

## APPROACHES TO INTEGRATED REVITALIZATION: ANOTHER SIDE OF THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN QUEBEC<sup>°</sup>

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### **Introduction: the development of the social economy**

The development of the social economy, present in Quebec since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, took off in the 90s following the employment crisis, which persists to this day. The social economy was organized as a movement and developed its identity in different ways while convincing the state to support its growth through public policy. It would be an oversight not to mention the role played, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by the Desjardins (Credit Union) movement and agricultural cooperatives. In the 1960s, a multitude of cooperatives developed - for housing, work, and consumer activities - as well as an associated movement towards diversification, offering a collection of services to the population. In short, the take off of the social economy in the 1990s was rooted in a long history of cooperative movements in Quebec.

The social economy was also a continuation of pre-existing waves of thought. The idea of local development had taken its course and was recreated here as a movement to develop our local territories. From this wave Community Economic Development (DEC) was born, which took all the principles of local development and added the necessary link between the social and the economic. It worked to have these two significant sections of our society working together for the development of a targeted territory.

Since the 1980s, CED was impacted by several different events. The early 1990s saw the completion of the network of Community Economic Development Corporations (CDEC in French). The arrival of ÉCOF, the CDEC of Trois-Rivières, in 1996, occurred during a stagnation in the development of new CDECs in Quebec.

But the event that probably had the most impact on the DEC over the last few years was the development of the social economy. With a push from Nancy Neamtan who was the former director of the CDEC at Pointe St Charles (Montreal), this social economy site claimed a place at the Summit on Employment organized by the government of Quebec in 1996 (Neamtan, 1996). This summit, which acted as a gathering place for forces interested in the social economy, brought together many large networks throughout Quebec for the development of the social economy in many sectors of activity in society. Over the last 10 years we have seen a resurgence of new projects for integrated revitalization where the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions are closely linked in local interventions. These new projects recognize

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<sup>°</sup> Translated from the original article by Kaitlyn Duthie-Kannikkatt.

the social economy and utilize social economy enterprises as a tool for development. The case of Trois-Rivières was developed within this perspective.

### **The case of Trois-Rivières**

Trois-Rivieres is a small city (the 9<sup>th</sup> largest in Quebec) of 126 000 residents, situated half way between Montreal and Quebec City, in the heart of the Province of Quebec. It is the second oldest city in North America (1634) and one of the first industrial towns with the development of its St-Maurice Forges in 1738.

Situated at the forks of the St. Lawrence River and the St. Maurice river, and within a region (the Mauricie) well known for its forests, Trois-Rivieres, after the second world war, witnessed the development of large industries, particularly in the areas of textiles, aluminum, and pulp and paper.

Like many industrial towns, Trois-Rivieres has witnessed many of these industries shut down since the end of the 1970s, with a subsequent loss of employment opportunities. The old working class neighbourhoods have become, little by little, the neighbourhoods where people live off social security, and where many live in poverty. These neighbourhoods, the oldest in the town, are gradually ‘devitalizing’. Many of the life forces of these neighbourhoods have moved to new sectors in Trois-Rivieres. Infrastructure (roads, parks, sidewalks, etc.) have not seen the same pace of development as other sectors of the city. The number of buildings left abandoned, as well as vacant lots, has increased, which has impacted, among other things, the crime rate in these areas. Much housing has been taken over by absentee landlords.

Despite the injection of many institutional and community resources, statistics show that rates of unemployment, poor health, poverty, illiteracy, etc. remain high in comparison with other sectors of the city. This phenomenon is not exclusive to our city, but is actually found in many former industrial centres.

The development of an approach to deal with the issues present in these original neighbourhoods of Trois-Rivieres began in 2001 after a door to door participatory study, realized by ÉCOF, the corporation for community economic development (CDEC), in collaboration with COMSEP, a community organization, and a community organizer from the Local Community Health Centre (CLSC) Les Forges. These organizations recognized the need to revitalize their link with the area within a social economy perspective, and with an integrated approach.

Nine years later, more than 100 citizens are involved and more than 60 organizations participate in this integrated revitalization project in 11 ‘devitalized’ neighbourhoods. A vibrant mix of projects – both market and non-market oriented - has been developed over these years. For example, ‘Bucafin’ – a café/laundromat/internet hot spot has become a meeting hub for the neighbourhood and has employed 5 people. Open 7 days a week, 7 hours a day, the “Bucafin” is also a place where artists in the community can get exposure for their work.

“The Youth Hostel of the First Quartiers” is another great example of a social enterprise that provides necessary lodging at low costs while creating employment. The “Communo-gym”

offers, thanks to three kinesiologists, access to a low-cost physical fitness centre for the local population. It offers personalized and quality support. The Social Estate Agency (AIS) secures housing at the best price for low-income residents and support for tenants that have contracts with private housing managers. This has already created one job and others are on their way.

Currently, two larger projects are in the process of being realized. One of these projects is working to put in place an eco-hotel that would also be an educational space. This project of \$9.6 million will allow for the creation of 30 direct jobs while reinvesting thousands of dollars into the community to support its revitalization. In the other case, a closed church will be converted into a multi-cultural space. About 10 jobs will be created for this project, all while preserving the cultural patrimony of the district.

Sometimes projects go from being non-profit to profit-generating enterprises. There was one project that rented bicycles to members of the community, with an inventory of 200 bikes, that became a small business offering different services to the population within the bike domain, thus becoming a platform for the unemployed to get their foot into the world of work.

This revitalization work also consists of structural tools being put in place to respond to the needs of the area. One key example is a program that helps low income households access property through a partnership of several organizations in the area (the Social Estate Agency). Another example is a micro credit community funds institute (the Mauricie Community Funds Lender).

Many non-market projects have also come to fruition. Community gardens that bring together close to 150 households, two community centres established in the most isolated sectors, the creation of a new park, a community parade celebration that has brought 3000 people together in a single day for eight years, the 'Accorderie' (service exchange) that connects close to 300 members, a project that promotes recycling and reusing, and many other projects have revitalized an area profoundly marked by poverty. Much remains to be done, but the first steps have been taken and hope has been renewed.

### **The role of key partners in this development**

This success was rendered possible through the participation of many partners in the area, and through the involvement of citizens that have decided to put their hands to the wheel.

COMSEP, the most well known association in Trois-Rivieres, played a major role in the development of the First Neighbourhoods Approach. Initially, they paved the way by being among the first associations to devote energy towards the development of social economy enterprises. Even today, COMSEP manages two businesses – a catering business and a fair trade products distributor. It was also because of the COMSEP coordinator, Sylvie Tardif, that the link with local public office was reinforced. Her work in area revitalization led to her getting elected to the city council.

The support of institutional partners like the health and social services centre, Emploi-Quebec and Service Canada, to name a few, has also been important. They provided the financing for the project to exist, and supported the projects in the first neighbourhoods.

#### *Involved citizens*

Many projects would not have seen the light of day without the involvement of citizens. They were the first to identify the need and to participate in generating solutions. Sometimes less involved with the technical aspects of the project, they could be found on boards, administration councils and committees. 'Communo-gym' would have had difficulty being realized without Claude Fortin, retired and heavily involved, as president of the organization. 'L'Accorderie' might not have existed without the involvement of a woman like Julie V. who carried the project since the beginning.

#### *Lead Organizations*

ECOF, the community economic development corporation (CDEC) of Trois Rivières was the lead on this project. First, ECOF initiated the project through the realization of the participative survey. Next, ECOF supported the coalition's projects with technical and human resources. ECOF mobilized its resources in the service of this project and linked its existing work (job search help, business support, etc.) with the projects supporting the revitalization of the neighbourhoods. The CDEC also pursued its work by developing social economy enterprises, notably 'Multi-boulots (jobs)' a service that allows residents to connect about available odd jobs such as mowing grass and snow removal.

#### *Towards a Quebec network*

The Trois-Rivières project is not unique in Quebec. The Quebecois network of integrated revitalization (RQRI) was established in 2008 to facilitate the exchange of expertise and to raise awareness of the social economy among those in public office.

### **What are, in essence, the 'approaches of integrated revitalization'?**

These revitalization projects, using the concept of social economy for territorial development, were developed progressively over a decade in Quebec. Other similar experiences have occurred in other countries, notably France and Belgium. These projects envision the improvement of the quality of life for citizens that reside in neighbourhoods marked by poverty and exclusion. As demonstrated by certain authors (Oberti, in Paugam, 1996), poverty and exclusion often take over the face of a neighbourhood. Through various mechanisms, we have observed 'spatial concentrations' of people in poverty. For illustrative purposes, we can take the example of housing. In a given area, for what are often historical reasons, housing may be in poor condition and not highly valued on the market in that location. Homes are thus less expensive. Inexpensive homes in one area encourage people living in poverty from other areas in the city to come and establish themselves there.

The integrated revitalization approach such as the one in Trois-Rivières forms part of a holistic vision. This kind of intervention is part of an action plan that connects social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors. It distinguishes itself from other projects where the emphasis is on improving physical structures. This poses a supplementary challenge for donors looking for

measurable, concrete results. A renovated business front is tangible and visible. Contributing to building self-confidence and empowerment for the people is less visible, at least in the short term. In the dominant discourse, integrated intervention and development practices are pushed aside in favour of isolated essential projects. Economic development disregards social development, and vice versa. To think of development actions and projects that are economic, social, cultural, and environmental all at the same time is an interesting challenge, and far from being always easy!

Integrated revitalization approaches are reliant on partnership. Involved in these projects we find community organizations, associations, public institutions, and public representatives, especially from the municipal level. This has the advantage of pooling significant resources, as well as varied expertise. It obliges different actors to broaden their analysis and their vision of reality, taking into account the point of view of other implicated actors. This kind of engagement encourages debate and discussion. How can we encourage cooperation among the representatives of institutions as well as community organizations and involved citizens? How can decisions be made while a local institution is sometimes subordinated to the decisional power situated outside the local context? What democratic process must be followed when project coalitions group together both individuals and organizations that represent hundreds of individuals? Some partners are more focused on the process, while others are focused on quantitative results. The respective missions of different partners sometimes conflict with the collective mission of the integrated revitalization approach. The question of leadership in the process is often an issue, as well as negotiation, open or otherwise, among actors. In short, it's an experiment in the practice of consultation and democracy!

### **Another vision of development**

Integrated revitalization approaches have a different vision than those generally recognized in dominant models of development. A vision built on development in the context of a plural economy – that is to say, a layout that includes the public economy, the traditional private economy and the social economy. This approach simultaneously emphasizes an ideology purporting that only the State can guarantee justice and democracy, as well as a neoliberal thought current that attempts to diminish as much as possible the role of the state.

This vision of development highlights the *potential* of the area, instead of only seeing the problems. Although aware that it depends on external resources to succeed, it is important to value the strengths of the locality. This breaks with the old urban development strategy that consisted, and still consists in many cases, of putting all the energy into attracting big businesses from the outside to come and establish themselves in their area – just until the town is back on its feet!

This vision, in the long term, re-establishes a notion of the ‘common good’ and of ‘living together’. Here is a major challenge.

## **Territorial approach**

The territorial approach is one of the pillars on which rests the integrated revitalization approach. This approach presupposes that the territory where people reside has its own dynamic that influences its development. The notion of belonging to a territory (neighbourhood, village, city) was very strong until the 1970s. The years that followed were marked by the rise in identities other than territorial ones. These included the affirmation of women within the women's movement, of workers within the workers movement, of youth within the youth movements, and others. The identity of specific communities and their movements of belonging (for women, youth, workers, etc.), and the identity of specific interest groups (the unemployed, those on social assistance, gays and lesbians, etc.) came to the forefront. Since the 1990s, we have assisted in the resurgence of a territorial identity. Certainly, the territorial identity is far from the only dimension that defines a person. A multitude of possible identities (women, youth, gays, etc.) fuse together and accumulate and take on more or less importance in a person's life based on the factors that most affect them.

Authors like Marco Oberti (Oberti, in Paugam, 1996) have demonstrated how the territory is, in itself, a possible factor of exclusion. Living in one neighbourhood or another ties residents to an image, a perception, that could have a negative connotation. Different areas have different realities in terms of access to diverse resources that are not distributed equally. That also applies to social networks that do not have the same solidity from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. We could illustrate this quickly by giving the example of a person looking for work. In neighbourhoods marked by poverty and exclusion, your immediate network (neighbours, family) may not be in a position to notify you of employment opportunities before they are filled.

As several authors (Castel, 1994; De Gaulejac, 1994; Paugman, 1996) have noted, the weakness of social networks combined with unfavorable economic situations contributes significantly to exclusion or at least put communities at risk of exclusion.

G rard Divay (Divay, 2004) posed the question of the necessity of having national policies align with the work being carried out on a local level. We could implement a series of projects to fight poverty in a given territory, but if government policies do not support this work, the impact risks being much less significant. We return, thus, to the fact that a territorial approach cannot be exclusive or limited to the local level. The local territory must situate itself within larger contexts (regional and national) and be capable of taking into account these different realities and their interdependence.

The notion of 'belonging' is also an issue. In effect, residence in a territory is an objective fact. But the feeling of belonging to a territory is a subjective notion. It is a social construct. It is thus not an immutable or acquired fact. Quite the opposite, it can be developed by putting in the effort. It is possible, for example, by prioritizing the creation of social links, starting with neighbourhood celebrations, cafes, and developing a positive image of the neighbourhood. This will allow residents to develop the desire to gradually build this feeling of belonging.



## **The renewal of democratic practices**

The integrated revitalization approaches aim to lead in the renewal of democratic practices. It is about both developing a participatory democracy and influencing representative democracy. The creation of spaces for citizens to be heard and make decisions allows for the emergence of an active citizenship where becoming an actor in the development of a community is not reserved for the elite. In these spaces, these occasions for ‘living democracy’ also become a school for democracy. The lessons learned in these spaces such as knowing how to listen to the arguments of others, knowing how to advocate for oneself, knowing how to rally for a particular decision make up part of the process of democracy in action.

Whether it’s forming working groups on different subjects, or neighbourhood assemblies, the creation of new community resources or social economy businesses make up part of this revitalization approach. These organizations or businesses are places for practicing democracy and involving citizens. Whether it’s through a general assembly or an administrative council, the numerous occasions for putting democracy into practice are everywhere.

It’s also in this school of democracy that local leaders are formed. This participatory democracy provokes junctions and interactions with the democratic representatives – the elected. These interactions allow for a better understanding of the decision making process of elected representatives (on the municipal council, in government, etc.). This new understanding allows for demystification and an ownership of these decision-making processes. It allows citizens the power to influence these decisions and thus become an empowered collective. The importance of this question of leadership is often underestimated. An integrated revitalization approach cannot succeed in realizing its objectives without the development of a new citizen leadership in targeted areas. It may be a difficult challenge that raises many questions. How can we ensure that this leadership is not a leadership of the middle class, excluding people living in poverty? How can we prevent these new leaders from becoming a new source of concentrated power?

Regular and continued work with elected representatives on different development files raises their awareness and allows them to modify their ways of interacting with the populations that elected them. They must take the time, for example, to meet with people and to really listen before taking decisions. Furthermore, this could sometimes lead the local area to involve itself more in the field of representative democracy by supporting one of their own in an election.

Could one more step be possible? To enlarge the base of citizens that become involved citizens, there is the challenge of inventing new mechanisms for democratic participation. This could take many forms: the internet could become one of the tools of democratic participation. Could we create popular urban committees that involve both citizens and professionals? Or return to having popular consultations in the street?

## **Intersectoral work**

Since the 1980s, the importance of collaboration among different organized actors whether in the community, association or institutional sectors has been a popular conversation, making up part of the dominant discourse on local development. This concept of intersectorality was

simultaneously being well documented, criticized and overused. One of the lessons from consultation actions in the 1980s was without a doubt the importance of linking consultation to action to provide direct results. Too many consultations become forums for endless discussion with few concrete results. The challenge remains to define, in each space, an interesting and efficient model for partnerships. In every case, models that demand flexibility and trust between partners and organizational leaders.

## **Inclusion**

An important difference between the integrated revitalization approach and other models of local development is its practices of inclusion. This process is based on the fact that everyone has their place, their role, a power to discuss, to reflect, to act. Many projects realized in the context of integrated revitalization approaches have as part of their objectives to allow for the inclusion of diverse people (youth, women, immigrants, etc.). Truly, these approaches are veritable nurseries for innovation in the domain of inclusion.

The concept of inclusion necessarily includes both individual and collective empowerment. It is an augmentation of power, of individual and community capacities in a continuous synergy. This poses a number of challenges. How do we reconcile 'living together' for people coming from different contexts and cultures? How to we reconcile the totally different ways of life of a marginalized person and a person who manages the neighbourhood trading centre, for example? All of these people have different ways of life, different attitudes and reactions, which can sometimes be unsettling for other people.

## **Citizen participation**

Integrated revitalization approaches rest on the principle of citizen participation. This requires the widest possible participation of citizens in the affairs of the city. This also poses the question of power and participation in decision-making. Again, what we mean by citizen participation must be defined. Our reflection and our practices indicate that we can divide the concept in three ways. First, there is grassroots citizen participation. This constitutes whether the citizen will vote, participate in neighbourhood activities and celebrations, and use services in the neighbourhood centre. The second category is that of 'belonging'. This refers to becoming a member of the local service exchange group, or a member of community gardens. The third step is that of planning and decision-making. This third step is where the citizen looks at becoming a member of an organizing committee, of a neighbourhood association, of an administrative council, or a social economy business. These different types of citizen participation all have their importance but do not demand the same kinds of commitments.

## **Conclusion: The social and solidarity economy as a model for local development?**

Because it is rooted in the local context, because it is inclusive, because it recreates that link between the social and the economic, and because it purports a vision, the social and solidarity economy puts forth an interesting model for local development. There is no magic recipe, nor must everything be known at the start. Each context must develop its own dynamic, as did Trois-Rivieres, for the impossible to become possible. The first step is to create hope – a hope that is



often undermined by the unfulfilled promises of the local elite. In this sense, the social and solidarity economy is leading the change in our world, and that, to us, is inspiring.

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