

What Piano and Social Procurement Have in Common



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Unbearably practical words pointing to where new worlds of wonder await

Thursday, July 30, 2020 -- Peter Pula

So much mystery and romance are conjured by the word *piano*. The piano is a powerfully evocative musical instrument. A piano is capable of sounding as many notes, and by some mysterious art even more, as a pianist has fingers and in endless combination. The harpsichord, the piano's predecessor, could do all that too. The harpsichord was once the premier instrument of choice in the European music scene for the wide range of possibilities it offered. Even at that, and alas, the harpsichord plucked each of its strings with equal strength producing a uniform

sound level, and to me, a madness-inducing monotony. Enter then, the now legendary piano. The piano made so much more possible. An incredible innovation at the time, the piano allowed for *dynamic*.

Suddenly it was not just that a musician presses upon the keys with precision and good timing. With the piano, new worlds opened by how soft or hard, and when softer or harder, quieter or louder the keys were addressed. The length of the notes could vary. Crescendo and diminuendo became possible. Dynamic. Evocation. Interpretation. Soulfulness. Time could be bent in new ways, moods could be conjured, force and vigour could give way to the sweet sound of melancholy in a moment and the state change could leave you weak in joyous bewilderment.

I can barely tolerate Bach on the harpsichord. Emanating from the piano, however, say at the hands of a great Polish pianist like [Piotr Anderszewski](#), that Partita once trying to my ears becomes [suddenly the sound of sweet divinity](#).

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All of this magic is created by something unexcitingly called, Piano-Forte. Or, Soft-Loud. Perhaps its inventor was so lost in the results of having invented the thing that naming it with any sense of romance was the last thing on his mind. I can hear it now, 'Let me explain. This is a harpsichord that you can play louder or softer. What do you think of that? Interesting, wouldn't you say?'

I guess you'd have to play the damn thing to get it.

Soft-Loud just doesn't do it justice. Eventually its moniker was abbreviated further from pianoforte to simply piano. Soft.

That seems to happen. Consider: Appreciative Inquiry, Asset-Based Community Development, Generative Journalism. Powerful, powerful practices. World changing.

Dull names.

I must be clear. I coined one of them and count myself thus to be in some of the finest company. As such, I am very appreciative of the precision of each of these terms. They are clear. They tell you what the thing is. They are descriptive. Necessarily so, I think.

Now consider this one, Social Procurement. O. M. G.

Well, its clear. It is hard to confuse its meaning. And, it's probably worth playing to really get it.

I've tickled the writer's ivories for the last 463 words because I've been wracking my brain trying to figure out how to convey the bold adventure into a beautiful new world sitting right there behind a combination of two almost unbearably practical words: Social Procurement.

Social Procurement is so practical, so simple, so clear a way to transform our communities in the direction of our preferred future as to be forehead-smack inducing.

And that's what Piano has to do with Social Procurement. Unbearably practical terms pointing to worlds of wonder.

Over the last few months, I have had the honour of recording five podcasts with the sponsorship of, and in collaboration with, Buy Social Canada on the question of Social Procurement.

Together they serve as an incredible introduction to a way of doing things, at a community level, where we have the power to move ahead without waiting for a larger system to do it for us, where we can regain and exert control in our own communities and neighbourhoods, together, and to advance our social aims, ecological, cultural, and economic aims. All this by simply changing the way we spend money we are already spending and taking nothing away.

Listening to these podcasts in the following order is a great exploration from concept to delivery. The subject is deserving of much more media than has been made here.

The Way to a Marketplace Revolution

Image



David LePage

David LePage has recently published *Marketplace Revolution — from Concentrated Wealth to Community Capital*. If you are interested in constructive social change and social justice and would like an unbearably practical way to go about it and to find your place in it, [my latest podcast conversation with David LePage](#) is a great place to begin the journey into, what he calls, a Social Value Marketplace.

There are three practices converging to make it possible. Social Enterprise, Social Procurement, and Social Value Finance. This convergence is necessary and underway. David speaks to each of them in this conversation and in his book, which you can buy [here](#).

This podcast is the latest in the series but is a best place to start. It is current and sets the stage.

State of Social Economy in Canada and Around the World

Image



Nancy Neamtan

[This conversation with Nancy Neamtan](#) demonstrates that the Social Economy is not a neophyte movement yet to cut its teeth. It has been developing, around the world recognizably for at least 100 years. Nancy has been party to work being done around the world and served as CEO of Chantier de l'économie sociale in Quebec. It's a movement that deserves to headline most newscasts. If it did, we'd have a different idea of our world and what is possible. The motions toward Social Economy are a global movement and a largely unseen story lying 'just beneath the surface' in many communities.

Finding Purchase for Marketplace Revolution

Social enterprises use market practices to achieve social aims. They are social-purpose businesses. They, for example, make brownies to employ people, rather than employ people to make brownies.

Image



Stephen Young

One of barriers standing in the way of their success is finding customers, stable revenue. And, without contracts and revenue, who wants to offer them 'social value finance' to by the brownie baking ovens?

So, imagine this. There is a company that offers enterprise software services to organizations around the world. Imagine 77 per cent of all of the world's economic transactions touch this company's platform. 77 per cent. Now imagine that this same company is working with organizations to leverage this gateway to connect purchasers with social-good providers, aka Social Enterprises. That is a lot of revenue. Social Enterprise demand problem = being solved.

Here's the rub... it's not imaginary.

SAP, a huge international company is doing it. [In this podcast conversation I explore with Stephen Young, global lead for SAP's Procurement with Purpose program how that effort is unfolding.](#)

My heartrate quickens at the thought of what this could make possible. Social Procurement is starting to sound a little more... dynamic... now.

Chandos Construction a Leader in Social Procurement

Image



Tim Coldwell

Chandos construction is a major Canadian construction firm. It does its own social purchasing as a matter of course. It is a fine example of a 'social-mission' enterprise. It is employee-owned with one class of shares. It is B Corp certified. It practices

social procurement of its own volition. It leads that way.

Chandos is also on the leading edge of the construction sector in Canada, having recognized that Social Procurement is now a condition in major contracts with funding from the federal government. That means if you are going to build something non-residential and where federal money is involved, you are going to be doing social procurement. Social outcomes like hiring people who face barriers to employment, hiring locally, are going to be part of the deal. That's a 10.6 billion dollar-year marketplace (in 2010 according to StatsCan).

Construction will be a major player in social outcomes purchasing. Chandos gets it and is on it.

[In this podcast conversation with Chandos Construction president Tim Coldwell](#) we learn more how the firm is already cultivating a social value marketplace in communities in which it does work. A viable future is already real in the here and now.

Construction Projects Create Social Value

Image



*Dr. Martin
Loosemore*

Dr. Martin Loosemore is a surfer who is out riding the waves earlier than most people get to their morning coffee. So, when you think of social purchasing think of that. He has impeccable academic pedigree matched by his practical experience. His work in the Australian construction sector to build social outcomes into build projects

has included a decades long development of 'connectivity centres'. These are centres attached to build projects in which third sector and other partners come together to support people who face barriers to employment. It's an compelling model and a petri dish of learning.

[In this podcast, Martin shares, what doesn't work, what does, and what's next when it comes to building social hiring and purchasing into major builds.](#)

This series of podcasts will stand the test of time as the possibilities of social procurement, and its critical place in a Social Value Marketplace, unfold.

More to come...