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**Empowerment: What's in a Word?
Reflections on Empowerment in Canada with
Particular Emphasis on Quebec**

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Introduction

Simply stated, the term empowerment refers to gaining or recovering one's own power or to giving power to someone else. Like many "buzzwords" commonly used today, it is not easily translated from English, such that empowerment is the term used in most other languages to describe this process, with some exceptions.¹ Empowerment has its roots in anarchism, Marxism and Jeffersonian democracy; it speaks to "people as active subjects of their own history". (Friedman, 1992: vi) It was the objective of political struggles such as the civil rights movement in the US, Paolo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed and feminist struggles and student protest movements in more recent history.² Today, empowerment refers both to mobilized opposition that contests the system from the outside as well as to groups, associations, movements that are inventing and constructing participatory alternatives from the inside, often in partnership or by forming alliances with various social actors, including the state.

There is a revival of interest in civil society, associations and "community" across the political spectrum, from the right in its call for renewed civic commitment to replace public sector welfare provision, to more progressive action by groups that are in many ways reinventing the welfare state to correspond with new realities in which the community, associations or civil society play an integral part.³ For Richard Sennett, the "fictive we" has come to life again, giving rise to a "new politics of hope".⁴ Others remind us that community matters but that its efforts are often compromised within a dominant paradigm that relegates community to the margins: "...community development has been just about

¹ The French most commonly refer to the English term; in Spanish the term "empoderamiento" is used, despite its awkwardness. Among other difficult to translate "buzzwords" today are embeddedness, capabilities, capacity building, to name a few. English does not have the single claim on universalizing concepts in its own language. There is no accurate way to translate "weltanschauung" from German or rapport salariale from French, to note but two widely used concepts. We are best to use the language which best serves our needs to fully grasp these conceptually loaded terms that say it all with few words.

² "Nonviolence and Social Empowerment" translated from "Gewaltfreie action" *Graswurzelrevolution*. Vol.32, No.123, II, 2000. <http://www.wri-irg.org/nvse-2-en.htm>

³ In a recent article, Benoit Levesque refers to a second generation welfare state. (Lévesque, 2005) Others speak of a new welfare mix. (Evers and Laville, 2004)

⁴ Richard Sennett (1998) *The Corrosion of Character*. New York. W.W. Norton and Company:139 in Amin, Cameron and Hudson, 2002:12.

the only strategy of empowerment attempted, however half-heartedly and sometimes (sic) with a view to disempowerment rather than empowerment in the whole repertoire of anti-exclusion policy”.⁵ Empowerment in any sense that really matters must result in a substantive transfer of resources; the presence of new actors on the scene contributing to a cacophony of voices generating noise, while important as a sociological phenomenon, is not in and of itself empowering.

Collective action has resulted in reclaiming economic resources in many parts of the world, contributing to a new paradigm that challenges prevailing views on the allocation and distribution of resources. This is occurring in new public spaces, in which the democratic re-appropriation of resources by groups, associations, movements in collaboration with other social actors is a *social activity*, as citizens negotiate new and hybrid economic arrangements to correspond to the needs and desires of their environments, radically contesting the nature and determinants of wealth creation through practice, through lived experiences.(Laville,2005) In Quebec and in other parts of Canada, these multiple publics, so to speak, reflect a growing pluralization of decision making centers, of multi-spatial sub-systems of regulation; they are part of an ongoing process of institutional innovation.(Mendell,2005) The construction of public spaces, of many publics, represents the institutionalization of new practices of political action, of empowered associational activity that are transforming collective action into political action, as newly empowered actors influence the allocation of resources through negotiated strategies of socio-economic development. For these to influence public policy, multiple “publics” must be coordinated into structured and hybrid meso and macro institutional settings. ⁶

Any significant meaning ascribed to empowerment that goes beyond the increasing numbers of citizen based movements present on the political scene and the important noise they generate, must, in our view, result in the construction of democratic economic

⁵ D. Byrne (1999). *Social Exclusion*. Buckingham. Open University Press:111 in Amin et al *ibid*:19

⁶ Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright refer to coordinated decentralization and recombinant linkages between different levels of government. See below. (Fung and Wright,2001:21-22, 32)

alternatives.⁷ The many places where this is occurring is the result of collective action, of solidarity based initiatives that have been undertaken by groups, associations, movements abandoned by a hegemonic discourse and practice that considered their hard luck as primarily an information and coordination problem to be resolved by market forces. With time, notwithstanding an intransigent commitment to this discourse, policy makers are recognizing the capacity of civil society to contest this paradigm through practice, as innovative community based socio-economic strategies multiply and produce visible results. While some progressive critics remain disturbed by the need for negotiated strategies involving all local actors – the business community and all levels of government - others recognize that for these democratically based initiatives to work, they must have broad support and penetrate the so-called mainstream. (Friedman, 1992) Building civic organizations is itself an empowering social process, but the reality of civil society is to recognize its diversity. The political challenge has been to negotiate strategies that speak to this diversity, while at the same time remaining committed to an alternative and democratic development strategy. For this to succeed, the support of the middle class is crucial (ibid,161-152). “To create a modern sense of community we need to open up public spaces where people with diverse interests, skills and resources can meet, debate, listen and cooperate to find common purpose and develop shared values”.⁸

On a larger scale and more conceptually, these place-based alternative strategies are contributing to a theoretical reflection on the economy that has yet to take place in any coherent manner. There is certainly a legacy of writings to draw upon that spans the utopians, Austro-marxists, guild socialists, the pricing debates in the 1920’s, the economic planning debates of the 1930’s that challenged both market liberalism and central planning, to name but a few. (Mendell,1990) Not surprisingly, many writers refer to the work of Karl Polanyi as an important reference and inspiration. (Polanyi, 1944; 1977) Contemporary

⁷ I am in full agreement with John Friedman on this important point without in any way diminishing the role of protest movements. It is the coordination between those working on the outside (protest) and those on the inside (proposition) that brings about empowerment as protest noise provides the conscience for developing democratic alternatives on the ground, that are rooted in protest movements. Solidarity between those working on the inside and those on the outside is not always easy to build. (See M. Mendell, 2003)

⁸ C.Leadbeater (1997). *The Rise of the Social Entrepreneur*. London.Demos:24 in Amin et al, *ibid*:12.

economist, Pat Devine demonstrates that democracy and planning are not incompatible in his proposed model of negotiated planning, drawing on some of this legacy to construct a new paradigm for a democratic economy. (Devine, 1988). The concept of a negotiated economy captures the practices we are describing. In his most recent book, Jean Louis Laville writes that this process of democratizing the economy is under-researched (Laville,2005) It is a process of empowerment. Community based initiatives are often interpreted as responding to market failure, a means to resolve externalities, to generate employment and enterprise development. While these objectives are foremost and critical for socio-economic revitalization, the development of solidarity through economic activity is rarely addressed.

Collective action has given rise to a plethora of innovative transformative strategies in the North and in the South, especially in the last 30 years though many have a much longer history. But as some of our stories of Quebec and Canada will reveal, the solidarity (often fragile as it may involve competing groups) underlying these initiatives has generated broader mobilization that, as we noted, is indispensable to the consolidation of these initiatives.⁹ The script for re-embedding the economy is being written by citizens with intimate knowledge of their own communities. In so doing, they are contributing to a broad process of social learning, a radical cognitive process that moves from individual spatial settings to new political spaces that institutionalize these processes. How this occurs is not yet well understood. The work of researchers empirically documenting these experiences is a critical first step.¹⁰ Emergent practices are only evaluated on the basis of results and not on process. They remain under analyzed and under theorized.

⁹ Solidarity is both the basis for and the outcome of these initiatives. The solidarity that underlies the construction of these initiatives then becomes the foundation for an expanded solidarity as these experiences mobilize citizens not initially engaged but positively affected by these innovative practices. And the multiplication of these initiatives (with their own specificities, of course) requires the construction of yet new solidarities.

¹⁰ This is an epistemological and methodological issue. In *The Livelihood of Man*, in which Karl Polanyi develops his idea of the substantive economy, an important reference for our work, he writes: "The scholar's endeavor must be, first to give clarity and precision to our concepts, so that we may be enabled to formulate the problems of livelihood in terms fitted as closely as possible to the actual features of the situation in which we operate; and second to widen the range of principles and policies at our disposal through a study of the shifting place of the economy in human society...Accordingly, the theoretical task is to establish the study of man's livelihood on broad institutional and historical foundations. The method

How are public spaces constructed? Why? Do actors come together only to resolve crises? Do actors come together to collaborate in developing alternative socio-economic development strategies in which the stakes are much broader, requiring a commitment of a different nature? Does empowerment occur only when there is also a transfer of resources to communities, to associations, to numerous “publics” associated with civil society initiatives? (Friedman,1999; Lavielle, 2005) What are the links between the political and economic dimensions of collective action, of “empowered participation”, in a larger sense? This needs to be explored sociologically to identify the many emergent publics and those structured public spaces where debate takes place. (Lavielle, *ibid*:12) To address the question of empowerment, these larger issues need to be raised so as to move forward from telling important stories to evaluating their larger impact on societal transformation, however slow and incremental this may be.

In their book, *Civic Innovation in America*, Carmen Sirianni and Lewis Friedland conclude as follows.

The choice to build a nonpartisan movement committed to learning openly and self-critically from a pluralistic array of civic practices and models is, in our opinion, strategically wise and politically principled. (Sirianni,2002:261)

Sirianni and Friedland do not minimize the complexity of designing new organizational and institutional capacities for collaborative problem solving and democratic learning. In a comprehensive study of community innovation in the US in which they interviewed more than 700 individuals over a 7 year period, Sirianni and Friedland explored new forms of community building and empowerment that built on four decades of civic innovation. The basis for doing similar important empirical work now exists in Canada with the recent creation of a national network of community economic development organizations, a newly

to be used is given by the interdependence of thought and experience. Terms and definitions constructed without reference to data are hollow, while a mere collecting of facts without a readjustment of our

formed coalition between this network and a network of social economy organizations in Quebec, the publication of an extensive study on the voluntary sector across the country, and the participation of foundations and government in supporting this work.¹¹ As this is a relatively recent need that reflects the transformation of the Canadian welfare state and the growing involvement of civil society in a reconfiguration of the socio-political environment, the work remains to be done. By exploring empowerment, it is useful to ask the same questions that Sirianni and Friedland raised in their study. Similar to their findings, we know that in Quebec and in other parts of Canada, associational assets are unevenly distributed depending on the issues addressed; historically, sectoral and identity “assets” can more easily be mobilized than a patchwork of associations and emergent and distinct institutional settings addressing particular spatial socio-economic conditions. How are these links made that are so critical to move towards empowered participation and transformative socio-economic change? (Giugni, McAdam and Tilly, 1998) Does the institutionalization of movements, associations, groups diminish their capacity for innovation in policy design? We must ask how realistic it is to assume (hope) that they can have an impact on institutional transformation, and that what we are observing is not merely contingent. What processes and mechanisms can civil society organizations influence?¹² They may in fact initiate both incorporation (institutionalization) and transformation (some aspects of existing social and political system). While I believe this best characterizes these processes in Quebec and Canada, I recognize their fragility; hence the urgency for this research that is ultimately political. (ibid:15)

perspective is barren. To break this vicious circle, conceptual and empirical research must be carried *pari passu*.”(Polanyi,1977:iv)

¹¹ The work of Sirianni and Friedland had the support of the Ford Foundation for their “Reinventing Citizenship Project” that undertook this extensive study. While several foundations support community based initiatives in Canada, a comparable long term detailed exploration remains to be done. We must, of course, recall that we are working in two distinct cultural universes. Foundations make up for a weak welfare state in the US., where many of the concerns assumed by community based organizations funded by foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller and Kettering to name just these three, have been the commitment of a welfare state committed to a different definition of social citizenship in Canada. (See Marsh, 1943)

¹² Sirianni and Friedland point to the need for “flatter hierarchies and democratization” to sustain innovation in both the community based organizations and public administration environments that are willing to work as partners and co-producers. (p.23) This is probably one of the greatest challenges and often appears as an insurmountable obstacle as embedded cultures are difficult to transform both in established organizations and certainly in state institutions. The betrayal of neo-liberal strategies has, however, helped in this regard, as governments are forced to reach out. Paradoxically, organizations rooted in civil society often resist change as it is seen as threatening.

Reflecting on empowerment in Quebec and in other parts of Canada, I am inspired by a number of authors who address empowerment implicitly or explicitly in their analysis of the transformative role of civil society organizations today, in particular, by the recent work of Erik Olin Wright and Archon Fung, in which they explore new and hybrid institutional spaces of governance designed by citizens in collaboration with the state, in both the North and in the South. (Wright and Fung, 2001; Fung, 2005) More than a wider representation on existing local bodies of governance, citizens are successfully designing institutional intermediaries of co-regulation. Wright and Fung's analysis is extremely useful in capturing the growing number of emergent intermediary spaces in which citizens are not only represented but are spearheading strategic plans on issues of general interest, be it public safety, protecting endangered species, schooling or municipal budgets¹³. One could expand the case studies presented by Wright and Fung to include many additional examples of innovative initiatives that are not necessarily designed to solve immediate problems but rather to build capacity within communities to better engage with policy on a broader front. The resultant ecologies of local organizations would consist of an array of citizen movements engaged in activities ranging from advocacy to comprehensive community development strategies ¹⁴(Sirianni:32) The question raised increasingly by researchers in different countries is how to leverage social activism. "Community building alone will not revitalize distressed communities <for example>, but no initiative will succeed without it." (ibid: 84; Friedman,1992; Laville, 2005; Laville, Levesque and Mendell, 2005; Wright and Fung, 2001). Moreover, the state needs new sources of legitimation; the consequences of state action are harder to predict. As such a framework of co-regulation is in the interest of the state as it can more easily acquire information and knowledge needed for policy formulation by collaborating with actors. The resulting "conflictual collaboration" that most frequently characterizes these relations appears to some as a "seat of the pants" or crisis management strategy that has no inherent logic or basis in public administration or civic action. This is a limited reading of a complex and evolving process of governance. To better understand these situated experiences, a "sustained public conversation" and a

¹³ I only cite these examples as they are the detailed case studies provided by the authors in this volume.

common language across networks and policy arenas are needed. For citizen groups, it involves “reconstructing identities and reframing scope and meaning of civic action”. (Sirianni: 234) For an analytical framework that captures this process, one must move out of a localized spatialized and sometimes sectoral focus, towards a political economy of citizenship that addresses the productive roles of democratic citizens in creating private and public wealth. (ibid:236)

This provides the link to the useful framework of empowered deliberative democracy or empowered participatory governance provided by Wright and Fung in addressing the issue of empowerment in its specificity as linked to particular struggles and locations, and in its universality as it also questions how civic organizations, social movements, associations, groups can coalesce around larger issues of political economy and claim access to socio-economic resources, not by lobbying for additional programs and funding (though this must never stop) but by leveraging the capacity of citizens to construct collaborative alternative development strategies with private and public sector actors. This process of reframing incorporates innovations in community based social service provision, job creation, the development of new sectors of activity, generic tools of development such as finance, training, research, an information commons, and so on. In the United States, there is common reference to the civic renewal movement and comprehensive community strategies; in Canada we are currently adapting these comprehensive community strategies in pilot projects across the country. In Quebec a long history of community activism and mobilization and a more recent history of collaboration between major socio-economic actors has made the leveraging to political action somewhat easier, though there remain many ongoing challenges. Despite these challenges that have escalated with the current government in power in Quebec, civil society is contributing to further embedding the economy in a “deliberative regulatory culture” that is transcending its local roots as it participates in designing more complex collaboration and deliberation strategies with actors and networks across the country and with state institutions at provincial and federal levels of government.

¹⁴ In the U.S., these are mostly rooted in urban protest movements. The legacy of these activities varies both within and between countries.

1- Empowered participatory governance

The framework presented by Wright and Fung is based on extensive empirical research. The case studies are highly descriptive, documenting the processes underlying institutional design in each case. In their theoretical essay, Wright and Fung address the feasibility of the normative principles underlying their model, not the least of which are the usual principal-agency dilemmas. But most important in this regard, is their insistence on the continued presence of countervailing power in these new institutional settings, that is, an adversarial organization and culture that identify the initial struggles. Countervailing power is critical to maintain the robust democracy that underlies collaborative governance, empowering those involved to resist deregulation, state shrinking and cooptation of oppositional forces that become neutralized in what can become top-down collaborative governance (ibid:264) These are challenges that such political and institutional innovations face in an environment that favors decentralization and localism for entirely different reasons ¹⁵ but that said, it is also true that “empowered participatory governance” as envisioned by Wright and Fung, is increasingly recognized by governments as a means to address a large number of issues in different institutional contexts. As such, this instrumentalization of democratic practices can also be the source for a rupture with existing state practices. Where intermediary institutional settings do not yet exist in any formal way, governments at both the provincial and federal levels in Canada are convening citizens to meet with state representatives to develop policy. Governments are being forced to engage in horizontal negotiations across ministries to correspond with the societal issues addressed that transcend a silo approach to public policy. Or as Charles Tilly and his colleagues write, the modern state is conscious of its own limits forcing the adoption of a more dialogical and flexible approach that includes the incorporation of non-institutional actors into the political system (Tilly et al:87)

This co-production of public policy in areas of the social economy and community economic development, for example, is the result of extensive dialogue between activists and government. (Mendell and Levesque, 2004) The recombinant linkages between social

actors and local, regional and national levels of government does not follow a linear pattern; in the case of Quebec and Canada it is perhaps better described as complex road map of political interaction, an ongoing process of institutional reconfiguration that has as its base a countervailing power willing to negotiate and guide the policy making process. Empowered participation means results; challenging the dominant paradigm through practice is the result of negotiation and patience. Activists are playing a double role of interlocutors of governments to initiate change, first and foremost in perceptions and then in laws and practices that incorporate a new vocabulary and policy discourse familiar to activists. It requires moving off the streets and into offices and corridors where negotiations take place and power is brokered. (Sen,2004:15-16)

Wright and Fung provide a blueprint for institutional transformation in which citizens participate in designing public policy in the public interest. The reflection on empowerment in Quebec and in other parts of Canada today that I will describe in the following pages explores what Erik Olin Wright and Archon Fung refer to as empowered participation as citizens actively shape “transformative democratic strategies” through collective action and deliberation (Fung and Wright,2001: 5). I find their focus on empowered participation extremely useful as it evaluates the impact of participation on institutional reform, hence on deepening or democratizing democracy. This calls for extensive empirical research in different settings to document a growing number of comprehensive strategies that are based in civil society.

Common to the experiences they describe is a concern with a concrete public issue that is resolved through a process of “reasoned deliberation” between empowered ordinary citizens and concerned officials, generally at the local level. (ibid:22) It is in this sense that empowerment is meaningful. More than an oppositional voice, citizens initiate a process of transformation in which they play a vital role. Their intimate knowledge of the issue is recognized by authorities as invaluable to the process. But this is not enough. Citizens are

¹⁵ The literature on rescaling and entrepreneurial localism address market driven decentralization (Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2000)

not empowered if they are simply consulted, however important this may be. These are one off invitations to participate in public debate that leave citizens on the outside and powerless to participate directly in the political process. A form of elite accommodation to democracy is not empowering. The importance of the experiences described in the Wright and Fung book and the conceptual framework that they construct out of these experiences, take us beyond buzzwords such as empowerment or many other synonyms such as capacity building, community action, community innovation, to name but a few, in that the ultimate goal must be institutional reform that creates new political spaces occupied by citizens with genuine decision making capacity.

The question we are left with is how to convert social or collective action into political action. What are the preconditions for empowerment? Fung and Wright provide an answer, I believe, which resonates with ongoing experiences in Quebec and the rest of Canada in their recognition of the need for recombinant linkages between local institutional innovation and state institutions. While this may be seen less radical in that it does not seize power, actions taken by citizens can colonize state power and transform formal governance institutions, thereby institutionalizing the participation of citizens to advance public interest more effectively through alternative institutional arrangements. If these experiments in democratic renewal succeed, empowerment takes on a wider meaning as it challenges prevailing regimes of governance. Situated experiences become the basis for wider experimentation and learning by citizens groups and state authorities that recognize the value of combining decentralized “empowered deliberation” with centralized coordination and feedback. As such, citizens engaged in empowered participatory initiatives are, in fact, democratizing democracy or designing a model of radical democracy. (ibid: 29)

2- Citizen Engagement and Democratic Renewal in Canada: Empowerment or Noise

Citizens are increasingly solicited to express their views on policy issues in a variety of ways that include polling, forums, consultations and in a growing number of so-called policy dialogues or through citizen engagement. In different settings, citizens are confirming the need democratic renewal, for public institutions to undergo a self-reflexive process so as to resituate the role of government in a changing socio-economic environment and to explore new and expanded models of deliberative governance with broad citizen participation. “Citizens have a democratic right to be engaged in policy”; there is growing pressure for the public policy process to be stakeholder driven. (MacKinnon, 2004:2)

Several provinces in Canada are inviting wider citizen participation in public policy. The most recent and remarkable example of this is the British Columbia Citizen’s Assembly on electoral reform in which randomly chosen citizens were mandated to recommend a model for electoral reform in the province following extensive citizen consultations, hearings, presentation of briefs, etc. This is an interesting experiment in empowered participation; the consultation process was led by citizens who were convened as they might be for jury duty, for example, though this time to address a complex issue that would normally have been undertaken by experts. Although initiated by government, the process was entirely handed over to the citizens of British Columbia. The proposed model, a single transferable vote, was voted on May 17, 2005. While the yes side won in over 70 of the 79 ridings in B.C., it only received 57% of the popular vote, 3% short of the required 60%.¹⁶ In Canada today, this is no doubt one of the most important experiences in democratic renewal and empowerment, despite the controversy over the shortfall in votes. Ontario has also begun a similar process for electoral reform and the federal government has established a standing committee on electoral reform, a response to these citizen-based initiatives.

¹⁶ As we write, there has still not been a decision taken whether this clear majority will be sufficient for this model to be adopted. The wrangling over the missing 3% continues.

Exercises in policy dialogue with citizens in recent years in several provinces in Canada include, among others, a Citizens Dialogue on the provincial budget in Ontario in 2004, on long term management of nuclear waste in the same year, on Canada's Future from 2002-2003 and on the Future of Health Care in Canada, the Romanow Commission, in 2002. The reform of the health care system is front and center on the policy agenda of all provincial and federal governments.¹⁷ And so the coast to coast dialogues and recommendations of the Romanow Commission received wide public coverage as did the subsequent inaction on its recommendations. What does one conclude about the process in this case? ¹⁸ Other dialogues are planned on privacy, access to data and health research as well as a dialogue with Canadian youth. (CPRN,2004).

What is meant by citizen engagement? What is its relationship to empowerment, to empowered participation and ultimately to empowered participatory governance? The examples we draw upon describe a variety of citizen engagement initiatives that need to be evaluated in the context of our discussion on empowerment, that is, in the capacity of these initiatives to lead to institutional transformation that creates and consolidates new decision making roles and spaces for citizens. Citizen engagement processes in Canada correspond with an adapted deliberative dialogue methodology that emphasizes social learning, as citizens are convened to explore issues on which they do not necessarily hold firm opinions. The purpose is to move beyond cataloguing public opinion on policy, towards a collective and interactive learning process in which issues are examined and discussed in great detail to better inform citizens on policy orientation. (MacKinnon, 2004:3) The purpose of social learning and dialogue is to develop a more educated and empowered citizenry enabled by this process to collectively influence the policy agenda. In some instances, citizens are convened to participate directly in policy development as in the case

¹⁷ This is especially true in light of the very recent controversial judgment rendered by the Supreme Court of Canada opening the way for the privatization of health care in its endorsement of private insurance to address structural problems in public health care institutions.

¹⁸ In Quebec, we are accustomed to summits, estates general, public forums, convened by government. What has captured the attention in other parts of Canada has existed in Quebec since the 1970's, especially an institutionalized dialogue between principal actors in Quebec society representing labour, business, government and most recently, the community or popular sector that is under attack by the current Liberal government in power. I will return to this in more detail below.

of community based poverty reduction strategies, a framework that combines public policy and community based approaches.(Torjman,1998:1) In others, they are asked to deliberate on issues from the outside, so to speak, to come up with policy recommendations that reflect extensive reflection, debate and dialogue. These can be at the invitation of government or the initiative of civil society. In all cases, the object of these social dialogues and active learning strategies (Torjman,2004:35) is to engage citizens in policy design.

Significant initiatives in citizen engagement have been undertaken by a number of independent research organizations and NGOs. Among those are the Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN), a national policy think tank committed to public debate and dialogue on social and economic issues in Canada, Tamarack Institute, an institute for community engagement and Caledon Institute of Social Policy, a research institute. The range of issues addressed extends from specific policy domains to designing the priorities for the future of Canada, including how these priorities might be achieved in a new and reconfigured relationship between citizens and government. They also address the issue of accountability of government given the growing disillusion with the political process, as citizens increasingly question the limits of representative democracy. Proposals for increased transparency and accountability, however, reflect more than a growing distrust of politicians and existing institutions. They call for more active public participation in policy debates, making policy makers accountable if they do not adopt the recommendations of citizens. Citizens are looking for new ways to define democracy.

In a series of papers produced by the CPRN on what it refers to as a “new social architecture”, authors address the transformation of markets, states, communities and families, the four sources of well-being for citizens, in contemporary society. (Jenson, 2004) As part of their reflection on these transformations, they invited Canadians to identify their priorities in this changing socio-economic and political environment in a series of public policy dialogues across the country. The initiative undertaken by CPRN in organizing numerous public dialogues across the country can be seen as contributing to

empowered participation in that these meetings revealed an overwhelming interest by participating citizens to play a more active role in policy decisions. A very significant finding by researchers evaluating this process of citizen engagement is the discrepancy between low voter participation rates and the very high ranking ascribed to political rights in a list of quality of life indicators prepared by citizens in these policy dialogues (Abelson and Gauvin, 2004:17) Have the limitations of representative democracy not only become disillusioning but disempowering? Citizens expressed a need for a “healthier democracy” in which governments listen to what they have to say. Public consultation processes that simply make noise and do not translate the views expressed into policy, produce cynicism about these processes. (ibid:20)¹⁹

Despite the enthusiasm expressed by participants, our question regarding whether these experiences and exercises in social dialogue are empowering in the sense in which we have chosen to use this term, remains open. This is by no means to undervalue the significance of these policy dialogues but rather to evaluate the role citizens are actually playing in constructing a new social architecture that reflects their priorities. In other words, are these no more than periodic conversations among citizens who, in the end, remain on the outside, or are they contributing to the development of a new regulatory culture in which citizens will play a decisive role?

A cynical reading would dismiss this process as a theatre for democracy or window dressing, with little if any impact on *realpolitik*. This is too easy, as it denies the importance of process. But there is the reality of dialogue fatigue. Must people participate in endless forums before they have any role in policy making? Will people remain available and committed to this process if change comes too slowly or worse still, not at all? Why would they? The evaluation of citizen dialogues across the country concluded that while

¹⁹ Citizens do not expect governments to talk directly to 30 million people. But they do want existing institutions – Parliament, legislatures and their communities, as well as the public service – to provide opportunities for people to participate in public discourse on policy issues. Citizens are asking for a space where they can be included not in debate as typically happens in town hall meetings but in dialogue, learning from each other and contributing their own ideas. (MacKinnon et al, 2003; viii in Abelson and Gaurin, 2004:21)

participants do appreciate their involvement, there is a need to institutionalize these processes, to create a space for citizens to have voice in policy design, thereby reinforcing our view that empowered participation requires institutionalization. How to engage citizens in a “deliberative process that defines the policy parameters acceptable in society”, therefore, requires an institutional context to legitimize this process. It requires a public space in which citizens are present and participate in policy dialogues where this matters, not only on the outside generating noise.

3- From Civic to Economic Empowerment: From Noise to Voice

Individuals are agents of social change; they are not passive actors constrained by their institutional settings. Today's reality increasingly confirms this as new institutional arrangements emerge and become part of a complex and interwoven institutional order. It features a great deal of experimentation "with old and new forms of politico-economic rearrangement" that cannot easily be reduced to any simple notion of transition (Amin, 2001:570). This is true whether we consider institutional change at local, national or international levels. (Mendell, 2005:2)

There are numerous examples of institutional experimentation that are replacing hierarchical forms of governance with deliberative processes, in which representatives from the private, public and popular or community based sector participate in negotiating socio-economic strategies, especially in regions of economic decline. In Canada and most notably in the province of Quebec, these institutional arrangements have multiplied over the last twenty years and have had an impact on public policy at both the provincial and federal levels of government. As emergent sub-systems of regulation or sub-altern publics (Amin,2001), these institutional arrangements are disturbing established patterns of governance, as they are transmitted horizontally across sub-systems and vertically to macro or governing institutions. Given their diversity, the picture they paint appears incoherent, a patchwork of place based strategies on the margins of prevailing patterns of societal governance, with little if any links between them, with little if any impact on prevailing institutions. However, documenting these processes and the institutional rearrangements they inspire, fits "patterned forms of disorder" (Hollingsworth, 2001:613) or "disorder within order"(Amin, 2001:567) that more accurately describes the institutional complexity of contemporary society. It is the processes underlying these institutional designs that we wish to address, as the resulting new institutional sub-systems displace existing structures and modes of governance. These processes confirm, in the words of Karl Polanyi, "the role of deliberate change in human institutions" of the "freedom to change institutions", of voice in policy design. They are forms of resistance that move beyond claims for resources and political space, beyond a politics of contestation to negotiate new social arrangements

within a plurality of institutions that intersect and overlap and in so doing, increasingly blur the boundaries between civil society and governing institutions. The result is a mix of political, social and economic arrangements that vary from community to community within regions across Canada and between countries. This is occurring both at local and multi-spatial levels (territorial) and in associational networks that negotiate with different levels of government (multi-sectoral and inter-territorial or national). Our interest is in the role of civil society in policy or institutional innovation and on actors as architects of new institutional sub-systems.

These institutional settings are the result of a process of co-evolution (Paquet, 1999), a combination of learning, resilience and cultural adaptation as those more accustomed to confrontational or adversarial relationships, establish collaborative partnerships to reach shared objectives. Experiences have shown that incorporation of groups, movements, associations into institutional spaces in which they co-habit and work in partnership, facilitates the transformation towards more democratic forms of governance. Institutionalization of these practices and processes further facilitates their integration into the public agenda. (Tilly et al, *ibid*) Conscious of its limits, the state turns to non-institutional actors and participates in institutional innovation by initiating processes of co-regulation, especially when citizen-based socio-economic initiatives succeed where strategies adopted by government have failed. Examples of this exist within several regions across Canada and most recently at the federal level with the recognition of capacity of the social economy.²⁰ This is more advanced in Quebec due to the strong presence of social movements and to the networking of actors so that they are able to negotiate with government with a single voice.

Local actors are transforming their communities by reclaiming knowledge, by denying the narratives of inevitability through practice in an institutional context in which dialogue and negotiation are transforming regimes of governance, shaking the unchallenged authority of

²⁰ The federal government explicitly recognized the role of the social economy in the Prime Minister's Throne Speech following its election in 2003.

the state. Citizens' organizations, movements, associations, are the architects of new sub-systems of participatory governance. They are instituting processes of economic democratization, re-embedding the economy in social contexts, designing sustainable approaches to development that correspond with the needs and desires of communities and developing the appropriate tools to achieve this. Processes of economic democratization are under way that are re-embedding the economy in social contexts include community and local economic development, the social economy, new instruments of capital accumulation and norms of social accounting and legislative reform. Collective ownership, social entrepreneurship, social investment compete effectively with private ownership and individual profit.

4- Comprehensive Community Initiatives

Comprehensive community initiatives are community based approaches to social, economic and environmental problems. They are multi-stakeholder processes of participatory governance, involving organizations, sectors of activity, citizens and government, drawing on local experience, expertise and knowledge, bringing new resources to strategic decision making at the local level. (Torjman, Levitan-Reid and Cabaj, 2004) Unlike citizen engagement, these are not broad based consultations; comprehensive community initiatives require institutional settings to negotiate, debate and draft socio-economic development strategies reflecting the needs of local communities. They require institutional innovation. This approach challenges prevailing theories of wealth creation that consider resource allocation as the job of the market and social provision as the obligation of a thin State. It demonstrates the transformative capacity of collaboration and partnership among citizens. Poverty is the concern of all members of a community. Citizens can be mobilized to work for the common good of their communities.²¹ The poor are not passive targets of government programs; they must be included in a process to transform their lives.

There are numerous examples of comprehensive community initiatives across Canada.²² It is in these situated institutional spaces of horizontal and participatory governance that the necessary links between health, education, income security, employment and sustainable growth, between social and economic phenomena are being made, those links that

²¹ See Gianpaolo Baiocchi's chapter in Fung and Wright (2003) on the empowerment of the poor in the participatory budget process in Porto Alegre, for example (Baiocchi, 2003:45-76).

²² The examples are too numerous to discuss in a short article, but I would like to note a few that are addressing strategic issues at a local level. A key influence cited in all publications is RESO, a community economic development initiative in Montreal that I will discuss in more detail below. Some other examples are Victoria, British Columbia's Community Social Planning Council, a multi-sectoral Community Council that acts as convenor for the Quality of Life Challenge, a community based organization made up of people on low income developing socio-economic transformation strategies; in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the Core Neighborhood Council in partnership with the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition and Saskatchewan Social Services has developed a 20 year vision for transformation. This example is also one of many that are building significant research capacity. In Manitoba the government created an inter-departmental Community Economic Development Committee of Cabinet; Nova Scotia's Sustainable Community Initiative includes federal, provincial and municipal governments and First Nations, and so on. For detail on these initiatives, readers are encouraged to go to the website of the Caledon Institute on Social Policy and Tamarack Institute. (Sherri, Eric and Marc, 2004; Toye and Infanti, 2004)

governments are still unable to make in any coherent manner at the macro level.²³ Communities are mapping assets and setting priorities. Governments are being asked to provide the data; citizens are transforming this information into knowledge. These are processes of “self-conscious institutional design” (Fung and Wright, *ibid*:22) that until recently have existed as fragments of institutional innovation.

Community economic development (CED) is a comprehensive community initiative that integrates social, economic, cultural and ecological goals of local communities. There are approximately 3000 organizations or initiatives engaged in community economic development (CED) in Canada. CED gives voice to local actors and priority to community needs.

CED can be defined as action by people locally to create economic opportunities and enhance social conditions in their communities on a sustainable and inclusive basis, particularly with those who are most disadvantaged. CED has emerged as an alternative to conventional approaches to economic development. It is founded on the belief that problems facing communities – unemployment, poverty, job loss, environmental degradation and loss of community control – need to be addressed in a holistic and participatory way.(<http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/>)

Many CED initiatives are located within hybrid institutional settings created by the state; others have been developed by civil society organizations enlisting state and private sector collaboration and partnership. For example, in 1987, the Canadian government recognized the need for community based economic planning by establishing Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs), non-profit organizations, committed to developing community capacity. These meso or institutional sub-systems, address poverty in rural regions with community based development strategies. Community Futures is a

²³ There have been many challenges to mainstream thinking and its separation of economic and social phenomena. The relevance of the work of Karl Polanyi, has already been noted. Amartya Sen’s writings on capabilities and functionings was path breaking in this regard resulting in the construction of the Human Development Index that makes the direct link between health, education, nutrition and discrimination on people’s capabilities. (Sen, 1995) The work of John McKnight on an assets based approach to communities has been extremely influential in moving out of a model that addresses low income communities from the perspective of needs and deficiencies, introducing community mapping, for example, itself an empowering process. (McKnight,1995)

“community driven economic renewal initiative, assisting communities in rural Canada to develop and implement innovative strategies for dealing with a changing economic environment. At the heart of the Community Futures approach is a firm belief that “local decision-making is the key to enabling communities to shape their futures”. (<http://www.communityfutures.ca/>) CFDCs provide services including technical assistance, training and development loans. They initiate a process of strategic planning, research and feasibility studies; they implement CED projects. (ibid). Local needs and opportunities are debated and negotiated between different levels of government, the private sector and civil society organizations. Researchers codify community knowledge and participate in policy design. CDFCs also play an important leveraging role enabling communities to access additional economic resources.

CFDCs are partnerships involving all local actors in setting priorities and developing suitable programs. An informal Pan-Canadian Group of CFDCs was established in 2000 that provides a network for the 268 CFDCs across the country. This followed a similar initiative undertaken in 1999 by civil society actors engaged in CED initiatives to create a national network. The Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) was established to build a “communities agenda” and to legitimize community economic development as an effective and comprehensive socio-economic development strategy.²⁴ Its role is to promote sector development and engage in policy advocacy. CCEDNet serves its members by providing information, surveys of current practice, case studies, new development tools and “evidence based policy recommendations to all levels of government”, thereby raising public awareness, itself a strategic political role (Toye and Infanti, 2004:3). Following extensive consultations in 2000-2001, CCEDnet produced a National Policy Framework outlining the enabling policies necessary to consolidate and scale up these community based initiatives. The establishment of CCEDnet has generated new possibilities in Canada that did not exist just a few years ago. This networking of initiatives has increased the visibility of a diversity of experiences that are implementing alternative and innovative strategies of sustainable and equitable development within hybrid participatory institutional contexts; for example, new community resource tenures

and eco-system management strategies within rural communities and community based strategies to address unemployment, poverty and social exclusion that engage government, the private sector and civil society actors as partners in socio-economic revitalization within both urban and rural settings. (ibid)

All three levels of government support CED in varying degrees in different regions of the country. A survey conducted by CCEDNet in 2003 identified five federal government departments and four regional development agencies with commitment to community economic development. A similar provincial and territorial survey for 2002-2003 revealed that 12 out of 13 jurisdictions have some engagement with CED and that 8 of these have implemented related policies. Community agencies and municipalities are also involved in many CED initiatives. Still, despite this involvement of government, it is most often contingent or program oriented, scattered and uncoordinated. But it is also true that the growing number of viable alternatives are demonstrating that there are clear benefits for government to participate, which inspired the current federal government's commitment to support CED initiatives, and, most significantly, to open new policy arenas, a major step in consolidating government involvement at the federal level. Moreover, community actors are playing an instrumental role in shaping this policy framework, in the co-production of innovative and enabling public policy.²⁵ Actors have been empowered to draft policy in an area that is new to the federal government, forcing the necessary shift towards horizontal thinking, certainly a critical first step towards horizontal integrated policy formation.

While the number of CED initiatives grow and their achievements become better known and understood by a larger public, there remains the need to better understand the transformative capacity of CED. For example, CCEDNet recently initiated a two and a half year Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network Project (2003-2006) to explore how such strategies are contributing to social inclusion.(Toye and Infanti,2004) In

²⁴ <http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/>

²⁵ The federal government has implemented several concrete policies targeting CED and the social economy. The Secretariat on the Social Economy recently established within the Ministry of Social Development is responsible for this sector of activity. As well, the government has allocated has \$134 million to the social

an initial study, the authors remind us that the tools to measure the impact of exclusion and marginalization on peoples lives and on increasing costs for government are inadequate, despite the growing number of social indicators that are being designed for this purpose . What is clear is that many comprehensive community initiatives across the country are implementing social inclusion strategies, but they have not been evaluated in this context. The objective of this CCEDNet project is to initiate peer learning among actors to develop a research framework for social inclusion based on successful strategies that are not widely known and to understand their underlying processes. This project is creating opportunities for direct exchange between practitioners who are implementing social inclusion strategies as well as other formats in which CCEDNet's broad membership can participate.

The realization by actors involved in innovative practice that they have been unable, to date, to comprehensively evaluate the impact of community economic development on social exclusion is a paradox and an important lesson. Because CCEDNet has a political agenda to put CED on the policy map, its focus has been on presenting measurable results, and as a strategy, this is working. But its priority is to empower people and communities. For this it recognizes the need for continuous peer learning as well as popular education tools to reach local citizens and groups not directly involved in CED initiatives.

The acquisition and transmission of knowledge is a social process; it is a process of empowerment (McCormick, 2002:274). Raymond Williams wrote that for change to occur, it is necessary to mobilize the imaginations of people so that they believe that change is possible.²⁶ This is not easy in environments that have been disempowered by economic decline and a disillusion with government unable to redress this situation. But as we have learned from popular education, the validation of daily life experience does mobilize imaginations. Public spaces are needed for this dialogue and interactive learning to take place. One of the projects that CCEDNet cites as an example of a community based initiative contributing to social inclusion is Vibrant Communities, an innovative policy

economy: \$100 million capital fund, \$17 million for capacity building and \$15 million for partnership-based research on CED and the social economy. (See Mendell and Levesque, 2004)

dialogue, initiated by Tamarack Institute, Caledon Institute of Social Policy and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in partnership with the federal government. The objective of Vibrant Communities is to empower citizens in local communities to address complex issues and design policies for poverty reduction and economic revitalization. Vibrant Communities is actively engaging citizens in strategic level interventions. (Torjman, Levitan-Reid and Cabaj, 2004)

Inspired by the Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives convened by the Aspen Institute in the U.S. in 1992, Vibrant Communities is a four year pan-Canadian learning partnership created in 2002 that includes 14 cities across Canada.²⁷ While the issues addressed and debated vary across the country from specific problems such as housing to broader questions of community capacity, this project is also exploring how a process of active learning and transmission of knowledge from actors to policy makers strengthens community capacity at the local level. These are multi-sector dialogues including representatives from business, labour, community organizations, the voluntary sector, citizens and government, convened by a designated organization in each city. The project is coordinated by a national secretariat and participating cities share their visions and strategies in a monthly web based dialogue. (Torjman,2004) A new conceptual framework and analytical tools such as community based definitions of poverty, models for community mapping and new socio-economic indicators are being developed in these multi-stakeholder settings in which citizens are actively engaging with complex information, often for the first time. Integrating the experiences of these cities through communications networks enables situated learning to scale up and construct a new epistemology rooted in local communities. Most important is the participation of ten federal departments in this project, once again, forcing a shift from a hierarchical and silo approach to policy towards horizontal policy formation as well as a critical shift from results-based to process evaluation that recognizes the value of the relationships established to carry out this project.

²⁶ Raymond Williams. *Resources of Hope* in Harvey, 2000:17.

The Vibrant Communities project has heuristic significance. Activists have been extensively documenting comprehensive community initiatives throughout the country, telling many stories. The survey of community economic development organizations by CCEDNet is the first systematic attempt to collect these stories. With only approximately 300 respondents, it is limited but most useful as there has been no comprehensive data available until now. But as CCEDNet now reflects on this, it recognizes the limitations of survey data that cannot evaluate the impact of community economic development on social inclusion, for example, and the need for peer learning. Both the CCEDNet and Vibrant Communities projects are funded by the federal government in recognition of the importance of collective social learning in addressing problems that are endemic in many communities across the country. Vibrant Communities is combining several approaches to this learning process, from the exchanges between the partners in each city to establishing linkages between the 14 cities involved as well as a diversity of popular education tools to bring these issues into the broader community. This process is an important one to observe, I believe, as it designs the means to strategically integrate comprehensive community initiatives.

The institutional spaces in which Vibrant Communities projects reside are learning environments for all participants, especially for government. The value added of Vibrant Communities is the bridging of otherwise situated and isolated experiences. (Torjman and Levitan-Reid, 2004) The numerous initiatives across the country and even within regions remain to be linked institutionally.²⁸ This project is an important first step. Institutional linking of these initiatives is a political act; it empowers isolated communities now engaged in a national dialogue to make political claims. These isolated community initiatives are transformed into political spaces in this process.

²⁷ Vibrant Communities also includes a “Gender and Poverty Program” in partnership with the Status of Women, Canada to strengthen the capacity of communities to address gender dimensions of poverty. Low income women are participating in research and workshops in this project.

²⁸ In a recent paper, Neil Bradford expresses the need for a coordinating body or mechanism of governance to network the many initiatives in London, Ontario, a medium-size city in Canada referring to other

Many of the comprehensive community initiatives across Canada have been inspired by experiences in Quebec. The references to Quebec and to the citizens' movement that drives these initiatives are extensive. Community economic development was first introduced in Quebec in the wake of the economic crisis in the early 1980's. Social activists pioneered citizen based socio-economic development strategies in low income neighborhoods hard hit by widespread unemployment and poverty in the same way as they had pioneered social initiatives in the 1960's, that have shaped health and social service delivery in Quebec since.²⁹ Economic intervention was new for those who led the movement; transforming an adversarial relationship with business and government to one of collaboration was possible because militants took the lead. It was in the collective interest to work together to devise a strategy for the community, and they were the architects. This was also possible in a political climate that invited collaboration on a larger scale between major players in Quebec society - business, labour and government- in the so-called Quebec model of "concertation". From this period, there were several "quiet revolutions" that distinguish Quebec from the rest of Canada and allowed for civil society to move from the margins, from opposition, to become an inside player with influence and credibility.³⁰ The direct involvement of community actors in economic revitalization of low-income neighborhoods and regions in the 1980's, marks the beginning of a process of institutional innovation, of the construction of political spaces for social and economic change. Comprehensive

examples of "community-driven local governance" across Canada. He cites Vibrant Communities as one of a few compelling examples of this much needed integration. (Bradford, 2005:2)

²⁹ The community health clinics, for example, established by citizens action groups were the basis for the creation of local community service clinics (CLSCs) throughout Quebec. It took 30 years to establish universal affordable non-profit daycare centers, also created by citizens movement. The Centres de petite enfance (CPE), while financed by the state, are autonomous citizen run non-profit organizations.

³⁰ The Quiet Revolution of the 1960's was a turning point in Quebec ending the dominance of the Catholic Church on all aspects of social and economic life. This historic moment ushered in a strong, centralized state and the establishment of large state-owned enterprises to move Quebec's economy forward. Quebec also had a history of social economy enterprises; the cooperative movement was an important actor from the turn of the century with the creation of the Mouvement Desjardins, Quebec's large and now multinational financial cooperative. Many large cooperatives emerged from the 1930's to the 1950's in several sectors. This so-called "old social economy" was transformed in the 1970's to become "the new social economy" as many civil society initiatives established cooperatives and associations. And finally, the direct engagement of the labour movement in the economic crisis of the early 1980's and the regulation of the economy and society by the Quebec model of "concertation". The establishment of the first labour solidarity fund, the Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs (euses) du Québec (FTQ) transformed

community initiatives developed as urgent and pragmatic responses to crisis became embedded institutional sub-systems of empowered participatory governance in Quebec society.

Inspired by the Community Development Corporations established in the U.S. 1960's,³¹ citizens established the first community economic development corporation (CDEC) in 1984 in Pointe Ste. Charles in the southwest district of Montreal, the cradle of industrialization in Canada, that now shared the fate of similar urban neighborhoods across North America devastated by economic restructuring and the crisis of the 1980's, and a model of state intervention that no longer corresponded with social and economic reality. These neighborhoods were transformed into images of corrosion and decay as one after the other, plants were closed and massive industrial sites were abandoned and left to rot. For those living in these communities and for the businesses that remained, working together with activists and the labour movement (most of the industries were unionized) was the only option. All three levels of government participated in establishing this first CDEC. Two more were created in the following two years.³²

Today, there are 15 CDECs within Quebec that are coordinated by two networks that effectively lobby to promote community economic development, Inter-CDEC for the Montreal region and the Regroupement des CDEC du Québec for the province. CDECs in Quebec established linkages with municipal, provincial and federal levels of government from the outset, distinguishing this experience from most other community economic development initiatives in Canada, that, more often than not, have been subject to

labour into a strong economic partner. This very condensed history is the background in which civil society also began to assume an economic role.

³¹ These Community Development Corporations were created as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty program.

³² These are CDEST (Montreal east) in 1985 and the Centre-Sud/Plateau Mont-Royal in 1986 (a large territory on the north-south axis of the city just east of the downtown Montreal). In 1987, in the southwest of Montreal following more plant closures, citizens formed Urgence Sud Ouest and established the Comité pour la relance de l'économie et de l'emploi dans le Sud-Ouest de Montréal (CREESOM), proposing that PEP expand its territory to include the six districts that together constitute the larger region of southwest Montreal. This later became RESO.

contingent participation of government. This was one of the findings in the CCEDNet survey of CED across Canada, in which the most frequent issue raised by practitioners was the absence of a coherent policy regime to support these initiatives. While community initiatives always struggle to maintain government programs and funding and lobby for additional support in Quebec as well, all three levels of government were involved as architects of the CDEC model, a hybrid and participatory institutional intermediary between the state and civil society, but in which both were present from the start, along with labour and business. The institutionalization of this relationship for more than two decades, makes it difficult to dismantle these structures to conform with changing political tides, not to mention that their achievements also make it harder to justify such action, whatever the underlying rationale. Establishing recombinant linkages from the beginning was critical to consolidate what might otherwise have been fragile initiatives that risked marginalization.

The experience of Pointe Saint-Charles remains a reference for community based socio-economic innovation in Quebec and across Canada. RESO (Regroupement pour la relance économique et social du Sud-Ouest) as it is known today, is a dynamic local development organization committed to “the participation of the community in setting its priorities, in its activities and in the development projects in the southwest”, notwithstanding its remarkable growth and involvement in multi-million dollar projects of urban renewal.³³ RESO’s growth and shift from saving a neighborhood to actively participating in its dynamic transformation, challenges its commitment to a citizen based strategy of alternative development, as do the many instruments of development at its disposal, such as a large investment portfolio that requires prudent and profitable investment in local development.³⁴ And so RESO has also become an important example of how comprehensive community initiatives can and must scale up without abandoning their commitment to citizen based

³³ <http://www.resomtl.com>

³⁴ I focus on RESO because of the challenges it presents in a rapidly changing urban landscape, as a test of the capacity of CED organizations that emerged in crisis settings to represent the poor and marginalized in communities, without resisting change. How to capture the gains is the challenge; how to influence the course of development; how to maintain the presence and relevance of citizens’ voices in these processes, from the inside. And there are also 56 Community Futures Development Corporations throughout rural

development. This needs to be emphasized. As a credible actor in socio-economic development, RESO has voice and participates actively in the many urban renewal projects proposed for its district. Some of these have been abandoned or considerably modified due to strong citizens' opposition. Others are interesting examples of innovative urban renewal that combines commercial and community inspired projects.³⁵ RESO convenes open meetings for local citizens to debate development proposals and design strategies that best serve the community without resisting change, without resisting transformation. These citizens assemblies are attended by large numbers of local residents as well as representatives from the business community and government.³⁶

As an organizational model of participatory governance and as an institutional model that invites wide public engagement, RESO and the CDECs throughout Quebec are powerful examples of deliberative and participatory democracy. They are institutional sub-systems of empowered participatory governance that make political claims on economic resources. The development of the neighborhoods in which CDECs are located is debated and negotiated in the same manner today as it was in the 1980's and 1990's under very different conditions. And the many social services to assist the poor and innovative economic tools and instruments to develop alternative strategies developed early on by the CDECs, such as community based finance, training businesses, promoting community business and the social economy, mentoring, to name a few, remain the bedrock of these community economic development corporations. The local community is now experiencing the second transformation of southwest Montreal as empowered citizens participating in negotiating this process, not as victims of gentrification and exclusion, the scenario that would most likely have occurred without the existence of RESO. This would not be possible without its

Quebec <les Sociétés d'aide au développement des collectivités(SADC)> that are implementing community economic development strategies.

³⁵ There are several examples of this. I note only the Lachine Canal project that stretches along the entire district of the southwest and includes residential condominiums and a mixture of private and social economy initiatives (cooperative or not for profit enterprises) in the cultural and tourism sectors.

³⁶ Several of the CDECs in Montreal face the same challenges as the city moved out of a long recession and is undergoing rapid transformation, especially in these former industrial neighborhoods, now attractive sites for commercial and residential development, but also for cultural and alternative development initiatives. Clearly, the CDECs are not the ultimate locations for decisions to be taken, but they are present in urban renewal discussions. Their input is taken seriously. As embedded institutions, their voices are not heard as noise; they are respected stakeholders in processes of urban renewal and planning.

legacy of countervail. RESO remains an important story to follow closely as CED initiatives in urban settings multiply across the country.

The community economic development movement in Quebec has withstood the constant threat of reduced budgets in the last several years and the risk of being submerged into new regional and local structures established by government in its politics of decentralization.³⁷ They have survived; their political legitimacy makes it difficult to wipe them off the map. Instead, CDECs are now integrated into this new decentralized environment, committed to mainstream strategies of local business development. Maintaining citizen-based priorities now requires more intense negotiation and debate, in some ways made easier by a legacy of resistance from the inside, equipped with alternative approaches that are embedded in these communities. These are not depoliticized environments that have become mainstreamed. As dynamic learning environments, the risk of high jacking and transforming these institutions to serve market based objectives is reduced. Most remarkably, the CDECs are surviving the current government's hostility to civil society based initiatives and to models of distributed and deliberative governance.³⁸ This is not because of their demonstrated capacity to deliver but because of their citizen based institutionalization in Quebec society.

Comprehensive community initiatives are mobilizing “the imaginations of people so that they believe that change is possible”. This is sufficient reason to believe that these experiences are not ephemeral either because government or funders or both will back off, or because the larger policy agenda that privileges market driven objectives will transform them, stripping them of their intrinsic value as socio-economic strategies. Staying the course and developing policy capacity is critical at this time. The lessons from the

³⁷ In 1997, the previous government of Quebec established local development centers (CLDs) (Centres locaux de développement) throughout the province based on the CDEC model, however, with the additional presence of elected representatives on governing bodies. The CDECs were mandated to carry out the role of these CLDs where they already existed, threatening the imposition of a bureaucratic and technocratic approach to governance and a mainstream vision of local development.

³⁸ The current government passed legislation in 2003 to create regional councils of elected officials (CRE) (Conseils régionaux des élus) greatly reducing the role of civil society in favour of elected officials, a clear statement of this government's rejection of a deliberative and a negotiated approach to regional and local development.

numerous comprehensive community initiatives across the country have identified what is missing to move these experiences forward as viable strategies of alternative democratic development. Policy integration is on the political horizon for the first time in a coherent manner. This, too, is a collaborative process in which leaders from the Quebec community movement are playing a central role.

5- Beyond the Local. Embedding Empowered Participatory Governance in a National Policy Agenda

In 1996, the Government of Quebec invited the participation of representatives of community and social movements to strategic planning meetings on economic development and job creation in Quebec, along with leaders from the business community and the labour movement, the usual participants in these discussions.³⁹ This resulted in the creation of the Chantier de l'économie sociale which became an independent non-profit organization in 1999. A network of networks, it represents social movements, community organizations, the cooperative sector, local and regional development organizations and social enterprises that integrate social and economic objectives. The Chantier has also created labour market and financial tools designed to serve and promote the development of the social economy.⁴⁰

Collective enterprise as defined by the Chantier is not only about ownership. The laws governing cooperatives apply to social economy enterprises with the addition of a commitment to participatory and democratic governance. The experience of the CDECs, the intelligent negotiating capacity of the actors involved, the commitment to democratizing the economy, to creating collective environments to produce goods and services, to innovate, to educate, to empower community are articulated in this new and innovative network. But unlike the CDECs, the Chantier is an independent organization, a *public space* that negotiates *political place* as it lobbies government on behalf of its members.

³⁹ This followed the “Marche des femmes contre la pauvreté” in the spring of 1995, in which 850 people participated in a 250 kilometre march to the National Assembly in Quebec City, demanding that the government invest in the “social infrastructure” of Quebec society. The government responded with a commitment to invest \$225 million over a five year period through a new Fund against Poverty (Fonds de lutte contre la pauvreté) and the creation of national and regional committees to study the social economy throughout the province. Most important was the broad and inclusive definition of the social economy agreed upon by committee members and presented to government. This was followed by a conference in March 1996 to which community organizations were invited and assigned to a multi-sectoral task force on the potential of the social economy to create jobs and promote economic development. The Chantier de l'économie sociale, as it was called, was a political innovation, as leaders in Quebec society collaborated with movements and groups to develop a strategy for the social economy. This was a unique event and certainly a turning point in the political economy of Quebec. Following the submission of its report to the Summit in the fall of 1996, the Chantier was given a two year mandate to represent the social economy and to promote its development.

⁴⁰ In 1997, the Chantier created RISQ (Réseau d'investissement social du Québec), an investment fund that issues loans to collective enterprise. One of the most interesting innovations has been the development of

⁴¹The Chantier plays an increasingly important mentoring and political role across Canada and internationally, sharing its expertise in the development of social economy initiatives and influencing policy at home and abroad.⁴²

As an institutional innovation, the Chantier has developed a deliberative and participatory structure of horizontal governance across sectors and activities and, most recently, a vertical structure of regional nodes to reinforce the democratic and participatory governance to which it is committed. As a national organization, it represents actors throughout the province, but it is the regions that together debate priorities that become the basis for coordinated policy development that reflects the regional diversity of Quebec. This presents a complex inter-sectoral and inter-territorial structure committed to participatory governance.

A significant turning point was the commitment made by the Prime Minister of Canada to the social economy in his Throne Speech in 2003 and the appointment of a Secretary to the Minister of Social Development with special emphasis on the social economy and targeted funding in the 2004 federal Budget. This followed extensive dialogue between the Prime Minister's office and social economy actors to develop an enabling policy agenda. It also followed several years of participatory action research in which practitioners and researchers collaborated in building a research agenda that would serve the needs of social

a parallel solidarity financial sector that includes the labour movement, the Mouvement Desjardins, a network of community-based loan funds and RISQ, to support the social economy.

⁴¹ The previous government of Quebec created an "Office for the Social Economy" (Bureau de l'économie sociale) in 2001 in the in the Ministry of Finance, later transferred to the Ministry of Regional and Economic Development in 2003. While its first location was better as Finance is the most powerful ministry in which horizontal policy discussions take place, the new location still permits for inter-sectoral dialogue.

⁴² The exchange of experience is reciprocal as actors in Quebec continue to learn a great deal from social economy experiences as they exist in other countries. The Chantier is invited to participate in policy dialogues with Europeans and with the many countries in the south. These rich exchanges have resulted in proposing policy measures adopted in other countries, such as legislation in Quebec to create solidarity cooperatives based on the social cooperatives in Italy. Social cooperatives now exist in Quebec and include producers, consumers and the community. (Lévesque et Mendell, 2004) The exchanges run both ways as the Quebec experience is appreciated especially for the vital role played by civil society in developing the social economy and in maintaining its leadership.

economy actors and provide a strong analytical and conceptual basis for their work. It also followed a difficult transition to a new government in Quebec not interested in the social economy but unable to ignore it because of its visibility and legitimacy in Quebec society. The federal initiative came at a crucial time forcing the government of Quebec to join the chorus and for the first time since its election, confirm its commitment as well.

The social economy has moved beyond situated initiatives to design an integrated multi-sectoral and inter-spatial network of networks of civil society actors empowered to influence policy at provincial and federal levels of government. It is not just economic activity with social objectives.⁴³ None of this could have happened without the history we have briefly summarized, without the resolute commitment by civil society to design economic alternatives; they recognized early on, as policy makers are only discovering today, that engaging citizens in such a project was the first and most critical step. And for this to be effective, institutional spaces were required. The social economy builds on these earlier initiatives in which it is integrated. It is a laboratory of social innovation that horizontally links networks and makes the vertical links with different levels of government, piercing through existing institutions to create new and hybrid public places of horizontal and distributed governance within state institutions. Actors are participating in designing a policy framework, in the co-production of public policy.

The comprehensiveness of the social economy that represents collective enterprise as well as an alternative development strategy that integrates social and economic objectives has opened new opportunities for institutional innovation beyond territory, but grounded in local settings. And so it has been an easy step to collaborate with the CED movement across Canada and speak with one voice. And while it may be less easy to do this with the very large and variegated voluntary sector that is primarily concerned with social issues and plays a vital advocacy role, this is also occurring. In all, these represent hundreds of

⁴³ This is closer to the Anglo-American concept of social enterprise and can be a euphemism for privatization of social services. This is not at all the concept used in Quebec and the rest of Canada where it is clear that these social enterprises are meeting new needs by creating new sectors of activity; they do not represent a transfer of public sector engagement.

thousands of people across the country and billions of dollars of activity. Civil society is finally recognized as an important economic actor that engages market, non-market (public) and non-monetary (voluntary) resources, to transform the lives of people and communities.

Conclusion

A reflection on empowerment has forced a careful look at the reality of citizen based initiatives in Canada. While the illustrations are few, they were selected to distinguish citizen engagement from comprehensive community initiatives as sources of empowerment, as we have defined this term. Both are important expressions of democracy; however, the former is not transformative, is not empowering. What we also discover in this exploration is the critical need for networking, for creating learning environments, for participatory action research and for policy innovation and institutional change. This is common to the experiences we described. Institutional change comes slowly; it is resisted, not always because of opposition, but because of institutional isomorphism that blocks change. And so a breakthrough in institutional innovation poses theoretical questions on how institutions change. Our work adds to the extensive empirical research that confirms the impact of social innovation occurring within institutional sub-systems on macro policy regimes. (Mendell, 2005) Even if this is an incremental process, these innovations are spearheading institutional reconfiguration. For this to occur, these innovations must themselves be engaged in a political project to develop the transformative capacity of what are otherwise pragmatic responses to social change. The many pragmatic approaches that have begun to translate experience into laws, theory and concepts for negotiation, that have introduced new vocabulary into policy circles that is clear and unambiguous, to replace the often ambivalent meanings associated with community based or civil society initiatives, means that these pragmatic approaches are constructing an alternative paradigm.

Alternative development is a process of social and political empowerment as those involved move from struggles to meet basic needs to political claims (Friedman: 31) And this occurs within a dominant paradigm as what appear as pragmatic approaches begin to contest prevailing doctrine. “Although mainstream as a doctrine continues to prevail, it is being challenged. In truly dialectical fashion, the counter-hegemonic model must work its way into the mainstream and then begin the long process of transforming both the mainstream and itself” (ibid:165-6). This is a long and incremental process, but one that is difficult to reverse once it is under way. On a practical level, what all governments are learning from

these experiences is the capacity of citizens to create productive spaces of employment and economic vitality embedded in innovative institutional settings that blur the boundaries between civil society and governing institutions and that they must be partners in this evolving institutional transformation.

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