

Project Update

August 2003

Cluster 1: Co-operative Consumer Identities in Urban Communities

Researchers are meeting with partners such as MEC, Calgary Co-op, FCL, and Saskatoon Credit Union, to explore partnerships in more detail. This has included discussion of existing in-house research and identification of new areas of mutual interest. Surveys are currently being created, and researchers in this cluster are working with their counterparts in cluster 2 to develop some common survey features to explore issues of identity and membership for members, employees, and managers. Data gathering is scheduled to begin in fall 2003.

Cluster 2: Co-operative Membership and Changing Boundaries of Community

This cluster includes the study of co-operative enterprises in the Atlantic provinces, Québec, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Researchers based at Mount St. Vincent University, partnered with the Consumers Community Co-operative (CCC) in Atlantic Canada, are investigating new forms of membership participation and democratic control structures in CCC in light of both mergers and community context. Results will shed light on how membership contributes to the social capital of organizations and of the communities in which they are located.

Site visits took place this summer between University of Saskatchewan researchers and participating co-ops and credit unions in the Prince Albert area of Saskatchewan and the Interlake Region of Manitoba. These visits allowed confirmed partners, and potential new ones, to engage in in-depth discussions of the research, and to explore the unique nature of partnerships.

Regional profiles are being created to provide essential background information for this portion of the research.

Researchers affiliated with the Université Laval and the Centre de recherche sur les innovations dans l'économie sociale, les entreprises et les syndicats, Université du Québec à Montréal, are working with co-operatives operating in a number of capacities and industries in Québec. Partners include forestry co-ops, health care co-ops, and other multistakeholder social service co-ops. In keeping with the regional focus of this cluster, all research partnerships and membership studies pay particular attention to changing characteristics of membership and identity and their relationship to notions of social cohesion, and the regional contexts of co-operative enterprises.

Cluster 4: Information Technology and the Co-operative Redefinition of Community

Research planning for this cluster is focusing on a theoretical study of business organization and network models, and case study research exploring how co-operatives are using the Internet for communication and business purposes. Some research partners from other clusters are expressing interest in this area, and issues of information technology are being incorporated into research tools being developed in other clusters. Particularly relevant to this cluster is the new dotCoop domain name and the issues of co-operative identity, membership, and marketing. Research in this cluster is more speculative in nature and slower to get underway.

Cluster 3: Co-operatives and Aboriginal Cultures

Researchers in this cluster attended the 2003 Arctic Co-operatives Ltd. AGM and engaged in fruitful discussions with partner co-operatives and interested co-op members. A number of potential research sites were identified with the assistance of ACL managers and members, and researchers are now preparing submissions for ethics approval of the research from these communities. If the research is approved, data gathering for this cluster may begin in the summer of 2004.

What is social cohesion and why does it matter to co-ops?

Social cohesion means membership in a community.

Co-ops are based on it, and may help to create it. This is what our project is investigating, what researchers are discussing with our community-based partners. It is also the subject of the forthcoming book *New Directions in Co-operative Research and Practice*, published by the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan.

Student Researchers

We have hired four summer research students to further the progress of this project. Their activities include assembling profiles for understanding the **regional dimensions** and impact of co-operative membership; analyzing **public relations** literature and member communications material for each of the clusters; identifying and reviewing the literature relating to **Aboriginal cultures** and co-operation; and surveying **municipal leaders** for their views on co-operatives in their communities.

Ethics Review

The research proposal received **umbrella ethics approval** from the University of Saskatchewan following the notice of award in 2002. Approval was based on an understanding of the participatory and evolving nature of research partnerships, and finalized versions of data-gathering tools will be submitted as they are developed. Research conducted in **northern Canadian** communities requires ethics approval from territorial and local governments in addition to extensive community consultation and support. Critical to all these considerations of ethical research conduct is, of course, **individual ethical approval and research agreements** established between participating co-operative organizations and cluster researchers.

Scholarships

Graduate student scholarships at both the PhD and MA level have been awarded, and some are **still available**. These awards are open to students entering any discipline or any interdisciplinary program of graduate studies at the University of Saskatchewan, or any other institution that provides equivalent matching funds. Successful applicants will work on cutting-edge disciplinary and interdisciplinary research as part of a cross-

Canada, interuniversity, and university-community team based at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. Summer research stipends are included in the awards. See the website for more information.

Conferences

A number of researchers working on aspects of this project presented papers at the recent conference "**Mapping Co-operative Studies in the New Millennium**" held 28–31 May 2003 in Victoria, BC. This international gathering on co-operative research was hosted by the British Columbia Institute for Co-operative Studies and was a joint Congress of the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation and the

International Research Committee of the International Co-operative Alliance. A number of papers coming out of the Co-operative Membership and Globalization project were presented at the conference; a selection of them can be found on the project website (www.socialcohesion.coop) under the heading "Conferences".



Publications

Watch for the forthcoming publication **New Directions in Co-operative Research and Practice**, an edited volume coming out of the national conference titled "Co-operative Membership and Globalization: Directions in Research and Business Strategies," which was held in Saskatoon 24–25 October 2002.

On the Internet

For more information about the project, partners, and researchers, please visit our website at www.socialcohesion.coop. For an overview of some of the Québec-based research, visit CRISES (Centre de recherche sur les innovations dans l'économie sociale, les entreprises et les syndicats) at www.crisis.uqam.ca/e/projetsocietariat.htm.

Contact Information

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