

Report to the
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by

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The Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERP) is nearing the end of its funded life. It began in 2005 and had financial support (Ca \$13,000,000) from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to sustain six regional nodes and a national “Hub” for some five years of research and community activation. The nodes and the Hub started at somewhat different times, meaning that they will end at proportionally different times. Moreover, all of them have applied for extensions of one year, so the project will continue through to the spring of 2011 for most of the partners; for two of them (the North and British Columbia/Alberta) it will carry on until the autumn of that year.

Over 300 researchers from some 30 disciplines in over 60 universities, along with a substantial number of researchers from Social Economy organisations, have worked on over 260 projects; most of them are still engaged in doing so. The range of projects is truly impressive if somewhat intimidating. Here is a somewhat arbitrary classification of the topics we have been investigating. Some projects, of course, are concerned with more than one theme.

- 52 have significant public policy focus
- 47 mapping/portraiture
- 33 evaluation/measuring
- 25 co-ops
- 25 social enterprise
- 19 food security
- 18 Indigenous
- 17 governance
- 13 capacity building
- 11 rural/agricultural
- 10 women's issues
- 9 funding
- 7 theory
- 6 Local Economic Growth, Natural Resources, Youth, Immigration, Curricula
- 5 English-French relations
- 4 - Fair trade, Forestry, Workplace
- 3 - Culture, Housing, Communication, Francophones outside Québec

- 2 - Knowledge Mobilisation, Development, Urban Revitalisation, Environment, Procurement, Adult Education, Employment
- 1 - Seniors, Tourism, Greening, Mutuels, Community/University Relationships, Families, Religious Organisations, Poverty, Parks, Mining, Crises, Volunteering, Mining, Natural Resource Management

We will be making a number of reviews and assessments of our work over the next year or so, and many researchers, though in the final stages of their work, are still considering many issues; their results, though close, are not yet ready for release.

Today, I will report on some of our key activities, describe a few that are yet to come, and note some of our challenges we have faced – and in some instances are still facing (at least from my perspective). This is not a document that purports to represent a consensus view from CSERP.

Some of our Key Activities

Summarizing the key activities of CSERP is a challenging project, especially given the time constraints we face today. I will simply list seven of the most prominent of them and accept the inevitable criticisms for the ones I did not include.

1. *Expanding and building Social Economy research.* Our main activity, of course, has been the stimulation of more and different kinds of research into the Social Economy (SE). While ultimately others will have to evaluate the quality of what we have done, it can be confidently said that we have opened or expanded several new areas of research. We have sought to understand how the Social Economy can be considered in Canada,

particularly in what is commonly called English-speaking Canada, where, until the advent of this project, it is generally not well known. We have been successful, though perhaps not as successful as we should have been, in bringing together SE researchers from Québec and other provinces.

At the same time, it must be realized that our research has shown that the SE will be approached somewhat differently across the varieties of the Canadian experience. We can learn much from each other, but ultimately SE realities are shaped within communities, amid our various ways of knowing, and inside our diverse political jurisdictions, obviously major considerations in a country as vast and diverse as Canada.

2. *Creating teams.* We have created local/provincial/regional networks of researchers within and without the academy that have undertaken path-breaking research (particularly in Anglophone Canada). In many instances, they were the first efforts of their kind, developing team research among people many of whom had formerly been accustomed to working exclusively on an individual basis and rarely closely with each other.

One should not pass lightly over this development. Although there will be no continuation of the national programme on the Social Economy, many of the teams that have emerged show every sign of developing new projects based on the collaboration of the last five years. They will be helped in doing so by many of the activities CSERP has fostered, including

bibliographies (for example, <http://www.socialeconomy.info/biblio>) and a research table that will make it easier for researchers to access what has already been done (see <http://www.socialeconomyhub.ca/?q=content/cserp-content-analysis-research-table>). CSERP leaves behind a potentially rich synergetic framework within which much can happen in the future.

An important feature of virtually all the teams is that they include researchers from both universities and SE organisations. In the process, they have learned much from each other and, one might argue, they have produced a different kind of research, one that, if it is to be true to its underlying commitments, has to be validated both in the academy and in communities. This has not always been easily accomplished and improvements can always be made in how the various individuals, groups, and institutions work together, but it has been a major accomplishment of CSERP that it has progressed as far as it has.

3. *Encouraging young researchers.* Almost all of our projects have engaged young researchers, including over 100 graduate students. They have been prominent at the annual and regional meetings of the nodes, the Hub, and some SE partners. They have organized very successful workshops in their own right on both the national and regional levels, the next one being in Montréal early next month. They have established a flourishing, web-based student network (<http://socialeconomy.info/en/english> or <http://socialeconomy.info/fr/view/events>).

We believe the long-term future for Social Economy research is assured in Canada through the interests and enthusiasms of these young researchers – as long as positions can be found within the academy and in Social Economy organisations that will allow them to carry on their work.

Unfortunately, developing that kind of sustainability will not be easy. The academic world admits significant engagement with a new field only with reluctance because it often means surrendering other initiatives. Few Social Economy organisations privilege ongoing, sustained generalized research, the kind of enquiry the field needs.

4. *Publications.* All of the nodes, the Hub, and some of the associated Social Economy organisations have published many of their results and there is a steady and growing stream of publications in various stages of development. Appropriately, enough, they take many forms: books, articles in refereed journals, articles in a variety of non-refereed publications, fact sheets, and workshop materials. Researchers from CSERP have prepared or are preparing two theme issues for major Canadian academic journals. We anticipate that there will be a substantial and increased flow of publications over the next two years, increasing substantially the 200 we estimate have already appeared (we will tabulate an exact number over the next year or so).
5. *Conferences.* Similarly, we have made extensive contributions to a wide range of conferences – within the academic world, in policy and public fora, and in meetings of Social Economy organisations. We estimate that people

associated with CSERP have made over 250 such interventions (again, we will have a more complete and accurate total within a year or so). One feature of many of the interventions is that they have been in fora and places where they could help foster enlarged community engagement with SE activities: in other word they have been action oriented to some significant degree. In the process, they have played their part in encouraging universities to become more engaged with community revitalization and increased levels of local accountability, an important initiative now evident at several Canadian universities.

6. *Knowledge mobilization.* Various members of the Partnership have attempted to mobilize the knowledge they have gained from their own research activities and from other research activities within CSERP. They have held several local and regional dialogues in doing so and they have made excellent use of their own websites as well as that of the Hub. Some of their leaders have been interviewed on radio, television and in the press. Partnering Social Economy organisations have also used results of CSERP projects in their information, lobbying, and training activities. Over the last few months, the Hub, in collaboration with the nodes and CCEDNet and with special funding from SSHRC, has held a number of regional sessions exploring five papers on different aspects of the SE, all prepared by researchers within CSERP. More are scheduled or soon will be.

7. *Other forms of communication.* We have experimented with a variety of ways to communicate about the SE and to disseminate our work in trying to

help develop understanding about it. Telelearning and webinar sessions have proved to be a very successful ways in which to communicate ideas, foster dialogues, and encourage collaboration (for the Hub's 20 telelearning sessions held in collaboration with the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, see <http://www.socialeconomyhub.ca/?q=content/telelearning-sessions>). E-Bulletins have also proved to be useful (for example, see <http://www.socialeconomyhub.ca/?q=content/e-bulletins>). The Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northern Ontario node has produced a very successful and attractive museum display, which they are taking to many communities in their region. It is a useful way to reach into communities and it is to be hoped that it specifically can be expanded upon in other regions.

Some Forthcoming Activities

I would like to draw your attention to a number of activities over the next 14 months within CSERP or associated with it.

1. From May 30th to June 1st, there will be a "Summit on a People-Centred Economy" in Ottawa organized by a number of the key SE organisations in Canada and supported in part by the Hub.
2. On June 1 there will be a youth SE conference at Concordia University in Montréal.
3. From June 2-4 ANSER (Association of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research) and CASC (Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation) will be

holding their meetings, also in Montréal at Concordia University. CSERP played a useful role in helping create ANSER and much of its work has enriched the activities of CASC. I suggest that you look at the programmes on their web sites. In my judgment, they are remarkably rich in subject matter, in the range of methodologies involved, in their mingling of universities and communities, and in their potential to contribute to building a better Canada.

4. Each of the regional nodes will be having one or more special events over the next year to celebrate the work they have done and to make it more readily accessible. You can quickly access each of the nodes through the links on the Hub web site to see what they are planning. In the process you will see the differences in emphasis among the nodes, reflecting researcher interests in part but also the different perspectives in the Canadian regions and, indeed, within each region.
5. The Hub, in collaboration with CCEDNet will be continuing to sponsor the telelearning sessions, which, like all previous conferences, will be downloaded on the Hub website. They therefore can be accessed anywhere in the world.
6. There will be numerous publications appearing. At the Hub we are in the process of developing e-books on specific themes. Each node, as well as some collaborating S.E. organisations, have impressive plans to publish the results of their work

7. We are planning on “final events” for CSERP as an entity at the CUEXPO conference in Waterloo, Ontario, next May (CUEXPO is a conference devote to considering university-community relationships) and at the Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences Congress, in May/June 2011 in Fredericton, New Brunswick. We will endeavour to make the work of all the CSERP partners prominent at these conferences and we would welcome ideas about how we can give greater publicity to the international Social Economy as well.

Some Challenges

Again, I do not have the time or space to discuss all the challenges we have faced, but I hope it might be useful to reflect on some of the more obvious ones – at least as they have seemed to me.

1. *Some specific Canadian issues.* From what I have seen and read, the national contexts within which the SE has emerged and is identified are essential in trying to understand what is being done and what is possible. While it is always very helpful to search out underlying conformities and universal theory for the SE, in the end there are always important dimensions that are shaped by national and regional/state/provincial experiences as well as local circumstances. Thus the SE in Canada is shaped by historic and contemporary differences between its Francophone and Anglophone communities and between them and Indigenous Peoples and ethnic communities. It is caught within the Canadian federal/provincial dichotomy that is both similar and dissimilar

to federated structures in other nations around the world. It must work within the somewhat different and often financially limited local government structures across our country. It is seriously affected by how Canadians have thought about the welfare state for some eighty years and particularly how it is viewed today. It is drawn to contemporary social and economic problems, some of which, such as the pace of migration and the nature of international relationships, are arguably different in at least degree from what we knew in the past. The SE must fit within the ideological frameworks currently in vogue or find ways to contest them in a serious and sustained way. Our university and research communities are confronting challenges that, while not unlike those facing similar institutions elsewhere, are essentially tied to the vicissitudes of Canadian politics, economic policies, and university politics; finding a place for the Social Economy within them is a struggle despite what has been accomplished.

I was once told by a much-travelled European friend that you could always tell who the Canadian was at an international gathering: it was the person who had trapped some poor unsuspecting guest in a corner and then went on interminably about the intricacies of the Canadian constitution and the angst caused by our national identity crisis. I have no intention of living up to that stereotype, so I will resist the temptation to discuss more the specifically Canadian issues that inhibit the development of the SE further, except to say that, for us in Canada, they

are the most important ones we face, just as their national circumstances are for most SE advocates in other countries.

2. *Continuing skepticism.* We have faced and are facing a continuing skepticism within the public square from people who complain that it is not clear what the SE is about or who deny the possibility of building the kinds of coalitions promised by the Social Economy concept. Most of us continue to deal with this by steadfastly carrying out research into the SE, typically defined by institutional form (i.e., voluntary organisations, co-operatives, foundations, and mutuals), though some of our number would draw the circle even wider. I believe we have made substantial progress in gaining support for the SE concept. Moreover, commenting personally, I do not think there is any other realistic alternative to persisting in making the case, though some would try to adopt another name, such as the Solidarity Economy or variations on social enterprise, partly to avoid the debate over the nature and possibility of the SE, partly to urge greater mutuality among its proponents, and partly because of the personal attractions that accrue for prophets of an apparently new paradigm. While I respect the sincerity of those who would pursue such alternatives, I suggest that a name change will simply recreate the problem in another context. I think it is best to stay with the SE perspective, deepen and solidify its intellectual roots and strengthen its practice base. I think we need to stare down and work through the challenges emanating from prevailing simplistic economic assumptions about the market place –

especially since the SE as a concept is no less blurred or complex than the convoluted nature of private enterprise if one were to look at it dispassionately and fairly. As far as I am concerned, we must stay the course.

3. *The centrality of Economics.* Particularly in Anglophone North America, the dominance of neo-liberal Economics is a serious impediment for the development of the Social Economy. While there are growing challenges to this paradigm in Social Economics, Environmental Economics, Feminist Economics and the New Institutional Economics, the dominance of what became mainstream Economics in the 1970s remains essentially unquestioned in much of the media, in many universities, and in government circles. There were some efforts to address this issue within CSERP, but there were not enough and I think it is a major challenge for the SE. I am delighted that CIRIEC International is addressing this issue directly within CSERP, but I believe something more and something much more systematic needs to be done. In my view, our experience has shown how important it is to do so.
4. *Bridging differences.* The Social Economy world tries to bring together people and organisations that in most instances have not worked closely together. In fact, both the Social Economy and the academic world are grounded in competitive models for the securing of funds and for individual or group advancement. And yet, aside from wishing to live the values we extol, the importance of deepening collaboration across the

sector and among university researchers engaged in it cannot be overestimated. It is important, even a necessary condition for significant success. We have seen differences between the sector and the academy and differences within both groups. We have made progress in overcoming some of those differences, but much more could be done. Pursuing narrow interests may result in small piles of leftovers for a few; engaging mutual effort seriously could and should lead to the preparation of a banquet for many, not least those suffering in many ways within our society.

5. *Privileging and sustaining engaged research.* It has become a common cliché to say we live in a “knowledge” economy, a concept widely attributed to the work of Peter Drucker. That tends to mean that knowledge has become a factor in the contemporary means of production as important as capital, labour, marketing strategies and acquisitions. In today’s economy, the production and management of knowledge creates jobs and produces wealth. It is demonstrably obvious when one examines the directions in which the manufacturers of much knowledge, the universities, are generally going. It is important when one sees how, even in times of considerable and deepening constraint, support for university commitments to aspects of the production and application of some forms of knowledge dimensions remains untouched, even replenished by governments.

In part, that is why the research and the knowledge prepared through

the Social Economy approach are so important. Its engagement with communities, its capacity to foster greater community wellness, its ability to address both social and economic issues and to recognize the need to do so – all of these qualities are important for the fostering of a different kind of knowledge economy than is usually presented. For that case to be made, however, the people who create social economy knowledge need to privilege it within their personal, community and institutional lives. For those primarily involved in activating social economy institutions and projects, research is more than an asset to be employed, an advantage to be gained for institution building, or a source of income to be secured in difficult times. For those within the academy, it is more than a reward to be earned when peers accept, when the conference is over and the article appears.

Research and knowledge are at the centre of what the Social Economy is all about. It needs to be sustained in a generous fashion; its participants need to enter into in the spirit of mutuality, openness and concern for the common good; in short, the essential values that ennoble the Social Economy quest.

I think we achieved some dimensions of that more perfect state within CSERP, though in some ways we fell short of the mark and both individual and institutional interests limited what we were able to accomplish. The future though is another matter and the challenge that besets us is how to build on what we have collectively started to do, how we can help build a

knowledge society that is different from what that concept is taken to mean. The ultimate test of CSERP will be how well we rise to that challenge.