



Building our understanding of the Social Economy in the North

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Social Economy Research Network of Northern Canada (SERNNNoCA)

Summary

Communities in Canada's North are currently facing substantial social and economic challenges. The social economy offers tools to help these communities face these challenges through empowerment and the formation of organizations better suited to resource dependent and Indigenous communities.



Community discussions with social economy groups in Iqaluit – November 2009

The Social Economy Research Network of Northern Canada (SERN-NoCA) is a network of researchers and community organizations that is studying the role that the social economy can play in the sustainable development of Northern Canada. It is built around the three Northern Territorial Colleges and their respective research institutions and links researchers working in the North with Northern students, community organizations, and educational institutions.

The main objective of SERNNoCA is to create a network of university and college-based researchers and representatives of community-based organizations, operating as partners, to conduct research relevant to the social economy in Canada's North. The network will ensure several key outcomes. These include:

- An increased awareness of the importance and potential of the social economy to the North,
- The enhancement of social economy capacity in the region,
- A greater understanding of alternative forms of social and economic development in the North,
- The improved performance of organizations and enterprises in areas that are important to the social economy in the North,
- New policy resources for governments relating to the social economy, and
- Better trained individuals to assist in the development of social economy organizations.

The Social Economy involves the not for profit sector that seeks to enhance the social, economic and environmental conditions of communities. Social economy enterprises are a component of the social economy that are run like businesses, producing goods and services for the market economy, but manage their operations and redirect their surpluses in pursuit of social and environmental goals.

Location

SERNNNoCa has its main office at Yukon College in Whitehorse, YT with regional offices at Nunavut Research Institute in Iqaluit, NU and the Institute for Circumpolar Health Research in Yellowknife, NT.

Partners

Northern Research Institute,
Yukon College
Nunavut Research Institute, Nunavut
Arctic College
Aurora Research Institute, Aurora
College
Lakehead University
Carleton University
Cape Breton University
Memorial University of Newfoundland
University of Alberta
Université Laval
Université du Québec a Montréal
University of Saskatchewan
University of Victoria
Institute for Circumpolar Health Re-
search
Arctic Health Research Network—
Yukon
Labrador Institute
Arctic Cooperatives

Questions session

Below we are asking a few questions in order to demonstrate how research results can be used by policy and decisions-makers in terms of community and climate change adaptation planning in the Eastern Canadian Arctic.

1) How can social economy help northern community face the challenges posed by climate change?

The ability of a community to deal with issues such as climate change or economic development is largely dependent on the strength of its social cohesion. Social capital, along with human capital, is the most effective source of community cohesion and community empowerment.

The social networks that produced social capital and formed the basis for community cohesion in traditional Inuit society were extremely effective in enabling Inuit and other Northern indigenous peoples to deal with past climate changes. Yet today this traditional cohesion is facing many challenges. The "economy of sharing," that underlay these social networks still exists but has adapted itself to new urban realities. It is now also manifested in the social economy of these communities.

Co-operatives, non-profits, and voluntary organizations have become central organizations of social cohesion in these communities. These social networks produce much of the social capital and cohesion present in contemporary Arctic communities. Under the proper circumstances these organizations can be effective agents at dealing with challenges such as climate change. But these organizations are facing challenges themselves. Research that tries to examine these challenges and what to do about them can assist the ability of these communities to face climate change issues.

2) Can you identify knowledge gaps from your organization's perspective?

In this research program knowledge gaps exist in having a complete picture of the social economy in the North. This is required to understand the types and numbers of these organizations that address issues of climate change in their activities.

A recent project supported by ArcticNet is examining the impact of transience on the social cohesion of Arctic communities. Using Inuvik Northwest Territories as a case study the researchers, in partnership with community groups, will investigate 1) the extent of mobility in the community, 2) determine what the major negative impacts of this mobility are on community organizations, and 3) discuss what can be done to mitigate these negative impacts. This information will support our understanding of social networks and abilities to deal with changes in communities and challenges that are faced.

Analysis of other communities is required to understand the varying needs of communities, the types of social economy groups that exist and how these might be involved in addressing issues of climate change adaptation. Building this knowledge base will enhance the ability of communities to recognize the resources and expertise that may already be available.

3) What is the key component of success of your network?

Partnerships are key to the work of SERNNoCa. We have researchers involved in projects and collaborations throughout the North with a number of research projects in Nunavut communities. Some of these projects will help in formulating policies to support the activities of social economy organizations.

The recent project with ArcticNet has provided an opportunity to look at the social sciences sector and connections of our research to issues such as climate change. There are growing opportunities for linkages with research networks through multidisciplinary projects to provide a more comprehensive understanding of climate change impacts and the ability of northerners to respond. We welcome suggestions for future research projects that create effective linkages with social forces that enhance our adaptive capacity.

For more information

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You can find out more information on our network on our website:

<http://dl1.yukoncollege.yk.ca/sernnoca/about>



SERNNoCA

The Social Economy Research Network of Northern Canada (SERNNoCA) is part of a national research program funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) with six regional networks and a national centre and facilitator - the Canadian Social Economy Hub. This node serves as the social economy research sector for Northern Canada.