. Scaling out may be achieved through generativity, whereby staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders "pay it forward" in their own lives and actions. We observed scaling up in the constant importuning to and eventual response from the regulatory body that controls access to fish. Scaling deep is evident in the power of the narratives to connect people with nature and their heritage.

Finally, our findings supported the usefulness of the identity-as-assemblage construct for understanding complex identity dynamics across multiple levels of analysis, revealing important processes previously understudied and undertheorized.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is limited by the specifics and idiosyncrasies of a particular place, Newfoundland, and a particular social enterprise, Fishing for Success. Some of the existing research on the capacity-building and identity-construction benefits of work-integration social enterprises, however, helps triangulate our findings in other contexts, such as Europe [7] and Hong Kong [8]. Brokering identity resources may be a more common and more powerful phenomenon among social enterprises than previously thought. Our prolonged (5+ years) ethnographic engagement, hampered for the last two years by restrictions related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, continues and may yet reveal new themes related to social enterprise and identity-resource brokerage.

Our study has not captured the identity dynamics of the community and province as a result of their interactions with Fishing for Success. It is possible that the social enterprise, as a curator of identity resources from the region, may also function as a mirror to the region. Their depictions of traditional Newfoundland life, especially as it is leveraged in media such as tourist photography, television programs and commercials, and press coverage, may well reinforce a particular version of “authentic” cultural identity. The place-identity effects of social enterprises mirroring culture and heritage back to a community are an intriguing topic for future study.

The emergent theme of social enterprise generativity also merits additional research. We propose that powerful experiences of identity reconstruction due to involvement in a social enterprise may enhance both the desire and the capacity to “pay forward” the benefits of participation. From a standpoint in identity-as-assemblage theory, identity components that are central, positive, stable, and newly acquired may have the most generative power. Generativity may be a function of social enterprise beneficiaries becoming new brokers of identity resources through new or existing organizations. If generativity can be understood and harnessed in the context of social enterprise, then the implications for scaling social impact could be significant.

The many mentions of the family-like aspects of relationships in the social enterprise raise another topic for future research. The management literature highlights many challenges associated with family-run businesses, including raw emotions and unfiltered communications, which can result in painful feuds or falling out [55]. For social enterprises that develop family-like ties, the identity consequences of unresolved disputes may be more serious than they would be for stakeholders of other organizations. How such conflicts play out in mission-driven enterprises merits investigation.

Additional research is needed to test the robustness and usefulness of our theory of identity-as-assemblage and our conceptualization of identity-resource brokerage in other contexts. If these theories can be shown to have explanatory power in other contexts, such as urban communities, other types of rural community, or other types of organization, they may offer valuable tools for understanding and remedying identity-related challenges of people such as at-risk youth or immigrants. The implications may reach beyond social enterprise to include other kinds of organizations in the non-profit or government sectors. For example, identity-resource brokerage, done strategically, may be of real value to initiatives focused on resettling immigrants or refugees or on bringing greater understanding to inter-ethnic dynamics in changing urban environments.

Finally, outside of the social enterprise space, scholarship has linked sustainability and sustainable behaviors to identity at levels ranging from individual consumption [56] to community and place identities [57]. The promising identity impacts that social enterprise might have on individual-level and community-level support for sustainable practices are open to investigation.

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