

A photograph of a social supermarket aisle. The shelves are stocked with various food items, including bags of rice, pasta, and other packaged goods. The lighting is somewhat dim, and the overall atmosphere is one of a community-based food store.

The Sustainability of Social Supermarkets: Can They Help Solve Food Insecurity?

Morven McEachern, University of Huddersfield

Mags Adams, University of Salford

#foodpovertyconference2018



University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

Background



- **FOOD ACCESS OPTIONS**

- Foodbanks
- Soup kitchens
- Church groups
- 1:1 models
- Pay as you feel outlets
- Social supermarkets

- What is a social supermarket?

- A retailer that “*receives surplus food and consumer goods from partnership companies (e.g., manufacturers, retailers) for free and will sell it at symbolic prices to a restricted group of people living in or at risk of poverty*”

- (Holweg et al., 2010, p.2)

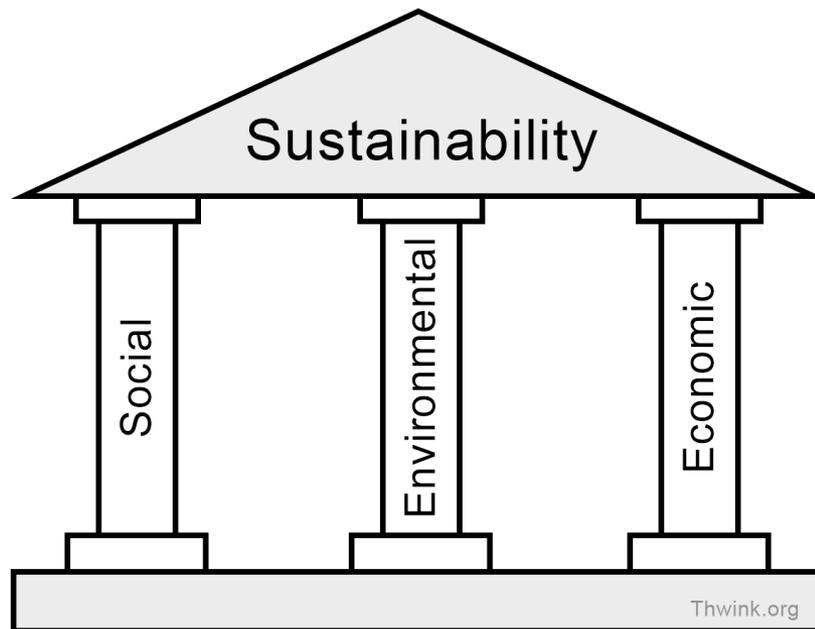
- How common are they?

- More than 1,000 stores of this type exist across Europe

- (Holweg and Lienbacher, 2010)

Theoretical Underpinning

Model of Sustainability



A Circular Economy Approach



Methodology & Sample

- Interpretive approach taken and conducted in-depth interviews with owners/managers of alternative food retail enterprises across the UK
- Transcribed data and performed inter-coder reliability
- Thematic analysis performed

Environmental Sustainability

- *“We have always operated in complete contrast to the contemptible supermarket-led supply chains that promote the ritual disposal of colossal amounts of perfectly edible food...we work very closely with our long-standing growers and suppliers to ensure that waste is not only kept to a minimum, but removed almost entirely from our supply model altogether”.*

- SFRE (Greater Manchester)



- “We have a **98% recycling rate**...we are very proud of that. **Everything is compostable**. We also allow people to **buy unpackaged** stuff, so you can just buy one pepper or you can buy all the stuff using our dispensers and bring your own things. The biggest thing is our **commitment to not throw away** the food that can be eaten. We are just **very careful about ordering** and we are good at kind of **reducing down fresh stuff** while it's still usable before it goes out. And then if it doesn't sell as reduced then it gets **given away** to staff or put outside the front of the shop for people to take”.

- SFRE (Brighton)

Social Sustainability

- *“We don’t use volunteers. But helping out in the shop, we need to pay you for that. Working in the kitchen, we need to pay you for that...That doesn't mean that those jobs aren't open to you, but it's not part of our model to rely on that kind of labour”.*

- SFRE 2 (London)



- *“We have a lot of volunteers...It means that we can pop-up where we like and we can commit ourselves to collaborate with who we like...We don't ask people to commit to any certain amount of time, we've just said, 'Come and join us', and then we communicate with our volunteers via Facebook and email”.*

- SFRE 2 (Edinburgh)



- *“One of the reasons we like to work with Fareshare is that they by and large are now supporting projects whereby we also cook for people. It's less of an older model style hand out system whereby someone would just turn up and receive maybe ten different items. The food goes to a community project or groups say for example a rehabilitation centre where a meal is cooked and people go along and they eat and it's the added benefit of having social interaction as well as getting a meal”.*

- SFRE 3 (Manchester)



Economic Sustainability

- “It started off taking sandwiches around the offices. It wasn't meant to **escalate into a social business**...started off as a sandwich shop and then we started employing one of the guys who was outside...selling the Big Issue...**inspired by social aspects** of giving something back...we 've got five shops all in...We are a charity but it's part business as well, so we do look at the corporate side of things, but again **all the profits** that we make go **straight back** into the Social Academy along with everything else. It's just **like a circle**, everything that **goes out**, it comes **back in** where it goes into the business”.

- SFRE (Glasgow)

- “We **take surplus** from Asda, Morrisons, Tescos, Aldi, Lidl and we had to have **agreements in place** that we weren't going to open a discount retailer that would **cannibalise** their market. Membership is **capped at 750** for people who are designated as specifically being in a **situation of poverty**. We are not capped in terms of people accessing the development programme, because they are not bothered about that. They are **bothered about** how many people can buy Marks and Spencer's products at **cheap prices**”.

- SFRE (Lancs)



Can Social Supermarkets Help Solve Food Insecurity?

- Social, environmental and economic values are harnessed by SFREs through many fuzzy configurations to achieve sustainable transformation
- Sustainable value for those experiencing food poverty remains limited
- SSs can offer a more holistic form of sustainability by enabling the transition to the wider food marketplace

