Book Review

by Ewa Wasniewski

Community-University Research Partnerships: Reflections on the Canadian Social Economy Experience. *Edited by P.V. Hall & I. MacPherson*. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria, 2011. 259 pp. ISBN 9781550584493

Community-University Research Partnerships: Reflections on the Canadian Social Economy Experience is the first of three books published after the culmination of a five-year pan-Canadian research partnership. As a doctoral student in Educational Psychology, this book provided me with a strong foundation to understand the current practices in Community Based Research, as well as successful strategies in developing university-community partnerships. The book is well organized and provides a comprehensive overview of the different challenges and rewards of these partnerships. Drawing on different experiences from across Canada, the book illustrates how different researchers and practitioners co-constructed knowledge as a purposeful collaborative process. The authors (who are academics, practitioner-researchers, community members, students, and research coordinators) were all involved in the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnership (CSERP) between 2006 and 2012. The editors note that sharing and exploring these different research experiences could strengthen partnership development processes and inform changes to current funding models by increasing successful university-practitioner engagement.

This book will be useful for a wide audience of practitioners and academics. The first chapter is particularly effective at establishing the context of research partnerships and will be a useful starting point for future collaborations, as well as serve as a primary document for historians of the Social Economy in Canada. It outlines how CSERP's National Hub was created and how it supported the development of various Regional Nodes. Research plays a particularly important role, according to the authors, in redefining principles, practices, relationships, and organizational involvement for the exploration of successful community negotiations within the Canadian Social Economy. The authors also provide a list of key definitions that are used throughout the chapters and form some of the overall themes in the book, including: governance, networking, definition of the sector, content of research, process (methods) of research, capacity-building, evaluation, and knowledge mobilization, as they relate to partnership development.

With regards to governance, two main approaches are offered: centralization of resources (Chapters 5 and 9) and decentralization of resources (Chapters 3, 6, and 7). All of the nodes had complete autonomy to develop partnerships based on the needs of their communities. The second most frequent topic was the importance of

networking, which was linked to the varied Node structures. Networking is discussed based on the different situations, experiences, and relationships within each node. For example, Chapter 3 shares the importance for face-to-face networking opportunities in developing and maintaining effective relationships. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth exploration into the development, construction, and current structure of the Social Economy in Canada. This third theme illustrates how academics are part of a greater community and how previous relationships can inform collaborative research. For example in Chapter 5, the authors attribute part of their success in partnership development from pre-existing community-university relationships that informed their reported research. The final five themes (content of research, process [methods] of research, capacity-building, evaluation, and knowledge mobilization, within partnership development) were not as predominate but were all represented within the book. For many, three of the most interesting chapters may very well be Chapters 4, 6, and 7. In Chapter 4, the Quebec Node presents an evaluation model for checking the partnership relationship in four specific areas: co-definition, co-implementation, mobilization, and results. The authors emphasize the importance of ongoing evaluation to ensure a cohesive dynamic relationship through the research process. Chapter 6 describes how a Community Based Research (CBR) approach was applied to five different projects in Northern Ontario. The author illustrates the importance of having a flexible, knowledgeable, and supportive project manager that can navigate different challenges in CBR as well the need for non-traditional inquiry for co-constructing knowledge with communities. Finally, Chapter 7 shares cross-cultural and inter-generational experiences in relationship building and knowledge sharing. The authors note that researchers need to place more emphasis on developing culturally sensitive relationships and value community outcomes as an integral part of the research process.

The collection concludes with a description of the need for a broader view of the potential impact and changes that the Social Economy and community-university partnership research could evoke. The authors draw from experiences and call for ongoing reflection and evaluation to identify the importance of preexisting relationships as well as the key role coordinators play as cultural brokers. This thematic overview continues in the afterword, as Dr. Edward Jackson moves away from the structures of the Nodes and Hub and discusses current political structures that are affecting the Canadian Social Economy. Dr. Jackson reminds us that it takes years to change attitudes and beliefs, and even longer if we are trying to evoke change within our institutions or governments.

Two of the strengths of this book are the way it is geographically framed and the informative development of key concepts. It is noticeable that the editors planned how each chapter builds on the next, and even though the key concepts are scattered throughout the book there is an increased level of complexity in their use. It is also notable that all of the authors were truthful and authentic in sharing their successes and challenges in their respected projects. This feature makes the book more useful to other Social Economy practitioners and academics, since it does not shy away from the challenges and issues faced by CSERP participants.

The book is limited however in its ambiguous thematic organization and also in its avoidance of addressing the underlying Social Economy discourse. Not all chapters discussed or used the key terms introduced in Chapter 1, creating confusion around the use of terminology and concept application. While one could argue the Social Economy is a character in every chapter, there is only one chapter that specifically explores it as a topic in and of itself (Chapter 2). Having a more explicit Social Economy thematic framework throughout all chapters would have improved the flow of the book.

As a young academic this book does provide an excellent glimpse into the complexity of community-university partnership development within the Canadian Social Economy. Even though it was daunting and discouraging at times to read the struggles of other participants, it was encouraging to read about the different types of

research being conducted by the CSEPR. No two experiences throughout the book are the same, which highlights the importance of documenting and disseminating the process of engaged partnership research. Although funding for this National endeavour was limited and has now ended, all of the authors express the importance of continued collaboration within and between research initiatives. Most of all, the book reminds the reader that within a collaborative mindset, all research efforts must respect the unique ways that the different regions within Canada support the Social Economy.

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