ANSERJ

Canadian journal of nonprofit and social economy research /
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

Volume 12 Number 1 / numéro 1
Spring / printemps 2021

www.anserj.ca

Official journal of the
Association of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER)

Revue officielle de
l'Association de recherche sur les organismes sans but lucratif et l'économie sociale
(ARES)

ANSERJ

Vol. 12, No. 1
Spring / printemps 2021
p. 1

Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

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Funding / Le financement

Funding for this journal is provided by the Aid to Scholarly Journals program from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). / Les fonds pour cette revue proviennent du programme Aide aux revues savantes du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines (CRSH).

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada
Canada

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a491

ANSERJ
Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

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EDITORIAL / ÉDITORIAL

Strengthening the Foundations of the Social Economy and Nonprofits / Renforcer les fondements de l'économie sociale et des organismes sans but lucratif

Jorge Sousa
University of Alberta, Edmonton

Marco Alberio
Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna
Université du Québec à Rimouski

Welcome to the spring issue of the *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research* (*ANSERJ*). As we approach the beginning of summer 2021, it is important to reflect on the changes that have occurred over the past year. While there have been significant changes in how we live and work, it is important to ensure that we not lose sight of the work that occurred prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which clearly had an impact on the directions of research and practice. This past year has raised greater awareness of already existing challenges, and limits have been made more evident by the pandemic, including social and environmental (in)justice. We have also observed the emergence of new challenges inside and outside organizations and also at a territorial level. Of course, new opportunities are also emerging from this crisis. For this reason, the theme of this issue is "Strengthening the foundation of the social economy and nonprofits."

Bienvenue au numéro du printemps de la *Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale* (*ANSERJ*). À l'approche de l'été 2021, il est important de réfléchir sur les changements qui sont survenus au cours de la dernière année. Certes, pendant cette période, il y a eu des transformations significatives dans la manière dont on vit et travaille, mais il est important de ne pas oublier le travail accompli avant le début de la pandémie, même si le COVID-19 a clairement eu un impact sur l'orientation de la recherche et de la pratique. Cette dernière année nous a rendus plus conscients de certaines lacunes qui existaient déjà, la pandémie rendant celles-ci encore plus évidentes, y compris par rapport aux injustices sociales et environnementales. Nous avons constaté en outre l'émergence de nouveaux défis au sein des organismes et au-delà de ceux-ci, ainsi qu'au niveau territorial. D'autre part, dans la foulée de cette crise, de nouvelles occasions se sont présentées. Reflétant ces circonstances, le thème de ce numéro est « Renforcer les fondements de l'économie sociale et des organismes sans but lucratif ».

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a491

A key message conveyed by the theme of this issue is that, as we look ahead to efforts aimed at producing new knowledge that accounts for the experiences of the pandemic and the strategies adopted in response to it, it is crucial that we not lose sight of the experiences and knowledge that have shaped the foundations of the social economy. While there will no doubt be a desire to think of the world as pre- and post-COVID-19, there is much we can learn from how communities and organizations responded to the crisis that could strengthen the role of the social economy and nonprofits in our society. The crisis forced sectors of the social economy to develop and implement innovative responses. These innovations forced us to not only focus our attention on what is done (the output) but also on how things are done. In this way, a reflexive process is already part of the innovation. New alliances have been built (consciously or spontaneously) among actors that were less used to cooperating and, in a way, saw each other as competitors, if not opponents. Social economy organizations and the private sector are collaborating, for example, when the private sector has often considered the social economy as a subsidized sector engaged in unfair competition.

Alliances are also taking place with the state at every level (regions, municipalities, etc.). The need to act rapidly in the face of COVID-19 forced states to delegate some functions to social economy and nonprofit organizations. This resulted in the renewal of a traditional acknowledgement that, after many years, the state (and maybe also the nonprofit sector) was starting to take for granted. If this delegation of responsibilities has been a strong burden in some ways, it has also represented a sort of (renewed) pride for the social economy and nonprofit sectors. Unfortunately, this recognition has largely been reactive and has not been followed by a more formal recognition through substantial and durable financial support and changes to public policy. This ambiguous attitude of the state risks frustrating and limiting the actions of the nonprofit sector, which could once again be trapped in the so-called culture project, where work only addresses the short term and planning opportunities are very limited. However, such a strong crisis will have

Ce thème véhicule un message clé, à savoir qu'il est crucial de ne pas perdre de vue les expériences et le savoir qui sont à la base de l'économie sociale tout en générant de nouveaux savoirs qui rendent compte du vécu de la pandémie et des stratégies adoptées envers celle-ci. Bien qu'il y ait sans doute une volonté de penser le monde en fonction d'un avant- et d'un après-COVID, on doit retenir, en vue de renforcer le rôle de l'économie sociale et des OSBL dans notre société, qu'il y en a beaucoup à apprendre sur la façon dont les communautés et les organisations ont géré la crise. En effet, cette crise a motivé des secteurs de l'économie sociale à développer et mettre en place des réponses innovatrices. Ces dernières nous motivent à porter notre attention non seulement sur ce qui a été accompli (les résultats) mais aussi sur la manière dont les résultats ont été atteints. Ainsi, l'innovation entraîne inévitablement sa part de réflexion. De nouvelles alliances se sont formées (que ce soit sciemment ou spontanément) entre des acteurs qui n'avaient pas l'habitude de s'entendre et qui, à certains égards, se voyaient comme concurrents, pour ne pas dire adversaires. Par exemple, actuellement, les organismes de l'économie sociale sont en train de collaborer avec le secteur privé dans un contexte où ce dernier a souvent perçu l'économie sociale comme étant un secteur subventionné qui lui faisait concurrence déloyale.

Des alliances sont aussi en train de se former avec tous les niveaux gouvernementaux (régionaux, municipaux, etc.). Le besoin d'agir rapidement par rapport au COVID-19 a poussé les gouvernements à déléguer certaines tâches aux organisations de l'économie sociale et du secteur à but non lucratif. Ces circonstances ont suscité une certaine reconnaissance de la part de l'État alors que celui-ci (et peut-être les OSBL mêmes) avaient considéré l'économie sociale comme allant de soi pendant plusieurs années. Si la prise en charge de responsabilités accrues a, d'une certaine façon, pesé sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale, elle a aussi représenté pour eux une source de fierté (renouvelée). Malheureusement, cette reconnaissance de la part de l'État s'est avérée une réaction passagère plutôt qu'une appréciation profonde qui aurait pu mener à des changements aux politiques publiques ou à un appui financier significatif et durable. Cette attitude ambiguë de la part de l'État menace de frustrer le secteur à but non lucratif dans ses ambitions et de limiter sa marge de manœuvre. En

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long-lasting effects that require well-planned and long-term actions.

One of the ongoing objectives of ANSERJ is to ensure that it reflects the uniqueness of cultures and languages across regions nationally and internationally. This journal has an important role as a venue for voices from the field to share their knowledge. To that end, in this issue we are approaching the "Perspectives for the Field" section a little differently. For instance, we have a dialogue in French between researchers and practitioners working in Québec: **Marco Alberio, Ophélie Couspeyre,** and **Érick Plourde.** The basis of the dialogue is an exploration of transformative actions taken by community actors in Québec that predate the COVID-19 pandemic but take on a much greater significance as we begin to consider a post-COVID-19 world. In order to understand how the experiences in Québec align with other parts of Canada, **J.J. McMurtry** provides an English response to the dialogue, which considers the content of the dialogue and its significance beyond the borders of Québec. Thus, this issue features not only a truly bilingual exchange but also a sort of pan-Canadian debate on different social and welfare state models.

Arguably, social economy and nonprofit organizations rely on key pillars in order to be successful. What these pillars are is open for debate, but there is consensus on the fact that they include the important role that volunteering, social innovation, and appropriate educational practices play in strengthening the field. In one form or another, the articles in this issue touch on these matters, which too often can be taken for granted as we continue to advance social economy and nonprofit practice and research. In the first article, **Benham Behnia** provides theoretical insights into the role-taking and role-making of volunteers from a symbolic interactionist perspective. In the second article, **Myriam Gagnon, Myriam Beaudry, Louise Lemyre, and Alexandra Guay-Charette** explore the role of em-

conséquence, ce secteur pourrait encore une fois se voir pris au piège du « projet culturel », où les occasions de planifier l'avenir sont restreintes et où l'on agit seulement à court terme. Pourtant, une crise comme celle de la pandémie aura des répercussions durables qui nécessiteront des actions soigneusement planifiées sur une longue durée.

Un objectif constant de la revue ANSERJ est de s'assurer qu'elle reflète la particularité des langues et cultures de diverses régions, tant au niveau national qu'international. Dans cette mesure, cette revue s'efforce de jouer un rôle important pour aider les travailleurs et travailleuses de l'économie sociale à partager leurs connaissances. Pour ce faire, dans ce numéro, nous abordons la section « Perspectives pour le terrain » d'une manière légèrement différente. À titre d'exemple, nous incluons un échange en français entre trois chercheurs et pratiquants basés au Québec : **Marco Alberio, Ophélie Couspeyre** et **Érick Plourde.** Au cœur de leur dialogue est l'exploration d'actions transformatives réalisées avant la pandémie par des acteurs communautaires au Québec. Ces actions prennent toute leur ampleur à mesure que nous commençons à considérer un monde de l'après-COVID. En outre, afin de mieux saisir dans quelle mesure l'expérience québécoise coïncide avec celle du reste du Canada, **J.J. McMurtry** a rédigé en anglais une réponse à ce dialogue; celle-ci porte sur le contenu du dialogue ainsi que sur sa portée au-delà des frontières du Québec. Ainsi, ce numéro inclut un échange qui est non seulement véritablement bilingue mais qui représente ce qui est en quelque sorte un débat pancanadien sur divers modèles de société et d'État-providence.

Pour réussir, les organismes de l'économie sociale et les OSBL dépendent de soutiens clés. Bien qu'on puisse débattre de la nature de ces soutiens, on peut s'accorder sur le rôle important joué pour renforcer le secteur par le bénévolat, l'innovation sociale et certaines pratiques éducatives pertinentes. D'une manière ou d'une autre, les articles dans ce numéro traitent de ces soutiens, que l'on peut trop souvent considérer comme allant de soi dans nos efforts pour faire avancer la recherche et la pratique relatives à l'économie sociale et les OSBL. Dans le premier article, **Benham Behnia** recourt à l'interactionnisme symbolique pour faire des observations théoriques sur les rôles créés et adoptés par les bénévoles. Dans le deuxième article, **Myriam Gagnon, Myriam Beaudry, Louise Lemyre, et Alexandra**

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a491

ployer-supported volunteering from a problematization approach. They argue that the findings of their study challenge the traditional view that supporting volunteers is a distinct activity within an organization, and they call for an involvement of volunteers as an essential element of a partnership and engagement strategy.

In the third article, **Michele Fugiel Gartner** takes up the challenge of reconceptualizing approaches to education in the management of nonprofits. Gartner argues that research on credit-based university courses seems to be the common approach, especially in a U.S. context, and that the growth of non-credit courses in the Canadian landscape needs to be better understood in terms of their strengths and potential shortcomings. In the fourth article, **Mamadou Koumaré** takes a case study perspective to investigate how the goods and services produced by a co-operative community organization in Mali have been found to provide differing benefits to its members and non-members. Koumaré finds that, ultimately, it is the community as a whole that has gained the greatest benefit from the work of the co-operative. In the final article, **Aaron Turpin, Micheal L. Shier,** and **Kate Scowen** investigate the delivery of mental health services using the social enterprise model. While the social enterprise model can present some challenges, they found the benefits include a reduction in barriers to access and a reduction in the stigma to seeking mental health support.

While the content presented in these articles is not related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conclusions of each of the articles will take on particular importance as we transition away from the reality we have found ourselves in for almost two years. The content of this issue continues to demonstrate the breadth, uniqueness, and resilience of the social economy in both practice and research. In closing, we encourage submissions that represent the breadth of our work. Finally, if you have not already done so, please register on our site so you can receive updated journal information and announcements. We always welcome your feedback and suggestions.

Guay-Charette emploient une approche axée sur la problématisation afin d'explorer le rôle d'un bénévolat qui est soutenu par l'employeur. D'après les auteures, les résultats de leur recherche posent un défi à la perspective traditionnelle selon laquelle l'appui aux bénévoles serait une activité distincte au sein d'un organisme, et elles recommandent que l'implication des bénévoles devienne un élément central dans une stratégie de partenariat et d'engagement.

Dans le troisième article, **Michele Fugiel Gartner** assume le défi de reconcevoir les manières dont on envisage l'éducation en gestion des OSBL. Gartner observe que la recherche sur les cours universitaires à unités semble être l'approche la plus commune, surtout aux États-Unis, dans un contexte où l'on a besoin de mieux comprendre les avantages et désavantages des cours sans unité offerts de plus en plus souvent au Canada. Dans le quatrième article, **Mamadou Koumaré** effectue une étude de cas afin d'examiner comment les biens et services produits par une coopérative communautaire au Mali s'avèrent bénéfiques à des niveaux différents selon que les clients soient membres ou non-membres. Koumaré conclut toutefois que c'est la communauté en entier qui bénéficie le plus du travail de la coopérative. Dans le dernier article, **Aaron Turpin, Micheal L. Shier** et **Kate Scowen** examinent l'offre en services de santé mentale au moyen du modèle d'entreprise sociale. Ils ont trouvé que ce modèle, malgré les défis qu'il peut présenter, offre certains avantages, y compris la réduction d'entraves à l'accès et de réticences à obtenir des soins de santé mentale.

Bien que le contenu de ces articles ne soit pas directement lié à la pandémie, leurs conclusions ont une importance particulière dans un contexte où on émerge peu à peu de la réalité dans laquelle on s'est retrouvé pendant presque deux ans. Le contenu de ce numéro démontre à nouveau l'ampleur, la singularité et la résilience de l'économie sociale tant dans la pratique que dans la recherche. Dans cette optique, nous continuons à encourager la soumission de textes qui représentent l'ampleur de notre travail. D'autre part, si vous ne l'avez pas déjà fait, veuillez vous inscrire sur notre site afin de recevoir des mises à jour de la part de l'ANSERJ. En outre, nous demeurons vivement intéressés à recevoir vos impressions et suggestions.

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We hope that you enjoy this issue of the journal.

Message from Jorge Sousa, editor-in-chief/editor

This is my final issue as editor-in-chief/editor for *ANSERJ*. Taking on this role for the past three years has been a privilege. I have learned much about the terrific work that has been going on in the field, and I am pleased to have played a role in supporting the dissemination of innovative research and theory. I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the different people who have played a key role in producing the journal.

I want to first thank the board for ANSER-ARES and the editorial board for their commitment to the journal. We have been fortunate to have Marco Alberio serve as editor for the past year. It has been a pleasure to work with him, and we have all benefitted from his impact. I also want to thank our publishing team, in particular Marilyn Bittman and Rowland Lorimer. Their commitment to the journal goes beyond the transactional relationships between publisher and journal. I am appreciative to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for maintaining the Aid to Scholarly Journals program, from which we successfully obtained a grant in 2018. This grant has allowed us to continue our work over the last three years.

I want to end by thanking our reviewers, readers, and authors. We have a spectacular group of reviewers who have ensured the rigour and quality of the journal. I always felt the submissions we received were gifts. While many were not published, all submissions were treated with the respect that all gifts deserve. Finally, please join me in welcoming Laurie Mook as the new editor-in-chief/editor. I am certain that Laurie and Marco will build on our existing work and introduce innovations that will continue to strengthen the journal.

En guise de conclusion, nous espérons que vous aurez du plaisir à lire ce numéro.

Message de Jorge Sousa, rédacteur en chef / éditeur anglophone

Ceci est mon dernier numéro en tant que rédacteur en chef/éditeur anglophone d'ANSERJ. C'était un privilège pour moi de pouvoir remplir ces fonctions au cours des trois dernières années. J'en ai beaucoup appris sur le travail extraordinaire accompli dans ce domaine, et je suis fier d'avoir pu contribuer à la dissémination de recherches et théories innovatrices. D'autre part, je tiens à profiter de cette occasion pour exprimer mon appréciation à l'égard des diverses personnes qui ont participé à la réalisation de cette revue.

Je veux d'abord remercier le conseil d'administration d'ANSER-ARES ainsi que le comité de rédaction pour leur engagement envers cette revue. Nous avons en outre eu la chance d'avoir Marco Alberio comme rédacteur en chef francophone depuis un an. Pour moi, cela a été un plaisir de travailler avec lui, et nous avons tous bénéficié de ses contributions. Je tiens aussi à remercier notre équipe de publication, Marilyn Bittman et Rowland Lorimer en particulier. Leur implication pour cette revue a largement dépassé le caractère instrumental du rapport typique entre une revue savante et son éditeur de presse. Je suis reconnaissant aussi à l'égard du Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines et de leur programme d'Aide aux revues savantes, duquel nous avons réussi à obtenir une subvention en 2018. Celle-ci nous a permis de poursuivre notre travail au cours des trois dernières années.

J'aimerais conclure en remerciant nos évaluateurs, nos auteurs et nos lecteurs. Nous avons un groupe spectaculaire d'évaluateurs qui travaillent fort pour assurer la rigueur et la qualité de la revue. D'autre part, j'ai toujours perçu les propositions d'articles que nous recevons comme étant des cadeaux. Bien qu'on n'ait pas pu publier tous les articles que nous avons reçus, on s'est efforcés de traiter chaque proposition avec le respect qu'un cadeau mérite. Finalement, permettez-moi d'accueillir Laurie Mook à titre de nouvelle rédactrice en chef anglophone. Je suis confiant que Laurie et Marco sauront bâtir sur le fondement établi et introduire des innovations qui continueront à améliorer la revue.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a491

Message from Marco Alberio, editor

It is my turn to thank Jorge Sousa, who has served for three years as editor-in-chief for ANSERJ and has very much contributed to making this journal stronger, more visible, and more innovative. Today, ANSERJ is a well-recognized platform for an ongoing dialogue between researchers and practitioners. This is also thanks to Jorge, who, for instance, introduced the new "Perspectives for the Field" section to give more prominence to practitioners and to the dialogue between practitioners and researchers. When I, for instance, proposed a piece for this section with the Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire, he strongly encouraged me to do it as a dialogue that, in his words, "resemble[s] a Paulo Freire dialogue." Of course, the comparison was and still is unsustainable for me, but it underlines his enthusiasm and passion and the strong investment he has made in the journal for all these years. I am sure that his role and contribution are recognized by ANSER/ARES to which this journal, although it is independent from an academic perspective, is associated. I really want to thank Jorge for his role, and I hope he will still be an active part of our journal.

Message de Marco Alberio, rédacteur

C'est à mon tour de remercier Jorge Sousa, qui a servi ANSERJ pendant trois ans à titre de rédacteur en chef anglophone et qui a largement contribué à rendre cette revue plus forte, plus visible, et plus innovatrice. Aujourd'hui, ANSERJ est une plateforme reconnue qui assure un dialogue continu entre chercheurs et pratiquants. On peut aussi attribuer ce succès à Jorge, qui par exemple a créé la rubrique « Perspectives sur le terrain » afin de mieux représenter les pratiquants et d'encourager des échanges entre pratiquants et chercheurs. Quand moi-même j'ai proposé pour cette rubrique un article sur la Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire, Jorge m'a fortement encouragé de le réaliser sous forme d'un échange qui, selon ses mots, « ressemblerait à un dialogue de Paulo Freire ». Je ne peux pas prétendre être à la hauteur de cette comparaison, mais sa suggestion est typique de son enthousiasme, sa passion et son engagement envers cette revue depuis plusieurs années. Je sais d'autre part qu'ANSER-ARES reconnaît aussi son rôle et ses contributions à l'égard d'une revue qui, tout en conservant son indépendance académique, demeure associée à cet organisme. En toute sincérité, je tiens à remercier Jorge pour le rôle essentiel qu'il a joué, et j'espère qu'il continuera à faire partie de cette revue à l'avenir.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a491

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Vol. 12, No. 1
Spring / printemps 2021
pp. 9 – 19

L'action communautaire autonome et son potentiel transformationnel dans les territoires : un dialogue en cours entre les milieux de la recherche et de la pratique

Marco Alberio
Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna
Université du Québec à Rimouski

Ophélie Couspeyre
Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire

Érick Plourde
Corporation de développement communautaire de Lévis

ABSTRACT

This article takes the form of a dialogue between a researcher (Marco Alberio, holder of the Canada Research Chair in Social Innovation and Territorial Development) and two practitioners (Ophélie Couspeyre, Development Officer, Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire, and Érick Plourde, Executive Director, Corporation de développement communautaire de Lévis). Taking up several points that emerged during a joint event that took place in October 2020, this dialogue aims to discuss the practice of autonomous community action (especially through the voices of the protagonists themselves) in a social, economic and political context that is changing rapidly—and not just because of the pandemic.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article prend la forme d'un dialogue entre un représentant du milieu de la recherche (Marco Alberio, titulaire de la Chaire de recherche du Canada en innovation sociale et développement des territoires) et deux représentants du milieu de la pratique (Ophélie Couspeyre, agente de développement, Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire, et Érick Plourde, directeur général, Corporation de développement communautaire de Lévis). Reprenant certains points qui ont émergé lors d'une journée de réflexion ayant eu lieu en octobre 2020, ce dialogue avait comme objectif de discuter de la pratique d'une action communautaire autonome (surtout à travers la voix des protagonistes mêmes) dans un contexte social, économique et politique en forte transformation—et pas seulement à cause de la pandémie.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a487

Keywords / Mots clés : Autonomous community action; Urban agriculture; Community development corporation; Social innovation; Pandemic / Action communautaire autonome; Agriculture urbaine; Corporation de développement communautaire; Innovation sociale; Pandémie

Marco Alberio (MA) : Avec ce dialogue nous souhaitons continuer une discussion entre des représentants de la recherche et de l'action communautaire. Plus spécifiquement, la collaboration entre la Chaire de recherche du Canada en innovation sociale et développement des territoires, dont je suis titulaire, et la Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire est en cours depuis environ un an. J'ai le plaisir de m'entretenir ici avec Ophélie Couspeyre, agente de développement à la Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire (TNCDC) et Érick Plourde, directeur général de la Corporation de développement communautaire (CDC) de Lévis.

J'ai pris connaissance d'une exposition de la Table (https://www.tncdc.com/innovation-sociale/) sur le thème de l'innovation sociale. Nous avons commencé à discuter des enjeux auxquels ils faisaient face dans une perspective de pérennité des initiatives et nous avons réfléchi à des modalités de collaboration. Et voilà l'idée d'un événement qui a été tenu (finalement en ligne) le 22 octobre 2020 et qui a vu environ 80 participants du monde de l'action communautaire autonome, de la recherche mais également des élus et d'autres acteurs locaux. Après une conférence de Jean-Marc Fontan (UQAM) et une table ronde avec une variété d'acteurs (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qGuhZV3AAA), nous avons tenu cinq ateliers sur des thématiques différentes.[1]

Reprenant certains points qui ont émergé lors de la journée du 22 octobre, ici nous voulons discuter de la pratique d'une action communautaire autonome dans un contexte social, économique et politique en forte transformation—et pas seulement à cause de la pandémie. L'action communautaire se trouve à la croisée de son histoire et des défis actuels d'ordres variés. Tel que le soulignent plusieurs auteurs comme Lévesque, Mendell et Favreau, la situation du Québec est assez différente de celle des autres provinces. Il y a une forme de reconnaissance graduelle et bien implantée de la part de l'État envers les acteurs communautaires. Quand on parle de reconnaissance, on parle aussi d'institutionnalisation et cette institutionnalisation peut également apporter des défis. L'action communautaire est souvent envisagée comme une forme d'innovation sociale radicale. Est-ce qu'il y a un risque réel pour elle de perdre son élan créatif, son élan de rupture dans une relation plus proche de l'État et ses institutions? Comment s'adapte-elle au contexte actuel? Après une courte présentation de la Table, pourriez-vous partager votre vision par rapport à ces enjeux? Comment conjuguez-vous la reconnaissance de l'État avec celle des communautés et des territoires? Les deux sont-elles vraiment compatibles?

Ophélie Couspeyre (OC) : Pour commencer avec un bref historique, les corporations de développement communautaire (CDC) existent depuis 1984. Dès leurs débuts et encore aujourd'hui, la mise en place ou la création d'une CDC émerge d'un besoin des organismes communautaires de se doter d'instruments de concertation, de soutien et de reconnaissance de leur travail sur le plan local. La mission d'une CDC est d'assurer la participation active du mouvement communautaire autonome au développement socioéconomique de son milieu. Actuellement, on compte 65 CDC, réparties dans 14 régions du Québec. Elles regroupent plus de 2 500 organismes communautaires qui interviennent dans de multiples secteurs d'intervention : la lutte à la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, la santé, l'éducation, la défense des droits, ainsi que le logement, par exemple. Une CDC regroupe des organismes sur une base multisectorielle et territoriale. Elle peut donc compter parmi ses membres des organismes d'action communautaire autonome, des organismes communautaires tout court, mais aussi des entreprises d'économie sociale et parfois même des organismes socioéconomiques ou parapublics. Elle contribue au développement social à l'échelle locale en développant des projets structurants et collectifs, principalement à vocation sociale, en partenariat

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a487

avec les acteurs du communautaire, évidemment, mais aussi avec les acteurs et actrices institutionnels, sociaux, économiques et politiques, sans oublier bien sûr les citoyens et citoyennes de leur milieu.

MA : Pour le lecteur hors Québec qui est peut-être moins familier à l'égard de ces concepts, quelle est la différence que vous faites entre l'action communautaire et l'action communautaire autonome?

OC : C'est une excellente question. En fait, quand on parle de reconnaissance de l'action communautaire autonome, on fait référence à la politique de reconnaissance de l'action communautaire adoptée en 2001 et intitulée « L'action communautaire : une contribution essentielle à l'exercice de la citoyenneté et au développement social du Québec **».** Dans cette politique, on retrouve les caractéristiques de l'action communautaire autonome (ACA). Les quatre premiers critères s'adressent à l'ensemble des organismes d'action communautaire : être un organisme à but non lucratif, être enraciné dans la communauté, entretenir une vie associative et démocratique, et être libre de déterminer sa mission, ses approches, ses pratiques et ses orientations. S'ajoutent quatre critères supplémentaires pour les organismes d'action communautaire autonome : avoir été constitué à l'initiative des gens de la communauté, poursuivre une mission sociale qui lui soit propre et qui favorise la transformation sociale, faire preuve de pratiques citoyennes et d'approches larges, axées sur la globalité de la problématique abordée, et être dirigé par un conseil d'administration indépendant du réseau public.

Érick Plourde (ÉP) : Il s'agit d'établir un équilibre entre le fait qu'on est des regroupements d'organismes communautaires multisectoriels, comme le disait Ophélie. Donc, d'un côté on a le pouls de ce qui se passe dans nos communautés à travers les organisations membres de nos corporations. De l'autre côté, les CDC ont un rapport avec les organismes publics, parapublics, gouvernementaux, le secteur philanthropique, etc. Nous sommes donc intermédiaires et médiateurs entre ces différents acteurs, ces différentes réalités. Les CDC sont au centre de ces conversations-là. Comme tu le disais, traditionnellement au Québec, le milieu communautaire, de par sa proximité au quotidien des citoyens et citoyennes, était celui qui répondait aux besoins et enjeux au sein des quartiers, des communautés. Les réponses aux besoins des populations sont passées par le développement d'organismes tels que nous les connaissons maintenant. Certaines organisations se sont institutionnalisées car elles ont démontré qu'elles répondaient adéquatement, de façon efficace et efficiente, à des besoins marqués. La politique vient reconnaître deux éléments centraux : la visée de transformation sociale de l'ACA et surtout son autonomie et son indépendance du réseau public.

MA : Je me permets de te relancer sur ce point. Qu'est-ce que signifie pour vous en concret être un acteur de transformation sociale?

ÉP : Le milieu communautaire est, depuis toujours, ancré dans sa communauté. Donc, il vit les transformations décennie après décennie. Les communautés qu'on a présentement ne sont pas les mêmes qu'on avait dans les années 60. Mais le milieu communautaire continue d'être à l'affût, d'écouter et de travailler dans une visée de transformation sociale qui favorise des processus de prise en charge, de développement du pouvoir d'agir des individus. Le milieu communautaire est constamment amené à être créatif, stimulant, à penser différemment. Cette capacité d'innovation et d'adaptation peut être un défi parfois pour les institutions gouvernementales et municipales qui fonctionnent de façon plus planifiée sur plusieurs mois, voire plusieurs années, avant de développer une infrastructure qui suive des idées naissantes. Le milieu communautaire a toujours été un leader de l'innovation, à nommer les nouvelles idées et à bousculer aussi, dans le sens où il voit naître dès le début, et il commence déjà à bousculer et à pousser, ce qui parfois peut être problématique. Mais aussi cela peut marcher.

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MA : « Bousculer » dans quel sens?

ÉP : Dans le sens qu'il amène ces thèmes-là dans le dialogue, dans la conversation. Il les propose. Parfois, après quelques années, il les impose. Il demande qu'on y porte attention. Les organismes communautaires mettent en place des processus démocratiques par lesquels la communauté manifeste sa volonté et sa capacité de définir elle-même ses propres réponses aux enjeux vécus. Le milieu est donc un moteur et un amplificateur. Il tente de répondre aux nouveaux besoins naissants avec créativité et un esprit d'innovation. Ceci dit, il amène des solutions dans la mesure de ses ressources humaines et de ses ressources économiques.

MA : Justement, c'est ce qu'on appelle la phase d'expérimentation des innovations sociales dans laquelle il y a de la négociation, même entre les acteurs locaux. Avant de s'imposer, l'innovation sociale a besoin d'être acceptée; une certaine forme d'acceptabilité sociale, politique et de marché aussi s'impose.

ÉP : Les CDC œuvrent à faire passer ce message-là et à l'amener, comme tu le dis, à d'autres acteurs du développement du territoire, et engager une conversation là-dessus. Parfois, ce n'est pas seulement le milieu communautaire qui instaure ces dialogues-là. Parfois, les municipalités sont proactives, ou différents acteurs peuvent être proactifs aussi. Ce n'est pas l'apanage du milieu communautaire seulement. Les CDC sont au centre de ces discussions multisectorielles. Autant on œuvre dans une perspective multisectorielle à l'interne, autant notre conversation avec les autres acteurs du territoire est diverse.

OC : Si je peux ajouter... Tu parlais, Marco, au départ, d'élan créatif, de rupture. Le fait que les groupes d'action communautaire soient vraiment ancrés dans leur communauté, ça leur donne cette capacité de déceler les enjeux rapidement. Par exemple, un organisme qui travaille en sécurité alimentaire va identifier un problème d'accès à l'alimentation dans un secteur de son territoire, relié à des enjeux de transport, d'enclavement, etc. La CDC va mettre tous les acteurs et actrices concernés en lien : les citoyens, les premiers et premières concernés, les élus, les organismes en transport, les entreprises de ce secteur, etc.

La CDC va mettre les conditions en place pour les aider à se concerter, à travailler ensemble, afin que le problème soit pensé globalement. La CDC crée des alliances pour répondre à ces besoins-là et les espaces d'idéation qui vont permettre à tous ces partenaires de mettre à l'épreuve, expérimenter des pratiques, des manières de faire innovantes.

Il faut que j'indique qu'il y a un thème qui accroche beaucoup dans l'action communautaire autonome quand on parle d'innovation sociale, c'est la question de la nouveauté. Pour nous, à la TNCDC, faire de l'innovation sociale, ce n'est pas nécessairement d'innover, de faire toujours du nouveau. Ça peut être, tout simplement, de faire les choses différemment. Ça peut vouloir dire revenir à la source d'une action qu'on faisait il y a vingt ans et qu'on a laissée de côté. Par exemple, cette action revient sur le devant de la scène parce que le contexte a évolué, parce que le territoire est en mutation, parce que les acteurs ont changé aussi. Cet aspect de l'innovation sociale est essentiel pour nous.

Et c'est aussi pour ça qu'on a voulu se positionner sur la question. À travers notre exposition, « L'innovation sociale, naturellement communautaire », on voulait réaffirmer que l'action communautaire est un acteur incontournable et on voulait participer aux discussions sur la scène publique. Parce que, malheureusement, l'idée d'associer l'innovation sociale à la nouveauté, ça vient teinter les politiques et les programmes de soutien de l'innovation sociale. Lorsque les bailleurs de fonds procèdent à des appels de projets, par exemple, les critères ne correspondent pas à notre réalité. Il faudrait qu'on prouve qu'on va changer le monde dans un très court laps de temps; pourtant, les questions d'innovation sociale et de transformation sociale s'abordent sur une temporalité différente. On innove, on expérimente,

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on est créatif à court terme, mais la transformation vient dans un temps beaucoup plus long. C'est ce genre d'enjeu qui fait en sorte que certains acteurs de l'action communautaire autonome sont très frileux lorsque l'on parle d'innovation sociale, et je les comprends!

M : Très intéressant. C'est un point fondamental en effet, ce lien entre transformation sociale et politique. Donc, quand vous parlez de transformation sociale, il semble s'imposer fortement la question des alliances qui se font horizontalement comme à la verticale. De plus, dans les études sur l'innovation sociale, et certainement pour la pratique aussi, on discute beaucoup de gouvernance. Comment peut-on passer à une autre échelle? Non pas parce que le local ne soit pas important, mais parce que, pour avoir une transformation sociale, il faut aussi un changement d'échelle. Comment vous le faites? Comment répondez-vous au défi de la fragmentation des initiatives ayant un potentiel d'innovation sociale et au risque d'éparpillement? Comment mettre tout en réseau? Pouvez-vous donner des exemples?

OC : C'est clairement un enjeu, tu l'as nommé, la question de la diffusion et du transfert. Comment une pratique innovante, qui vient transformer les façons de faire, voire les façons de penser, se diffuse-t-elle au-delà du territoire dans lequel elle a émergé? C'est sûr que les regroupements, comme la TNCDC, ont un rôle à jouer—tout du moins, on essaye de le jouer. Encore une fois, à travers des événements comme l'exposition sur l'innovation sociale, on tente de faire connaître ce que fait chacun des territoires, pour que les uns et les autres se nourrissent mutuellement, mais en gardant à l'idée que chaque territoire est unique et qu'une action qui s'est faite ailleurs ne peut pas nécessairement s'implanter telle quelle. C'est pour cette raison qu'on insiste sur les processus au-delà du produit qu'on va créer ou de l'initiative qui a émergé. C'est vraiment le processus qui nous importe parce que c'est lui, en fait, qu'on est capable d'« essaimer », c'est lui qui mérite d'être diffusé.

MA : Concrètement, qu'est-ce que ça veut dire pour vous, « faire attention au processus »? Dans quel sens?

OC : Pour nous, un processus, c'est mettre des acteurs en relation et se poser les bonnes questions : ils sont où, les citoyens, dans l'émergence de cette initiative-là? C'est toute cette démarche-là en fait : comment on est allé chercher les acteurs, comment on a mobilisé les ressources—qu'elles soient endogènes ou exogènes—liées aux projets. Et puis, il y a aussi une question de rapport de forces quand même, parce que chaque acteur ne peut pas contribuer de la même manière et parce qu'il faut mobiliser des ressources financières. Aussi, ce n'est pas seulement de ressources humaines dont on a besoin. Dans le processus, la création d'alliances est importante parce que le député ou des acteurs économiques vont peut-être aider à mobiliser des fonds particuliers, etc. On essaye de sortir de ce qu'on appelle les fameux financements par projet. C'est frustrant et stérile, parce qu'on innove, on a de beaux projets, et une fois qu'on a démontré l'utilité du projet, on nous donne une bonne tape dans le dos et on nous dit, « Bravo! Continuez maintenant à le faire vivre, votre projet. »

MA : Il y a donc la question de la pérennité qui se pose comme élément essentiel pour permettre une transformation sociale.

O : La pérennité est une question centrale quand on passe d'une innovation à une transformation systémique, plus structurelle, plus institutionnalisée. C'est ce passage-là qui reste un défi. Je pense qu'il y a un rapport de pouvoir, en effet. Je pense que c'est un contexte économique, un contexte politique. Soit qu'il est en faveur, soit qu'il l'est moins, et là, bien, les organismes travaillent plus ou moins fort pour faire reconnaître leurs pratiques, tout en restant autonomes.

MA : Très intéressante, cette question des relations de pouvoir, parce qu'il y a des relations de pouvoir même à l'intérieur du monde communautaire qui est loin d'être homogène, donc entre organismes communautaires, mais aussi

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entre l'État et les organismes communautaires, entre les intervenants et les citoyens, parmi les citoyens, etc. On sait par exemple que les populations plus vulnérables, même si on essaye d'aller les chercher directement, ont un déficit de participation. Comment répondez-vous à ce défi de garder une participation pour toutes et tous où il y a au moins l'occasion de participer?

ÉP : C'est un des mandats importants du travail des CDC de créer des espaces de rencontres, des espaces d'échanges, qui se sont élargis avec maintenant les nouvelles technologies, à travers les Zooms. Comme tu le dis, c'est un défi d'entretenir la conversation. Moi-même, j'ai vécu dernièrement une situation où il y a un organisme important du territoire qui est arrivé avec un projet de marché public d'agriculteurs locaux. Depuis trois ans, plusieurs organisations développent un projet collectif connu, publicisé, touchant ces mêmes thèmes. L'organisme en question connaît cette démarche-là, mais il a développé son projet tout seul, sans en parler à personne. L'initiative est liée à ses activités. L'organisation est bien intentionnée dans sa visée, mais cette initiative est entrée en conflit avec le projet collectif. Une personne m'a demandé : « Mais pourquoi tu ne l'as pas chicané? » Ils n'ont pas pensé collectivement. C'est un défi d'inspirer l'action collective et la co-construction, parce que les organisations ont leur autonomie, elles ont le droit de penser au développement de leur organisation de façon « individuelle ».

Comme CDC, j'ai toujours une lunette collective. C'est notre travail, c'est notre mandat de regarder les choses avec une lunette collective, mais je ne peux pas imposer cette vision-là aux autres. Il faut que je crée des espaces—comme tu le disais—multiples, que ce soit à travers des assemblées, à travers des activités, qui incitent et inspirent la co-construction, le travail en commun. C'est ce qu'on a fait à travers l'activité qu'on a organisée sur l'innovation sociale : on a offert un espace d'échanges, de réflexions, des espaces qui sont rares dans le milieu. Les organisations n'ont pas beaucoup de temps. On le sait, les directions parfois font plusieurs tâches : administration, gestion des ressources humaines, même de l'intervention à l'occasion.

La culture par projet est donc un autre enjeu. Puis le fait de ne pas avoir le temps de prendre des pauses et de réfléchir à sa mission et de réfléchir à ses valeurs, réfléchir au développement collectif. Il y a un autre élément que j'aimerais rajouter, en lien peut-être plus avec le milieu de la recherche. Il est important d'essayer de comprendre l'innovation, comment elle se développe sur des territoires. Il y a des contextes, des mécaniques qui favorisent le développement de l'innovation sociale. Il faut bien comprendre tous ces aspects avec les différents acteurs sur le territoire. Je pense que la recherche nous aide à faire ça.

Encore une fois, si je parle de mon expérience à Lévis, je vis un climat favorable où il y a des gens dans la municipalité qui comprennent le développement social, l'innovation, et qui sont enclins à travailler avec nous. On est en train de réfléchir aux mécanismes, à notre mécanique de communication, notre mécanique d'échanges, parce qu'une fois que le groupe actuel ne sera plus là, ce n'est pas acquis que les suivants vont avoir le même enthousiasme. Mais si les mécaniques et la façon et la méthode ont été instaurées, à ce moment-là, ça devient des canaux de communication et des façons de faire déjà établies. Et comment ça se passe dans le contexte actuel de la pandémie?

OC : Je voulais justement en venir. Le contexte actuel est peu favorable à la concertation, à l'émergence de projets collectifs structurants. Les groupes ont prouvé qu'ils étaient très réactifs et très agiles face à la crise. Ils se sont retournés sur un 10 cents, si vous me permettez l'expression, pour adapter, transformer leurs pratiques, parce qu'ils ont dû changer leurs façons de faire. Avant, on faisait des activités collectives; bien là, on ne peut plus. Donc, ils se sont très rapidement retournés et ont repensé leurs actions. C'est aussi ça, la force de l'action communautaire—Érick l'a nommée. Les groupes sont capables de réagir rapidement à une crise. D'ailleurs, souvent, les meilleures

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innovations sociales émergent d'une situation de crise. Je pense qu'il y a beaucoup de choses qui vont émerger. Mais la question demeure : comment fait-on pour que ces initiatives ne restent pas juste dans les mains d'une organisation qui a fait des merveilles pour répondre à un besoin et comment on les diffuse partout?

C'est la question de la visibilité. Tu l'as très bien dit, Érick aussi, les groupes n'ont pas le temps d'aller sur de multiples tribunes pour dire, « Oh, regardez combien je fais merveilleusement bien mon travail! » Mais *nous* le faisons, c'est tout; c'est notre travail. Ça revient à la question de la reconnaissance. Il y a une étape politique, évidemment; il faut reconnaître ces meilleures pratiques, les valoriser et faire en sorte qu'elles se diffusent dans le respect des missions de chacun. Les regroupements peuvent aussi jouer un rôle, dans le rayonnement et la diffusion de ces initiatives, mais il faut qu'il y ait une oreille attentive quelque part.

MA : Justement, la Covid-19. La pandémie a été un élément qui a joué beaucoup sur cet élément, en positif, mais aussi en sollicitant beaucoup—peut-être trop quelquefois—les acteurs communautaires. Donc, en les responsabilisant énormément. Le gouvernement provincial l'a reconnu dans des discours, mais comment cela a-t-il été abordé selon vous dans la pratique?

OC : Il l'a reconnu verbalement, on a eu droit à une « petite tape dans le dos », à des félicitations lors des points de presse, mais dans les faits le budget provincial n'a pas suivi. On s'attendait à beaucoup de ce budget. Ça fait maintenant près de deux ans qu'on collabore à la mise à jour du plan d'action gouvernemental en matière d'action communautaire. L'annonce du budget a eu littéralement l'effet d'une douche froide pour nous. Les groupes ont fait preuve d'une très grande capacité d'adaptation durant cette crise, mais avec les moyens du bord, qui n'étaient déjà pas suffisants avant la crise. Les travailleurs et travailleuses du communautaire sont épuisés, à bout de souffle, et on leur propose, en guise de reconnaissance, des fonds d'urgence qui ne correspondent pas à leurs besoins. C'est très décevant, quand on sait que l'action des organismes communautaires est plus que jamais essentielle et qu'elle participe à maintenir le filet social. Le problème n'est pas ponctuel, il est structurel. Les groupes manquent de ressources pour réaliser pleinement leur mission dans des conditions adéquates.

MA : Au-delà de la question budgétaire qui est un élément essentiel de la reconnaissance, au niveau local par exemple, le contexte de pandémie vous a-t-il donné une possibilité pour réaffirmer votre rôle? Si oui, comment? Plus largement, comment avez-vous réagi à cette situation de pandémie? Comment ça a été aux premiers moments? Mais surtout, qu'est-ce qu'on fait maintenant? Quels apprentissages vous en tirez?

OC : Durant la crise, de nombreux acteurs ont compris concrètement le rôle joué par les CDC dans une communauté. Elles ont joué un rôle central, notamment dans les cellules de crises, mises en place rapidement au début de la crise sanitaire. Le plus souvent, les CDC coordonnaient les services afin d'offrir une réponse concertée aux problématiques qui émergeaient dans les communautés. Dans ces instances, les CDC représentaient les groupes d'action communautaire qui se consacraient à pallier les besoins d'urgence. En plus d'offrir un soutien direct accru aux organismes communautaires, les CDC ont joué un rôle crucial dans la transmission de l'information : comprendre les consignes, les mesures et les programmes, c'était un travail de longue haleine, que les groupes de base n'avaient pas le temps de réaliser.

MA : Qu'est-ce que vous feriez différemment? Comment utiliser ces apprentissages pour le futur?

ÉP : Les CDC se retrouvent, dans certains cas, au centre de la coordination, l'animation, la mise en œuvre de différentes initiatives. Tantôt, on a parlé des rapports de pouvoir. Dans le contexte d'urgence de la pandémie, ce qui

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a487

est devenu intéressant, c'est que dans le dialogue et dans la mise en œuvre, l'esprit de collaboration et d'écoute s'est imposé et, tout d'un coup, toutes les voix étaient entendues : du point de vue du communautaire; quand on parlait à notre milieu municipal; lorsqu'on parlait au réseau de la santé. Et il y avait un désir sincère de travailler de façon égalitaire. Des appuis immédiats étaient octroyés (financement, partage de ressources). Maintenant, un des défis, c'est la suite des choses, c'est de maintenir cette proximité-là, cette écoute, cette collaboration. Le travail de plusieurs organisations a été décuplé, mais il répond, en grande partie, aux mêmes besoins. On avait besoin de ces appuis et on en aura encore besoin, de ces ressources offertes spontanément et de façon tellement généreuse. C'est surprenant comment ça devenait facile d'avoir accès à des trucs qu'on demandait depuis des années. Ce qu'on craint le plus, pour ma part, c'est le retour à la normale dont on parle souvent. Si on réfléchit, du point de vue de la façon dont on a travaillé en collaboration, les partenariats, le soutien au milieu, encore une fois de la perspective du milieu communautaire, on ne veut pas un retour à la normale. On veut rester dans cette façon de dialoguer, cette écoute-là, et cet effort collectif soutenu. Même au niveau du développement, on a vu une recrudescence, pour ne donner qu'un exemple, de l'intérêt de la population au développement local et aux services de proximité. On n'avait pas le droit d'aller loin, donc ça donne envie de développer sa vie de quartier. Donc, on parle d'achat local aussi. Ça a été mis de l'avant. Il y a plein d'éléments comme ça, juste pour nommer des exemples plus concrets. J'espère qu'on va rester dans ces zones-là, que les municipalités vont dire, « Le message de la population était très fort. Ce n'est pas juste à cause d'une pandémie, c'est que c'est un message latent de ce désir-là des citoyens d'avoir une vie de proximité plus développée, plus dynamique, d'être impliqués comme citoyens dans différents espaces autres que d'être sur un CA ou de faire du bénévolat dans une organisation. » Il y a une façon différente d'être un citoyen qui participe au développement de sa communauté, donc être à l'écoute de ces nouvelles tendances-là. L'agriculture urbaine est un autre exemple. Il y a des idées, des concepts, tels que l'agriculture urbaine, qui sont là depuis une décennie, voire beaucoup plus longtemps. Nos espaces devraient être développés en harmonie avec les besoins des populations : que ces besoins soient écoutés et qu'ils fassent partie de la conversation, non pas comme étant des « initiatives communautaires et populaires gauchistes ». Il y a un peu cette écoute-là qui a été créée pendant la pandémie; il n'y avait plus d'idées folles.

Tu as nommé aussi tantôt la verticalité des processus décisionnels. Ça prend toujours mille études et plein de chercheurs pour démontrer qu'une idée ou une initiative a du sens. Cela a pris comme cinq décennies d'études pour dire, « Ah, finalement, sais-tu quoi? L'agriculture urbaine, ce n'est pas si pire comme idée. » Ça fait vingt ans que les gens de la communauté te le disent, que le milieu te le dit. Mais en contexte pandémique certains messages passent rapidement. Les gens se mettent à œuvrer rapidement. Ça permet de voir aussi que parfois, quand tu fais confiance, quand tu écoutes, quand tu donnes du pouvoir d'agir—et là je reviens un peu aux rapports de force dont, Marco, tu parlais tout à l'heure—tout peut se faire ensemble. Quand je discute à Lévis, ça va bien; ça va bien avec nos partenaires, mais ce qu'on a réussi, la raison pour laquelle ça va bien, en grande partie, c'est parce qu'on a développé un rapport de confiance. Et quand on a un rapport de confiance, on s'écoute. Quand quelqu'un nous parle, on l'écoute pour de vrai. On n'est pas sur la défensive; on n'est pas avec une rhétorique institutionnelle. On est sur l'idée, on est sur le besoin du citoyen, sur le développement de notre communauté. C'est là-dessus qu'on est, au lieu d'être en opposition et en réaction.

MA : Justement, pour aller vers les conclusions, je répète ma question : comment rendre cela pérenne? Comment rendre durables certains apprentissages que vous avez faits et que les organismes ont faits? Comment faire en sorte que ce climat d'écoute, de respect mutuel, continue? Et comment peut-on garder une pratique encore plus « démocratique » et partagée bien que les relations de pouvoir ne disparaîtront probablement jamais? Donc, comment ce climat de coopération, qui a été dicté par l'urgence, pourrait rester en temps normal? Quelles actions vous mettrez en place pour que ça puisse durer?

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OC : Définitivement, encore une fois, il s'agit de mettre en valeur les réalisations qui ont été faites dans ces espaces-là. Le fait qu'on a collaboré, ça fait en sorte qu'on a arrimé des services, qu'on est allé répondre à des manques de services pour la distribution alimentaire. C'est le thème qui me revient le plus souvent parce que c'est celui-là qui a été au-devant de la scène pendant la crise de pandémie. Disons que c'est inviter les acteurs qui sont autour de la table à se projeter un peu plus loin. Le défi de ces espaces de concertation, c'est le temps, nous l'avons dit. Souvent, les acteurs aiment ça, être dans l'action, mais il faut réfléchir l'action à long terme, sortir de ce temps d'urgence pour penser l'action sociale en dehors de l'urgence du moment. Ça, c'est la clé pour aller un petit peu plus loin, être beaucoup plus structurant. Là, on a éteint des feux, on va se le dire. Mais maintenant, comment on fait pour qu'on soit des communautés plus résilientes, des communautés plus tissées serrées afin que, lors d'une prochaine crise, il n'y ait plus de trou de services? La personne en contexte de vulnérabilité, qui n'a pas la capacité ou les moyens de se déplacer, par exemple en milieu rural, elle va tout de même avoir accès à une distribution alimentaire parce qu'on va l'avoir anticipé, ce problème. Les partenaires y auront pensé dans une perspective préventive! Ça, c'est notre défi dans l'action communautaire. C'est là que s'inscrit notre action, dans la prévention et la transformation. On prévient et on travaille à ce que tous les acteurs participent activement à la société—une société plus juste, évidemment. Un autre défi : faire en sorte que ces espaces de dialogue-là ne soient pas désertés par les autres acteurs, en disant, « Bon, bien, ça y est, la crise est passée, on continue notre travail chacun de notre côté. » Mais il faut dire, « Non, regardez le résultat qu'on a réussi à faire ensemble dans une perspective de développement des communautés. Continuons donc! »

MA : Pour conclure, une dernière question pour vous et qui concerne aussi la relation avec le monde de la recherche. Comment peut-on continuer à travailler ensemble et aussi à vous soutenir? Comment peut-on créer une connaissance qui vous est utile? Non parce que la connaissance doit être seulement appliquée, mais aussi comment peut-on répondre aux exigences du monde communautaire qui essaye de se remettre en marche? Bien qu'il n'ait jamais arrêté, tel que vous l'avez souligné.

ÉP : Ça suit l'idée que j'avais tantôt, à savoir que le milieu de la recherche est propice à donner une voix, à aller chercher les différentes voix de toutes ces expériences-là, les mettre à profit d'initiatives ou de sujets qui touchent notre milieu communautaire. La recherche a certainement permis ça. On l'a fait lorsqu'on a fait notre événement en octobre. Il y avait toute une diversité de gens : le milieu municipal, le réseau de la santé, universitaire, des directeurs, il y avait des gens d'un peu partout. Donc, créer des espaces comme ça, d'une part, c'est important de le faire.

MA : Après, du côté de la recherche, nous avons aussi des questionnements sur notre rôle. Des fois, notre travail de chercheur (en sciences sociales surtout) n'est pas compris, ni par les administrateurs de nos institutions ni par les acteurs communautaires. Le travail universitaire a aussi une visée transformationnelle, et c'est ici, je pense, qu'il y a un point de contact entre le monde de la recherche et le monde communautaire, en clarifiant dès le départ que les connaissances et les savoir se développent des deux côtés. Ce que la recherche peut amener est un regard analytique, réflexif et surtout extérieur (bien que jamais complètement neutre), parce que c'est important de décloisonner. C'est vraiment un mélange de savoirs qui se fait. Les connaissances et les savoirs sont ancrés dans vos pratiques; mais peut-être qu'on amène un regard qui vous permet de mieux la voir en maintenant certaines choses en perspective. Et probablement la recherche contribue également—je le souhaite—à « donner citoyenneté » à ces connaissances et à ces savoirs dont vous disposez déjà mais qu'ensemble nous pouvons aussi développer.

OC : Souvent, on le dit, il va émerger énormément de belles choses de la crise. On le sait et on ne veut pas capitaliser sur une crise sanitaire de cette envergure. Mais quand même, il va y avoir des innovations sociales intéressantes. Les groupes eux-mêmes sont tellement dans l'action que souvent ils ne prennent pas le recul pour les voir, ces innovations-là. Je pense que c'est ça aussi l'intérêt de mettre en interaction et faire des arrimages entre la recherche

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et l'action communautaire. Un groupe qui vient de transformer complètement sa pratique, il ne la nomme pas instinctivement (« Tiens, je fais de l'innovation sociale! »). Sans lui mettre des mots dans la bouche, on peut lui faire prendre conscience que ce qui se fait là, c'est de la transformation sociale. Et c'est là, je crois, qu'il y a tout l'intérêt de jumeler ces deux acteurs-là, pour peut-être mettre des mots sur ce que nous, on n'est pas capables de nommer.

MA : Je vous remercie énormément de cet échange. Il s'agit de thèmes dont certainement on discute depuis plusieurs années mais plus rarement ensemble. Vous le faites normalement dans vos instances et nous, les chercheurs, on travaille et on analyse votre pratique. Nous partageons les résultats de nos études mais la co-construction de la réflexion est plus rare. Je souhaite que ce dialogue ouvre encore plus la porte à une réflexion commune qui ne soit pas la simple juxtaposition de deux perspectives mais plutôt un métissage de savoirs et de connaissances.

En ce qui concerne les thèmes traités, nous n'avons évidemment pas le temps de résumer tous les points abordés lors de cette discussion, et cela ne me semble même pas souhaitable de le faire, parce que cette discussion se veut ouverte et progressive. Cependant, notre dialogue a certainement souligné comment l'action communautaire, bien que pas toujours de manière déclarée, investit depuis longtemps le champ de l'innovation et de la transformation sociale. Il s'agit maintenant, même dans une phase de reprise post-pandémie (pandémie d'ailleurs qui pourrait aussi revenir) de continuer le travail afin d'influencer les politiques publiques, pour que les initiatives sociales à plusieurs échelles soient aussi reconnues et appuyées de manière plus systémique et structurelle au-delà de ce qu'on a nommé « la culture par projet ».

NOTE

1. Atelier 1 : Les enjeux organisationnels du travail : les ressources humaines.
   Atelier 2 : Le contexte d'intervention : renouvellement des approches et des pratiques.
   Atelier 3 : Le milieu communautaire comme espace de parole et d'*empowerment* : la place des parties prenantes.
   Atelier 4 : Les besoins d'accompagnement des organismes : comment la recherche peut être en appui à la pratique?
   Atelier 5 : L'action collective : la mobilisation des ressources et des acteurs.

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 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a487

ABOUT THE AUTHORS / LES AUTEURS

Marco Alberio est professeur en développement social et territorial à l'Université du Québec à Rimouski, titulaire de la Chaire de recherche du Canada en innovation sociale et développement des territoires, et professeur de sociologie à Alma Mater Studiorum — Università di Bologna. Courriel : marco_alberio@uqar.ca .

Ophélie Couspeyre est agente de développement à la Table nationale des corporations de développement communautaire (TNCDC). Courriel : recherche@tncdc.qc.ca .

Érick Plourde est directeur général de la Corporation de développement communautaire (CDC) de Lévis. Courriel : cdclevis@gmail.com .

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ANSERJ

Vol. 12, No. 1
Spring / printemps 2021
pp. 20 – 22

Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

Social Economy Futures in the Context of COVID-19

J.J. McMurtry
York University

ABSTRACT

This brief article explores two key questions that have emerged for the social economy in the COVID-19 context: 1) the nature of the relationship between social economy actors and the State, and 2) the possibility for social transformation going forward. This article engages with a dialogue entitled "Autonomous Community Action and Its Transformational Potential at a Territorial Level: An Ongoing Dialogue Between Research and Practice."

RÉSUMÉ

Ce bref article explore deux questions clés pour l'économie sociale soulevées dans le contexte du COVID-19 : 1) la nature du rapport entre l'État et les acteurs de l'économie sociale, et 2) la possibilité de transformations sociales pour l'avenir. Cet article se fonde sur un dialogue intitulé « L'action communautaire autonome et son potentiel transformationnel dans les territoires : un dialogue en cours entre les milieux de la recherche et de la pratique. »

Keywords / Mots clés : Social economy;The State; Quebec; COVID-19; Social transformation / Économie sociale; L'État; Québec; COVID-19; Transformation sociale

INTRODUCTION

The dialogue between Professor Marco Alberio, Ophélie Couspeyre a research officer at the National Table of Community Development Corporations (TNCDC), and Érick Plourde Director General, Corporation de développement communautaire (CDC) de Lévis, which appears in this issue of *The Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research* is a fascinating insight into some current debates and issues amongst Social Economy practitioners and academics in Québec. Specifically, the authors continue a discussion initiated at a global event in late 2020 on social innovation where the issue of autonomous community action in the COVID-19 pandemic context and the role of the State were engaged. I will pick up on these twin themes from the perspective of a researcher of the Social Economy and a person who, while familiar with the Québec context, does not live, research, or do community work in this province.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a489

The first issue is of significant historical importance to social and political movements: engagement with the state and its institutions and the nature of that relationship. Autonomy from the state is a significant feature of most definitions of the social economy (McMurtry, 2010, 2015). In Québec, however, the state and social economy actors have developed a rich practice of leveraging the power of the state to institutionalize and broadly support the social economy while the actors and organizations within it maintain significant autonomy. (The importance of this point in the context of COVID-19 will be addressed below). Specific to this history and practice is the development of community development corporations (CDCs), which are meso-level vehicles for autonomous community organizations to intervene in the social and economic issues of the region and leverage the support of the state. The mediation role of the CDCs—which allow for a clear separation or distinction between the state and the social economy while facilitating engagement between them—is fascinating and instructive to an observer from outside of Québec. While it would be fair to say that there are many points of contestation in this model, it has allowed Québec to develop a unique and robust social economy ecosystem.

Key to this ecosystem is an understanding of the distinction between "community action" and "independent community action." Such a distinction in practice allows for the independence so valued by social economy actors without abandoning the transformative potential of larger state support. Specifically, the participants in the dialogue highlight the ways in which the multi-tiered structures of the social economy and their various relationships with the state allow for social innovation.

There is a strong and compelling argument, however, for a project of social transformation and independence from the state that is extremely relevant in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most interesting but underdiscussed features of the pandemic is the significant turn toward the state-led direction and control of our social, political, and economic lives (e.g., shut downs and stay-at-home orders), which were largely inconceivable in the early part of 2020 and have now been normalized. Such an expansion of the state into every element of people's lives has not been seen since World War II, and yet we have not as a society really been inclined (or allowed) to discuss this radical change or its implications. Instead, there has been a focus on imagining a "return to normal" as a balm for the ailment of COVID-19.

At the same time as we have witnessed this radical turn toward the state, we have also witnessed very public resistance by a variety of conservative groups and the rise of hate crimes directed at socially, economically, and politically marginalized or minority populations. This rise in hate crimes and a virulent and aggressive conservativism is on top of the significantly differential impacts of the pandemic, especially on those who are economically less well off. It is, therefore, notable that, outside of this dialogue, not much has been said publicly about those organizations and societal actors who have a different, social justice-focused program of social transformation but share a healthy desire for independence from the state without necessarily invoking confrontational approaches to it. This dichotomized discourse around the state during COVID-19 has not been helpful in thinking though the options for a post-pandemic world, which is urgently necessary. A CDC that functions as an intermediary between the state and the community in this pandemic context—offering "shelter" for independent community organizations while ensuring access to the resources and capacities of the state—could provide fertile ground for positive social transformation and future visioning.

The second issue that was raised by the dialogue is the COVID-19 pandemic's potential to create an opportunity for societal transformation through social innovation utilizing the flexible organizational tools such as CDC's and the unexpected societal willingness to alter "the rules of the game." Specifically, the participants in the dialogue helpfully encourage readers to think differently about our obsession with novelty, especially in times of crisis. Too often innovation is assumed to be the ability to create new and unique solutions. This is one meaning; just as importantly, and probably just as often, innovation is the rearticulation or reorganization of existing tools and methods. In this light, we can reconsider the potential of intermediary institutions such as CDCs because they can facilitate the institutionalization of community innovations, relieving independent community organizations of the pressure to both maintain and innovate in a context of scaled-up

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a489

need. Further, the role of CDCs as hubs of sharing best practices can be viewed as critical during a crisis. One of the biggest impacts or losses from the COVID-19 pandemic is the exponential increase of the individualization and atomization of social actors. Exhaustion from online engagement is real, but not often discussed is the almost total erasure of collective conversations, learnings, and informal informational exchanges during the pandemic; the loss this represents for social economy organizations is monumental. This near elimination of social learning has been combined with an increased demand for the services provided by social economy organizations during COVID-19, the inequality mentioned above, and the absolute exhaustion of workers and community members.

The ability of organizations to "turn on a dime," as the authors say, is remarkable, but the important question is: what comes next? There is no quick return (if ever) to a pre-COVID-19 era, and the question the dialogue authors raise is an important one: how are we going to leverage the learnings from this period to continue social innovation in our new COVID-19 world? The issue of state funding also looms large; the budgets in Québec and elsewhere did not "reward" the social economy community for its heroic work during this pandemic, and the concern is that we may be in for a long period of austerity. Perhaps it is time to reconsider the concept of anchor institutions in light of COVID-19 and work toward a model where state-supported institutions, such as hospitals and universities, turn their purchasing power toward social economy organizations. Further, there is the possibility, as the dialogue mentions, of the state better understanding the crucial role social economy organizations play in the face of a crisis, and better connections have been established between state organizations and community organizations at an operational level.

As the dialogue encourages, it is important to internalize the idea that after the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot return to normal in terms of the lack of state support for social economy organizations. Indeed, we need to work to ensure that the state adopts a position of robust recognition and funding for the social economy sector—a promise made long ago by former Prime Minister Paul Martin when he said, "we intend to make the social economy a key part of Canada's social policy toolkit" (Social Enterprise Ontario, 2021, para. 3) and announced $132 million in funding (which never fully materialized) in his government's throne speech.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR / L'AUTEUR

J.J. McMurtry is currently serving as Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies at York University. He has been researching and writing about the social economy for over 15 years and has been an active practitioner in social economy organizations for most of his life. Email: jmcmurtr@yorku.ca.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a489

ANSERJ

Canadian journal of nonprofit and social economy research /
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

Volume 12 Number 1 / numéro 1
Spring / printemps 2021

www.anserj.ca

Official journal of the
Association of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER)

Revue officielle de
l'Association de recherche sur les organismes sans but lucratif et l'économie sociale
(ARES)

ANSERJ

Vol. 12, No. 1
Spring / printemps 2021
pp. 23 – 37

Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

Role Commitment and Role Maintenance Strategies: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Volunteering

Behnam Behnia
Carleton University

ABSTRACT

There are numerous reports on the rates of attrition among volunteers as a persistent challenge for organizations. In explaining volunteer attrition, researchers have predominantly: 1) provided an individualistic account of volunteering; 2) overlooked the interactional dimension of volunteer work and the crucial role of interpretation in its development; and 3) assumed commitment as a function of satisfaction with volunteering experience. Drawing on the theoretical insights of a symbolic interactionist approach, this article contends that volunteers' role commitment hinges on their satisfaction with their interpretation of their interaction with clients, rather than the interaction itself. This perspective calls attention to the volunteer-client dyadic interaction, gives a prominent place to the social role and its definition, and draws attention to strategies used by volunteers to sustain challenging relationship with clients.

RÉSUMÉ

Il existe de nombreux rapports sur les pourcentages de bénévoles perdus et le défi que ces pertes posent pour les organismes. Pour expliquer ces bénévoles perdus, les chercheurs ont surtout : 1) fourni des comptes rendus individualistes du bénévolat; 2) ignoré la dimension interactionnelle du bénévolat et le rôle crucial de l'interprétation dans le développement des interactions; et 3) pris pour acquis l'engagement comme indice de satisfaction des bénévoles. Se fondant sur la perspective théorique offerte par l'interactionnisme symbolique, cet article maintient que l'engagement des bénévoles dépend de la manière dont ils interprètent leurs interactions avec les clients plutôt que des interactions elles-mêmes. Cette perspective met l'accent sur l'interaction dyadique entre le bénévole et le client, donne une place de choix au rôle social et à sa définition, et attire l'attention sur les stratégies employées par les bénévoles pour gérer des rapports parfois difficiles avec leurs clients.

Keywords / Mots clés Role commitment; Role theory; Social roles; Role maintenance strategies; Symbolic interactionist approach; Volunteering / Engagement envers un rôle; Théorie des rôles; Rôles sociaux; Stratégies d'entretien des rôles; Interactionnisme symbolique; Bénévolat

INTRODUCTION

There are numerous reports indicating the rate of attrition among volunteers as a persistent challenge for organizations. Research suggests that the retention of volunteers is sometimes more difficult than their recruitment (Behnia, 2007;

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a370

Green & Chalip, 2004; Greenwood, Gordon, & Bolton, 2016; Stefanick, Best-Bertwistle, & Race 2020). The loss of volunteers is a loss not only for organizations but also for the individuals who receive their help (Goldman, 2002; Jamison, 2003; McNamee & Peterson, 2015; Stefanick et al. 2020).

The high human and financial costs associated with losing volunteers have led researchers to investigate why individuals continue (discontinue) their volunteer work (Allen & Mueller, 2013; Behnia, 2007; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Musick, 1999). The answer to this question lies in the study of commitment. Defined as an intention to maintain or stay in a particular relationship, role, or identity over time, commitment is believed to influence one's current and future plan of conduct (Agnew & Le, 2015; Byrd, 2009; Ebaugh, 1988; Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2010; Turner, 2013; Wilson & Musick, 1999).

A review of literature shows that in explaining volunteers' commitment, researchers have predominantly provided an individualistic account of volunteering by emphasizing volunteers' motivations, experiences of volunteering, and role identity. Influenced by motivational theories, researchers have purported that individuals remain committed when their altruistic and self-interest motivations (e.g., helping others, giving back to the community, meeting people, substituting their lost roles, learning new skills, and improving job opportunities) are fulfilled in the actual volunteer experience (Behnia, 2012, 2007, 2012; Green & Chalip, 2004; Jensen, Lou, Aagaard, & Vaeggemose, 2017**;** McCorkle, Dunn, Wan, & Gagne, 2009; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Rochester, Paine, & Howlett, 2012; Schusterschitz, Flatscehr-Thon, Leiter-Scheiring, & Geser, 2014; Smith, Drennan, Mackenzie, & Greenwood, 2018; Snyder & Omoto, 1992; Stefanick et al., 2020; Sturmer & Snyder, 2010; van Ingen & Wilson, 2017; Weng & Lee, 2016; Wilson, 2012). Therefore, people continue their volunteer engagements to the extent to which the expectations and motivations that brought them to volunteer work are satisfied (Chacon, Vecina, & Davila, 2007; Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Choi, 2010).

Emphasizing the experiences of volunteering, researchers have observed that volunteers are more likely to remain committed when they feel connected to clients and peer volunteers, and are satisfied with their assigned tasks, organizational support, supervision, and the appreciation of their contribution (Behnia, 2012, 2007; Allen & Mueller, 2013; Bussell & Forbes, 2001; Haski-Leventhal & Cnann, 2009; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Rochester, Ellis Paine, & Howlett, 2012; Snyder, Omoto, & Crain, 1999; Stolinsky, Ryan, Hausmann, & Wernli, 2004; van Ingen & Wilson, 2017; Vecina, Chacon, Marzana, & Marta, 2013; Wilson, 2000, 2012; Wilson & Musick, 1999).

Researchers have also argued that volunteer commitment is a function of role identity. According to role identity theory, individuals have multiple roles. Role identity occurs when one of those roles becomes important to their sense of who they are and part of their self-concept (Musick & Wilson, 2008; van Ingen & Wilson, 2017). Once developed, role identity motivates individuals to remain engaged in behaviours consistent with their self-concept (Chacon, Vecina, & Davila, 2007; Schusterschitz et.al., 2014). As people volunteer, some of them build a strong volunteer role identity (Penner, 2002; Rochester, Paine, & Howlett, 2012; van Vianen, Nijstad, & Voskuijl, 2008). The rate of turnover is believed to be lower among those individuals who strongly identify with the volunteer role compared to those with a weak role identity (Chacon et al., 2007; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Schusterschitz et. al., 2014; van Ingen & Wilson, 2017).

Drawing on the insights of a symbolic interaction approach, this article critically reviews the literature on the dynamics of volunteering and factors shaping volunteers' commitment. The review revealed important gaps in volunteering research and provided the context for proposing an alternative and more comprehensive approach to the study of volunteering. This article argues that despite their important contributions to the understanding of factors involved in volunteer commitment, researchers have overlooked 1) the interactional aspect of volunteer work, 2) the crucial role that interpretation plays in volunteer commitment, and 3) the presence of situations in which volunteers remain committed despite their dissatisfaction.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a370

Taking a symbolic interactionist perspective, it is argued here that volunteering brings into contact two individuals with unique personal and social characteristics who are expected to define their role as help-giver and help-receiver and act accordingly. This perspective calls attention to the volunteer-client dyadic interaction, gives a prominent place to social role and its definition, and draws attention to the crucial role that the volunteers' interpretation of their interaction with clients has in their commitment.

The contention of this article is that volunteering is a complex, dynamic, and evolving social relationship, and its stability is associated with how volunteers interpret their interactions as well as the activities they enact to maintain the relationship. As discussed below, a symbolic interactionist approach (SI) provides a conceptual framework that can guide researchers in their investigation of volunteers' interpretation of their interaction with clients.

According to Herbert Blumer (1969), the SI approach rests upon three premises. First, humans "act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them" (p. 2). As Blumer (2004) explains, an individual does not respond to another's action "on the basis of its mere presentation but instead interprets the gesture and responds to it on the basis of the interpretation" (p. 20). For instance, confronted by a person shaking a fist, one responds based on the way the gesture is defined. One may interpret that gesture to signify "that the person is angry, or bluffing, or indicating displeasure, or playfully feigning an attack" (p. 20; see also Blumer, 1967b). In other words, between the experienced events and the individual's response there is an intervening process of definition that is essential to the outcome (Blumer, 1967a).

The second premise is that the meaning is neither intrinsic to the object of attention nor brought to the relationship by the interacting individuals. Rather, meaning arises out of the social interaction that one has with a fellow human rather than in isolation (Becker & McCall, 1990; Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 1976; Sandstrom, Lively, Martin & Fine 2014). Stressing the importance of social interaction in the formation of meaning and human conduct, Blumer (2004) writes that human behaviour is often explained as adhering to norms, carrying out role requirements, or pursuing motivations. Thus, social interaction is reduced to a mere medium for the play of factors, such as motivations, personality traits, social roles, and norms, that lie outside the interaction. In such an approach, social interaction adds nothing to the analysis or explanation of behaviour, as there is no recognition that social interaction "may limit, transform, or nullify" (p. 17) the behaviour of people involved in an interaction.

According to the third premise, the meanings are "handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person. Process is the correct one used by the person in dealing with the things he [*sic*] encounters" (Blumer, 2004, p. 2). During an interaction, individuals pause, monitor their reactions to the situation and their inner feelings, and reorganize and adjust their behaviour as they take account of the other person's actions. Thus, their definition of a situation can modify as the interaction proceeds and the participants respond to each other's act. In other words, before responding, there is a "pause," a "two-second delay while we mentally rehearse our next move, test alternatives, anticipate others' reactions" (Griffin, 2000, p. 56). This pause allows individuals to devise a response based on their definition of the situation. Therefore, even when a shaking fist is defined as a sign that an angry person is ready to launch an aggressive attack, it does not necessarily lead to fight or flight responses. One may "devise one of several responses, such as trying to bluff or mollify the perceived attacker, being contrite, 'joking the mater away,' or provoking the 'attacker' to greater anger" (Blumer, 2004, p. 21; see also Becker, 1972; Sandstrom et al.).

It is important to point out that although dissatisfaction with their role experience could strain and even undermine volunteers' commitment, their interpretation of their experience could lead to behaviours other than quitting. They may remain committed despite their dissatisfaction by resorting to "relationship maintenance strategies." Some of the strategies used by volunteers in such situations will be discussed in this article. The inclusion of such strategies will further enhance knowledge of the mechanisms involved in role commitment.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a370

This article consists of four sections. The first section proposes a model of role commitment by applying the theoretical insights of the SI approach to social roles. Next, the outlined model is examined in light of the experiences of volunteers who work directly with clients who benefit from their work (e.g., befrienders, mentors), and the influence of the volunteer-client dyadic interaction on volunteers' self-concept, perceived self, and definition of the clients' identity is explored. In the following section, the relationship maintenance strategies used by volunteers are identified and discussed. Finally, the fourth section presents some of the implications of the proposed model for practice.

ASYMBOLIC INTERCTIONIST MODEL OF ROLE COMMITMENT

According to role theory, social roles refer to patterned behavioural expectations associated with social positions such as teachers, parents, citizens, neighbours, and friends that shape the conduct of individuals who occupy those positions (Biddle, 1986; Dolch, 2003; Newman & Newman, 2007). There are, however, two major perspectives on social role: structural and symbolic interactionist approaches. Although these two perspectives agree that members of society are aware of the existence of norms of behaviour associated with social positions, they differ on the nature and influence of norms (Zurcher, 1983).

In a structural approach, social roles are conceived of as an already existing set of behavioural expectations associated with social positions that exist independently from human interaction and interpretation. Behaviours associated with social roles are learned by members of society through a socialization process. In this approach, individuals are "expected to conform to norms associated with their social position and to perform what they are supposed to do" (Biddle, 1986, p. 70). Normative requirements are, therefore, considered as objective forces that impinge upon the occupants of a social position and influence their conduct (Dolch, 2003; Hindin, 2007). In other words, whoever occupies these social positions knows "how to 'play' one's role — because the norms that define the role provide a script for any given situation in which one is called on to play the role" (Hewitt, 2003, p. 64; see also Frank, 2007; Heiss, 1981a; Zurcher, 1983).

A problem with a structural approach is that it views social roles as scripts that exist independent of the interaction process and the interpretation of the interacting individuals. Individuals think and act in ways that are consistent with the scripts. Social roles are, therefore, perceived as a static entity, and their negotiated and flexible nature is ignored (Asforth, 2001; Lopata, 1991). A symbolic interactionist approach provides a different view of social roles.

Although symbolic interactionists do not dispute the presence of normative behavioural expectations associated with social positions, they argue that roles are "behavioral expectations of what a person *should do*" (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 421, emphasis added; see also Heiss, 1981a). An individual's definition of their role in an interactional context influences whether or not the individual follows role expectations and how they do that. However, role definition is not readily available. To define their role and align their actions accordingly, interacting individuals go through "role-taking" and "role-making" processes. Role-taking means imputing a role and identity to another person (e.g., student, parent, counsellor) and imaginatively occupying that role and looking at one's self and situation from that vantage point (Hewitt, 2003). It helps one anticipate the other's conduct (Stryker, 1967). In role-taking, individuals "read and interpret the other person's gestures through the prism of their own self, needs and stocks of accumulated knowledge" **(**Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1996, p. 565; see also Turner, 2013).

By imputing a role to the other, an individual is not only able to adopt the other person's perspective and anticipate their behaviour, they are also able to "make" their own role (e.g., teacher, daughter, patient) (Blumer, 2004; Charon, 1995; Dolch, 2003; Hewitt, 1976; Lundgren, 2004; Turner, 1956, 1962). In role-making, individuals organize their actions in order to assert a role in a situation that affirms their self-concept and needs (Hewitt, 2003; Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1996; Turner, 1994, 2013).

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Charles Horton Cooley's concept of "looking glass" reveals that in addition to one's self-concept and definition of the other's identity, a third factor is also involved in one's role definition and conduct: the "perceived self." Cooley maintains that in our interactions with others, what we think others are thinking of our appearance, behaviours, and attributes evokes feelings (such as pride, gratification, resentment, frustration, or mortification) that could in turn shape our conduct (Heiss, 1981b; Lundgren, 2004; Rosenberg, 1979; Wallace & Tice, 2012).

Once a role is defined, it functions as a perspective from which individuals construct their conduct (Hewitt, 2003; Turner, 1962). However, since role definition develops in the process of interaction between individuals, it is not static and inflexible (Dolch, 2003). Role definition is more akin to formulating a hypothesis, and as such it could be confirmed, revised, or even rejected as the relationship progresses and the interacting individuals learn more about each other (Hewitt, 1994; Turner, 1962, 1994). Because of their cognitive ability, individuals are able to "reflect about and assess the roles they are enacting or are supposed to enact. They can choose, for example, to let a role engulf their definition of self or can accommodate the behavioral expectations without at all defining themselves in terms of the role" (Zurcher, 1983, p. 34).

This article also posits the presence of two stages in role commitment: the pre-engagement and engagement stages. The pre-engagement stage refers to the period prior to undertaking a new role, when individuals prepare themselves through the "anticipatory role socialization process." This process assists individuals in their transition to a new role by helping them learn the values, skills, attitudes, and norms associated with the role to which they aspire to enter (Ebaugh, 1988). Anticipatory role socialization occurs through direct personal experience; conversation with relatives, friends, and acquaintances; and exposure to information via the media and the internet (Ebaugh, 1988; Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; McCorkle et al., 2009; McNamee & Peterson, 2015).

In pre-engagement, individuals imaginatively explore the consequences of entering the new role. They ponder whether they have the resources, capacities, and attributes required for the enactment of the new role (self-concept); the characteristics, expectations, and needs of those they will be interacting with (others' identity); and the potential judgements that those other individuals might make about their capacity in meeting the expectations and values associated with that role (perceived self). Individuals develop a preliminary commitment when these explorations lead to a positive orientation toward the role (Liou, 2008). However, this initial role definition and commitment could be challenged as volunteers engage with clients. Volunteers' commitment, therefore, hinges on congruence between expectations arising from their definition of their role as a volunteer and their experience of its enactment.

Applying these premises to volunteering, this article argues that one does not become a volunteer and fulfill the role by simply being matched with another person as a volunteer. To become a volunteer, individuals go through a process of role definition. A volunteer's self-concept, perceived self, and definition of other's identity influence their definition of their role and how they enact it. The presence of ambiguity in any of these three factors, or incompatibility between them, generates what role theorists call "problematic interaction situations," which could challenge the continuity of a relationship and result in a volunteer quitting or resorting to strategies for its maintenance.

To show the significance of the proposed model in shedding light on the dynamics of volunteer-client interaction and role commitment, volunteers' reports of their face-to-face interactions with clients are examined in relation to their self-concept, their definition of client's identity, and their perceived self. More specifically, the literature focusing on the volunteers' definition of their dyadic interactions with clients is explored, seeking answers to the following questions: What are the underlying reasons for volunteers' defining their interactions as satisfactory or disappointing? What are the factors influencing such interpretations of their experience? What are the key mechanisms keeping them committed to their relationships?

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Application of the role commitment model

Other's identity

Volunteering is not a spontaneous and random form of helping activity, it is an action based on reflection and selection. Individuals screen various volunteer programs and their potential clients in order to select the desired one (Behnia, 2007; Vecina et al., 2013). In other words, volunteers do not work with just anyone (Froyum, 2018). They are drawn to a certain group of individuals based on their perception of that group. They are attracted to clients who, in their view, need and deserve their help (Musick & Wilson, 2008). According to Carissa Froyum (2018), the clients must be conceived of as needy (i.e., suffering from a shortage of material and social resources), blameless (i.e., not be responsible for their need for help), and willing to be changed in order to be considered as deserving.

Social identity is another factor that draws individuals to volunteer with certain social groups. According to social identity theory, the perceived similarities and connections lead people to view themselves as members of the same social group (in-group) compared to others who do not belong to that group (out-group). Thus, individuals have a tendency to gravitate toward people with common ethnic, gender, class, and professional backgrounds. Consequently, the stronger an individual feels connected with a particular group, the more inclined that person is to volunteer for members of that group (Doidge & Sandri, 2018; Haski-Leventhal & Cnann, 2009; Lester, Mead, Graham, Gask, & Reilly, 2011; McCorkle et al., 2009; Sabir, Pillemer, Suitor, & Patterson, 2003; Smith et al., 2018; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2015; Weng & Lee, 2016). Conversely, individuals may refrain from volunteering with some groups, such as people with HIV/AIDS and refugees, due to the stigma and stereotypes associated with their identity (Behnia, 2007; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Snyder, Omoto, & Crain, 1999; Snyder & Omoto, 1992; Stolinski et al., 2004; Wilson, 2000).

Training and orientation sessions provided by volunteer organizations are also critically important in shaping prospective volunteers' image of their clients and their needs (Holden, 1997; Jensen, Lou, Aagaard, & Vaeggemose, 2017; Kramer, 2010; Lilburn, Breheny, & Pond, 2018; McCorkle et al., 2009; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Thompson, Valenti, Siette, & Priebe, 2016). The content of training is reported to generate concern and trepidation among the prospective volunteers (Greenwood et al., 2016). For instance, in a training program for mentors, the youth with whom volunteers were to be matched were portrayed as "deliberately telling lies, engaging in criminal activities, abusing alcohol and drugs, having suffered child abuse, or being schizophrenic or suicidal" (Colley, 2003, p. 65). After the training, some participants relayed that the training had "generated a sense of fear about the young people whom they might be mentoring" (Colley, 2003, p. 66).

Volunteers, therefore, enter the helping relationship with a preliminary definition of who the clients might be and what values and needs they might have. Brian McCorkle, Erin Dunn, Yu Mui Wan, and Cheryl Gagne (2009), for example, report that prior to meeting their clients, participants in their study expected "to share a client's life transformation, similar to the Hollywood movies *Shine* and *A Beautiful Mind*" (p. 296; see also Damianakis, 2007).

However, the actual experience of volunteering could challenge these preliminary notions. Volunteers' initial positive feeling could change as the relationship progresses and they get to know the clients. Clients' deservingness, for instance, could be questioned when volunteers disapprove of clients' conduct and attitudes. Helen Colley (2003) reports that after a few months of mentoring, a mentor's view about the mentee was changed, and their relationship was negatively affected as a result. Adopting a discourse of deviance, the mentor talked about the mentee "in terms of benefit dependency, unwillingness to work, teenage pregnancy, lack of respect for educational values" (p. 91).

Emotions such as confusion, disappointment, frustration, and anger could emerge when a volunteer's initial expectations are not met (Jensen et al., 2017). Disappointment with the relationship can at times be so strong that it can lead volunteers to contemplate quitting. A volunteer who was born to immigrant parents and witnessed the challenges they faced in ad-

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justing to Canadian society, for example, enthusiastically began volunteering with an older adult immigrant. Initially, she appraised their relationship as "excellent" and talked about their common interests and "ways of thinking." However, after a few meetings, the volunteer became so frustrated with the client's confrontational and challenging behaviours that she talked about ending the relationship (Behnia, 2018).

The volunteer-client relationship is also affected by whether volunteers conclude that a client's claim about their needs is true and that they are not taking advantage of them (Musick & Wilson, 2008). For example, some volunteers who worked with refugees with demanding needs discontinued their work because they felt the refugees were exploiting them (Behnia, 2007).

Self-concept

Volunteers enter the helping relationship believing to possess personal resources and capacities relevant to the volunteer role, such as compassion, patience, friendliness, flexibility, persistence, a positive outlook, leadership, listening skills, and caring skills (Behnia, 2012; Keith, 2003; Lilburn et al., 2016; Stefanick et al., 2020; Wharton, 1991). Their perception of the relevance of their skills and traits comes from their assumptions about a client's life experience and needs. For instance, a friendly visitor who assumed that residents of a nursing home were not appreciative of their lives stated: "I can make them see the bright side of each day because I love life and feel each day as a gift of God" (Keith, 2003, p. 26).

These perceptions make individuals feel confident enough to join volunteer organizations. Self-efficacy or confidence in having the skills and capacities necessary for the completion of volunteer tasks, for example, encouraged Canadian-born individuals to engage in volunteer work with newcomers. They believed that their training in mediation, teaching experience, years of working in the community, and travel abroad enabled them to overcome the challenges of working with immigrants (Behnia, 2012). The presence of similar personal experiences may also make individuals believe in their ability to work with certain groups (McNamee & Peterson, 20156). Immigrant volunteers, for instance, reported that they did not anticipate any challenges in working with newcomers. The presence of a common past gave immigrant volunteers confidence that they had a good understanding of the difficulties newcomers confront and were, therefore, in a better position to help them (Behnia, 2012).

Volunteers come to the helping relationship with an imaginative view of who they are and what personal skills and competencies they bring to the relationship. In other words, they bring a role identity that consists both of the behavioural expectations associated with the new role and their personal identity (Turner, 2013). However, engagement with clients could challenge their role identity as a volunteer. In a study of volunteers working with street youth in Israel, volunteers reported that before meeting clients they imagined themselves as adult role models who were there to save the youth by showing them the right way, and that they expected to be accepted as such by the youth. However, contrary to their expectation, the street youth not only did not "accept their help with open arms but rather put them through some hard trials and tests, and the volunteers had to prove they were worthy" (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008, p. 82).

The performance of tasks that contradict volunteers' self-concept could call into question their perception of themselves as a good person. Daphne Holden (1997) reports that college students who began their volunteer work with a homeless shelter with a desire to treat homeless people respectfully as equals, experienced an identity crisis when they found out that their role was to "enforce shelter rules, to spy into residents' lives, and to order around the very people whom they came to help" (p. 123). All the volunteers reported anxiety and discomfort about the organization's behavioural expectations, with one volunteer stating: "It's hard for me because I want to be on, like, equal ground, like feel equal to them and not feel a superior or something because it's not my situation" (Holden, 1997, p. 124).

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A sense of self-efficacy or confidence in their ability to complete the assigned tasks is another important factor in sustaining a volunteer's commitment. Seeing the positive effects of their volunteer work generates a sense of fulfillment and functions as a major reason to stay committed (Behnia, 2012; Green & Chalip, 2004; Smith et al. 2018). In contrast, volunteers may become disappointed when, contrary to their expectation of being a helping and resourceful person, they realize they are not making a difference or helping (Musick & Wilson, 2008). For instance, volunteers working with refugees reported experiencing disappointment when they were unable to prevent the deportation of refugees with whom they were matched or were unable to provide the sureties that imprisoned refugees were looking for (Behnia, 2007). Volunteers working with newcomers, for instance, reported that they remained committed because they felt helpful. If I didn't see progress then I might get a little umm, maybe a little bit disappointed not in my students but in myself, that I wasn't able to get her to a level that was helpful for her. (Behnia, 2012, p. 17)

Consequently, a lack of feedback made some volunteers uncertain about their self-efficacy: "Sometimes you have somebody, nothing is said, no expression is said. So then you have this feeling of confusion of 'did I really help him or not?'" (Behnia, 2012, p. 17).

Perceived self

Researchers have pointed out a link between volunteering and moral identity. Helping others without expectation for financial remuneration has generated the assumption that to be a volunteer is to be an altruistic and good person (Froyum, 2018; Holden, 1997; McNamee & Peterson, 2015; Musick & Wilson, 2008). While the "volunteer" identity carries positive moral value, whether or not clients and significant others (e.g., supervisors, relatives, friends) respond positively to this valued identity could engender different conduct in volunteers and impact their perception of self. Lacy G. McNamee and Brittany L. Peterson (2015) report that a study participant who was criticized by her supervisor said, "You hear that over and over and over, [and] you begin to wonder whether you're doing it right or not — especially if you never get any positive feedback" (p. 285). It is reported that the volunteers most likely to quit are those who received no recognition and appreciation for their work (Caro & Bass, 1995; Musick & Wilson, 2008). Clients' recognition of the contributions of volunteers and a show of gratitude for the help they receive are perceived as their positive perception of volunteers (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

Another important factor that shapes volunteers' experiences is feeling that they matter. Mattering is defined as a perception that we are an object of other people's attention, that they care about our lives and what we think, want, and do, and that they rely on us and we make a difference to their lives (Flett, 2018; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). As Jane Piliavin and Erica Siegl (2007) point out, mattering involves feeling "good about oneself," which is generated by the perception that people "notice us, care that we exist, and value us" (p. 452).

Therefore, the positive attention shown by clients conveys the message that volunteers matter to them. For instance, volunteers felt they mattered when older adult clients treated them as though they were their family members, looking after them, checking in on them, and expressing interest in their life and well-being (Behnia, 2018). Conversely, when clients do not return a volunteer's phone calls, do not show up for appointments, and do not share personal information, it can make volunteers feel rejected and as it they do not matter (Behnia, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2016). A volunteer who believed that a client "chose to reveal little about himself" reported that the "[client is] just regarding me as some kind of [servant] … like some kind of lower-order being that's been brought in to provide a service for him that he requires and, beyond being polite [pause] he doesn't have to deal with me as a person, and that made me angry" (Greenwood, et al., 2016, p. 7). This perception made the volunteer wonder whether he could continue the relationship.

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RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES

Dissatisfaction caused by the discrepancy between expectation and experience does not always result in volunteers ending their relationship with clients, leading to the question of why some volunteers continue their volunteer work despite a dissatisfactory experience. This question draws attention to the insights of scholars who have pointed out that people "spend more time maintaining relationships than developing or dissolving them" (Duck, 1988, cited in Stafford, 2003, p. 52). Research shows that people often engage in relational maintenance efforts in order to "stabilize a relationship that has gone through tough times and to keep it in a satisfactory condition." This explains the presence of "seeming anomalies such as stable, unhappy marriages" (Canary & Dainton, 2006, p. 728).

To maintain the continuity and stability of these relationships and to keep them from further deterioration, people often resort to what scholars have called "relationship maintenance strategies." These strategies refer to efforts to keep existing relationships, including those that are going through difficult time (Canary & Dainton, 2006). There are cognitive and behavioural strategies of relationship maintenance.

The cognitive strategies refer to the non-interactive processes undertaken by individuals when they face a challenging relationship (Canary & Dainton, 2006; Harvey & Wenzel, 2006). The cognitive strategies include mental activities such as minimizing, ignoring, forgiving, reframing, and justifying someone else's transgression (Canary & Dainton, 2006; Kivisto & Pittman, 2005; Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012).

One of the cognitive strategies used by volunteers to sustain their commitment to a challenging relationship is to blame external factors. According to attribution theory, when individuals blame themselves for a failure, it is likely they have negative feelings about themselves. However, when external or situational factors are identified as the causes of a problem, there is a higher likelihood that their self-concept is not being threatened (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; Zurcher, 1983).

Unsatisfactory role enactment could challenge a volunteer's self-concept as a capable and resourceful person. To protect this self-concept and stay in a relationship, a volunteer may blame other individuals and social forces. Froyum (2018), for instance, describes how a volunteer matched with children tried to deflect responsibility for the children's failure to progress by blaming bad parenting, a bad neighborhood, poverty, and delinquent peers.

Blaming circumstance is also helpful in maintaining a relationship because it confirms that clients deserve to be helped. Clients deserve support because their needs are caused by circumstances beyond their control (Behnia, 2012; Doidge & Sandri, 2018; Froyum, 2018). To continue their volunteer work with challenging immigrant seniors, volunteers resorted to various cognitive strategies: some thought of clients as children attempting to get attention, "[You deal with them] like you deal with a little kid about the age four-five years old. … They need your attention, they need your love"; some explained clients' troublesome behaviours as signs of low self-esteem, "They think 'nobody knows me,' 'I am nobody' … 'nobody loves me'"; and some even used ageist interpretations to explain the seniors' difficult behaviours, "When you get old, [your brain] is gone … Because the brain is shrinking" (Behnia, 2018, p. 44).

Finally, another strategy used by volunteers was to change their mindset. Diane Greenwood, Carolyn Gordon, Claire Pavlou, and Jessica Bolton (2016) report that the befrienders matched with people with dementia often feel "tired, bored or frustrated, and even questioning their ability to 'go on.'" But many of them "talked about the influence of their mindset on coping with the emotional challenges of the befriending role. They perceived difficulties like predictability as an inevitable part of the role and therefore saw themselves as responsible for managing their emotions: 'It's only tiring if I let it be … and if I let that get me then that's my problem, it's not him'" (p. 11; see also McCorkle et al., 2009).

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The behavioural strategies of relationship maintenance refer to behaviours or interactions that individuals enact to sustain a relationship. They go from acting nicely, withholding complaints, avoiding arguments, and supporting and comforting the transgressor to confronting them by setting boundaries and expressing anger and frustration (Canary & Dainton, 2006).

Volunteering often brings people of different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds into an unequal relationship, where one provides support and the other receives the support. Interactions with clients could make volunteers aware of differences in their identity such as age, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. That could become a source of concern for being negatively judged and even rejected by clients. To prevent that, some volunteers may resort to the strategy of hiding aspects of their identity. For instance, volunteers who worked in a homeless shelter tried to hide class gaps between them and the homeless people by avoiding talking about their vacations with the residents (Holden, 1997). Concerned about her client's reaction to their class difference, another volunteer reported that whenever she visited the teenage mother,

> I dress down, I don't wear jewelry, I go with the smallest car. I haven't even gotten her out to my house yet because I don't know what she would think. I have a big house in a nice neighborhood, and she lives in this little tiny place. (Wharton, 1991, p. 99)

Another behavioural strategy used by volunteers is to create situations congruent with their self-concept. For instance, to protect themselves against the negative judgement of shelter residents, volunteers avoided enforcing rules by pretending to be ignorant of how to handle them. They asked the paid staff to enforce rules. Another strategy they used was to take the night shifts. This allowed them to have more time to talk to shelter residents and build friendlier relationships with them (Holden, 1997; Musick & Wilson 2008). Other volunteers used this "avoidance" strategy to maintain their relationship with clients. For instance, when there was a history of animosity between their countries of origin, volunteers tried to avoid any discussion around politics with clients (Behnia, 2018).

Finally, to maintain relationships, some volunteers verbalized their frustration. One volunteer, for instance, reported that: "There was no joy in it for me by going and picking her up and taking her to whatever store she wanted to go to. I knew I wouldn't last like that. So I started setting limits and explaining to her that that's not what friends do" (McCorkle et al., 2009, p. 295).

CONCLUSION

Conceiving of volunteering as a role enactment, this article explored factors associated with volunteers' commitment to their roles, as well as some of the strategies they use to sustain unsatisfactory relationships. Informed by a symbolic interactionist approach, this article investigated role commitment in relation to volunteers' interpretation of their interactions with the clients. The application of a symbolic interaction approach showed that to define their role, volunteers go through role-taking and role-making processes by collecting and interpreting interactional cues along three parameters: their self-concept, their definition of the client, and their perceived self.

Conceptualizing role definition and commitment as a two-stage process, this article also examined the influence of the anticipatory role socialization process in shaping the perspective of prospective volunteers regarding a potential new role. In the pre-engagement stage, the prospective volunteers construct an image of themselves in the role, clients with whom they will be matched, and the view that clients might have of them. This process results in the development of certain expectations about themselves and clients, which could be confirmed or challenged in the engagement stage. Whether volunteers remain committed in the face of a discrepancy between expectations and experiences depends on how they interpret their relationship with clients. Volunteers may stay committed by resorting to cognitive and behavioural strategies that allow them to frame challenging relationships as acceptable.

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The proposed conceptual model could enhance the retention capacity of organizations by helping them to see the interactional aspects of volunteer-client relationships and the crucial role interpretation plays in their maintenance.

Organizations can play an important role in promoting volunteers' commitment by assisting them in the interpretation of their interaction with clients. Considering that due to anticipatory role socialization, volunteers come to the helping relationship with a certain conception of themselves and the clients, organizations need to 1) use the initial interviews and orientation sessions to elicit volunteers' perspectives in order to identify any misconceptions and unrealistic expectations that could negatively influence their interpretation of their interactions with the clients; and 2) organize informal community events to create opportunities for volunteers to meet and interact with clients, more experienced volunteers, and staff (Behnia, 2018; Stevens, 1991).

Once volunteers commence their volunteer work, organizations should provide them with ongoing follow-up and support. These activities allow the organizations to check in on how things are going, hear about volunteers' experiences with clients and volunteer works, and monitor volunteers' perceptions of their self-concept and perceived self, and see whether intervention is necessary to reduce confusion, doubt, and frustration.

Access to appropriate information about clients' background, interests, culture, support networks, and special needs helps volunteers in their search to define a client's identity (Damianakis, Wagner, Bernstein & Marziali, 2007; Jensen et al., 2017). This information could help volunteers have greater insight into the potential impact of their background differences. For instance, some refugees may be reluctant to share personal information and talk about their pre-migration life due to their past traumatic life experiences. Some befrienders, however, have reported perceiving distrustful behaviour as a sign of rejection and, therefore, a source of resentment (Behnia, 2007).

Volunteers need training workshops on issues such as socio-cultural differences, biases, and stereotypes and the effects they can have on their relationships with clients and how to address that. This training could help volunteers interpret their interactions with clients.

Finally, the appreciation shown by clients and organizations is an important factor encouraging volunteers to continue their work. It not only boosts their sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy, it can also convey a feeling of being positively perceived by others (perceived self). Therefore, it is important that organizations inform volunteers of the clients' positive feedback and appreciation of their contributions. Organizations' official recognition of volunteers furthers volunteer commitment (Behnia, 2012; Kovacs & Black, 1999).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Faranak Aminzadeh and the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR / L'AUTEUR

Behnam Behnia, PhD, is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive Ottawa, ON. K1S 5B6, Email: behnambehnia@cunet.carleton.ca

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a370

ANSERJ

Vol. 12, No. 1
Spring / printemps 2021
pp. 38 – 57

Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

Pathways to Local Partnerships in a Semi-Rural Setting: A Qualitative Study of Community Engagement and Employer-Supported Volunteering in Small and Medium Enterprises and Local Nonprofits

Myriam Gagnon, Myriam Beaudry, & Louise Lemyre
University of Ottawa

Alexandra Guay-Charette
Concordia University

ABSTRACT

There remains a knowledge gap regarding the factors that drive the development of business-nonprofit partnerships in the context of employer-supported volunteering—especially in small and medium enterprises. Furthermore, there is a need to consider how enterprises operate in their cultural contexts to better understand how they support volunteering trends in Canada. This study aimed to improve understanding of the multi-level factors that foster the development of business-nonprofit partnerships in the context of employer-supported volunteering. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with community and small business actors in a semi-rural setting in Francophone Québec. Results challenged the traditional view of volunteer support as a distinct activity, showing an integrated system of inter-dependence. Results suggest the relevance of conceptualizing small enterprises' support of volunteering as part of an inclusive approach to community engagement.

RÉSUMÉ

Les facteurs liés au développement de partenariats entre entreprises et OBNL dans le contexte du bénévolat appuyé par l'employeur sont méconnus – particulièrement au sein des petites et moyennes entreprises. Il est également pertinent de considérer le contexte culturel pour mieux comprendre les tendances canadiennes du bénévolat appuyé par l'employeur. Cette étude vise l'obtention d'une meilleure compréhension des facteurs multiniveaux associés au développement de partenariats entreprises-OBNL dans le contexte du soutien au bénévolat. Quinze entretiens semi-structurés ont été effectués auprès d'acteurs du secteur communautaire et des petites entreprises dans un milieu semi-rural francophone-québécois. Les résultats repositionnent la notion d'activités distinctes et témoignent plutôt d'un système intégré d'interdépendances. Les résultats suggèrent de conceptualiser le soutien au bénévolat des petites entreprises au sein d'une approche inclusive d'engagement communautaire.

Keywords / Mots clés: Employer-supported volunteering; SME; Business-nonprofit partnerships; Community engagement / Bénévolat appuyé par l'employeur; PME; Partenariats entreprises-OBNL; Engagement communautaire

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a385

INTRODUCTION

Employer-supported volunteering (ESV), which encompasses strategies used by employers to promote and facilitate their employees' involvement in the community, has become portrayed as an opportunity to mobilize human resources for community well-being. For example, in a recent Canadian study, full-time employees who reported the presence of employer support for volunteering were significantly more likely to get involved in informal volunteering, financial donating, and in-kind donating, while controlling for a combination of socio-demographic variables (Gagnon & Lemyre, 2020). Types of ESV include time-based support, financial support, logistical support, recognition of employees' volunteering involvement, and advertising volunteering opportunities (Rodell, Breitsohl, Schröder, & Keating, 2015). ESV is often undertaken in cooperation with nonprofit organizations (Lorenz, Gentile, & Wehner, 2011). However, understanding of business-nonprofit partnership dynamics is limited.

ESV literature has focused heavily on the employee-employer dyad and the perspective of large corporations (Cook & Burchell, 2018), often at the individual level. Thus, there is a lack of integration of the perspective of other key stakeholders involved in ESV (e.g., nonprofits), as well as a lack of integration of contextual factors at play in ESV dynamics (e.g., organizational practices, community context), especially in small enterprises and communities.There is a need to improve understanding of the factors that contribute to both the development of successful business-nonprofit partnerships and to positive outcomes for the community in the context of ESV (Austin, 2000; Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Cho & Kelly, 2014). The current study aimed to address this need by exploring multi-level factors associated with the development of partnerships between small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and nonprofits, and the related community outcomes in a semi-rural setting in Francophone Québec.

THE CASE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

In Canada, few studies distinguish between SMEs and large businesses when reporting on ESV activities and related organizational practices (Basil, Runte, Basil, & Usher, 2011). However, research suggests that SMEs may experience community involvement, ESV, and business-nonprofit partnerships differently than large organizations do. SMEs have their own particular set of challenges for the implementation of community involvement activities, including limited financial resources, tools, support services, and infrastructure (Kechiche & Soparnot, 2012). Therefore, SME community involvement tends to favour in-kind contributions in products, services, or competencies (Madden, Scaife, & Crissman, 2006), while large businesses favour financial initiatives, such as donations and sponsoring (Russo & Tencati, 2009).

Overall, SMEs tend to adopt informal and implicit corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies, while large businesses use more formal procedures, such as environmental and human resources policies (Baumann-Pauly, Wickert, Spence, & Scherer, 2013; Russo & Tencati, 2009). In the context of ESV, SMEs have been shown to be less likely than large businesses to engage in strategic planning targeting specific causes and more likely to adopt an informal approach (Basil, Runte, Basil, & Usher, 2011). While large businesses place considerable emphasis on the external reporting of CSR, SMEs devote little effort to external communication about their activities (Baumann-Paul et al., 2013). Consequently, due to the informal nature of CSR in SMEs, nonprofits may be less aware of SMEs' community involvement practices, which could hinder business-nonprofit partnerships. Indeed, a study of the corporate community involvement practices of American SMEs found that representatives expressed interest in establishing more sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships with nonprofits, but they perceived a lack of requests for support or interest from nonprofits (Zatepilina-Monacell, 2015). Moreover, little is known about the specific manifestations of ESV within SMEs, or how different stakeholder groups (e.g., employees, employers, nonprofit representatives) perceive and understand it. Given this gap and the important distinctions between SMEs and large businesses, a better understanding of ESV in SMEs and the dynamics involved in the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships in the context of community involvement is required.

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UNDERSTANDING THE FRANCOPHONE QUÉBEC CONTEXT FROM A SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the Canadian context, Francophone Québec requires special consideration due to the particularities of community involvement patterns. Data from Canada-wide surveys on community engagement trends and practices has repeatedly shown significantly lower rates of formal involvement (e.g., formal volunteering) in Québec compared with other provinces (Curtis, Baer, Grabb, & Perks, 2003; Turcotte, 2015; Vézina & Crompton, 2012). These differences may be explained by cultural and socio-historical hypotheses. Some scholars have suggested that Quebeckers prefer informal methods of civic engagement (Laforest, 2011); others have suggested that the role of longstanding Catholic and religious influences combined with the influence of the relatively large welfare state may have contributed to the perception of a relatively low need for voluntary engagement (Gaudet & Reed, 2004; Hwang, Andersen, & Grabb, 2007; Runte, Basil, & Runte, 2010). Québec's lower rates of involvement also appear to extend to the context of ESV (Hurst, 2012; Runte, Basil, & Runte, 2010). Cross-cultural comparison studies on ESV comparing Québec and other provinces are sparse. In their survey study on ESV, Mary Runte, Debra Basil, & Robert Runte (2010) found that Québec companies were slightly more likely than non-Québec companies to focus on the external benefits of ESV, such as community perception, rather than internal benefits, such as increased employee satisfaction and commitment. This highlights the relevance of considering factors pertaining to the broader social environment (e.g., cultural factors) in order to better understand the dynamics at play in ESV. In addition, examining ESV dynamics in Francophone Québec fosters a better understanding of ESV practices in SMEs, which provide 87.4 percent of jobs in Québec. Small businesses (99 employees or less) account for 97.9 percent of businesses in Québec (Industry Canada, 2019).

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social-ecological model highlights the role that the social environment can play in ESV dynamics. The model posits that individuals and their behaviours are nested within broader systems in their social environment (e.g., family, employer, community, economy, society), which they influence and are influenced by. Although the ecological systems theory has been used to understand the antecedents and responses to formal volunteering (Kulik, 2007a, 2007b), little attention has been given to this model in the context of ESV.

In line with a social-ecological approach, this article proposes that in addition to individual-level factors—including the experiences of stakeholders from both sectors—mutually influential ecological systems impact the development and success of business-nonprofit partnerships within Francophone Québec and shape SME-nonprofit partnerships and ESV practices. At the organizational level, this includes the role and characteristics of SMEs in Francophone Québec's business landscape in relation to community engagement (e.g., organizational processes and practices). At the community level, it includes neighbourhood characteristics (e.g., rural, urban, etc.).

NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTEXT AND THE RURAL ADVANTAGE

Urban and rural settings exhibit different characteristics. In rural and semi-rural regions, for example, residents are more likely to know and trust their neighbours and to have a strong sense of belonging within their community (Turcotte, 2005). These characteristics may contribute to higher engagement, since volunteering is more prevalent in rural regions, as observed in Canadian-wide surveys of participatory behaviour (Reed & Selbee, 2001; Turcotte, 2005; Vézina & Crompton, 2012). However, little is known about specificities and dynamics of rural businesses in the context of ESV. Given the higher volunteering rates found in rural settings, examining the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships in smaller communities may provide insight on factors associated with SME community involvement.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to get a better understanding of both the factors involved in the development of SME-nonprofit partner-

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ships within a small community context and the related community implications in order to identify promising practices. As such, the study was guided by three research questions:

1. What is the participant's understanding of ESV in SMEs?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators of SME-nonprofit partnerships in a small community context?
3. What are the perceived outcomes linked to SME-nonprofit partnerships in the context of ESV within a small community setting?

The study was conducted in partnership with the Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec (FCABQ); it is part of a larger interdisciplinary university-community research project with the University of Ottawa titled E=MC^2 (Engagement=Mobilizing Communities and Collaboration).

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative methodology based on key informant interviews was employed to gather rich data on perceptions, practices, and influential factors associated with rural ESV and SME-nonprofit partnerships. The research setting was identified through consultation with community partners.

This study examines the case of a semi-rural municipality recognized for its history of successful SME-nonprofit partnership development in the context of ESV; the study of successful (rather than unsuccessful) partnerships was privileged given the lack of previous data on this issue. The regional county municipality is located between two important urban centres in the province of Québec. Population size was estimated at around 40,000 residents (with a density of 34 residents per square kilometre). The average individual income was inferior to the provincial average ($22,242 versus $25,646), and the median age was higher than that of Québec (45.2 years versus 41.5 years; Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2014. Recruitment was facilitated by a community partner (the director of a local volunteer centre) who helped identify key informants from both the business and nonprofit sectors, as per a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007). The aim was to recruit stakeholders with different roles in SME-nonprofit partnerships who could provide different insights (e.g., employees and community volunteers may comment primarily on individual factors at play, whereas employers and nonprofit staff may offer a more organizational perspective). The sample comprised 15 participants (eight women and seven men) from four categories: SME employers (owners or managers; $N = 3$), SME employees ($N = 2$), community organization employees (i.e., local nonprofit coordinators; $N = 3$), and community volunteers ($N = 7$). Two participating SMEs were from the retail sector and one was from the financial services sector. Some participants in the community volunteer category also discussed instances of experiencing ESV as employees. Characteristics of participating SMEs are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of participating small and medium enterprises

	SME A	SME B	SME C
Sector	Retail	Retail	Financial services
Number of employees	47	63	100

Procedure

The research team developed the interview guide based on study goals, in consultation with community partners. The interview guide covered the following themes: a) types of employer support for volunteering; b) reasons for involvement; c) perceived ESV and SME community engagement outcomes; and d) facilitators and barriers to SME community engagement and SME-nonprofit partnership development. Fourteen interviews were conducted in person and one was

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conducted by phone. In-person interviews were conducted in French and were held at participants' preferred location. Interviews with community volunteers and SME employees took place at the volunteer centre, while interviews with non-profit representatives and SME employers were conducted in a private room at their workplace. Interviews lasted from 38 to 128 minutes; they were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Quotes have been translated by the first author.

Analysis

Data were analyzed by the first three authors using a combination of deductive and inductive analyses (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) and the NVivo qualitative analysis software. The researchers first developed an a priori coding grid based on study questions and previous ESV research. Six interview transcripts were coded based on this first coding grid, each researcher supplementing the initial coding scheme as new themes emerged from the data. To verify the level of agreement on the codes generated, the three researchers met to compare codes, clarify definitions, and combine emergent codes into an updated coding grid. The researchers then revised the previously coded transcripts and coded the remaining ones. Once all transcripts had been coded, the list of codes was refined to synthesize findings in a smaller number of distinct categories (Thomas, 2006).

FINDINGS

To investigate multi-level factors involved in SME-nonprofit partnership development in the context of ESV, analyses explored four dimensions of participants' perspectives: a) their conceptualization of ESV, b) challenges and barriers to SME-nonprofit partnerships, c) facilitators and opportunities for SME-nonprofit partnerships, and d) perceived multi-level outcomes of SME-nonprofit partnerships in the context of ESV.

Understanding employer-supported volunteering in the context of small and medium enterprises

A first important observation was that most respondents did not relate to the term "employer-supported volunteering." SME employers did not describe the different ways in which they supported or facilitated their employees' volunteering as a distinct form of community engagement. Rather, they considered these practices as part of the broader array of community-serving activities performed by their business. This suggests that support for employee involvement was woven into the overall community engagement approach of the business:

> Well, since I'm offering them [local nonprofit organization] products for the day, the tent and all that, I may as well check among the entire staff and the management team to see if there's one or more people who want to go to this event [fundraiser] to give out gifts to people, give out juices during the day. (Participant 1, employer, SME A)

Flexible approach

Strategies commonly cited to support employees' community involvement denoted flexibility, support, and approval on the part of SMEs. These strategies were used in the context of employer-led initiatives, joint employee-employer initiatives, and employees' personal volunteering endeavours. Several participants mentioned flexible work schedules as key to accommodating volunteering endeavours: "Every first Wednesday of the month, she always has her meeting [at a community organization where she volunteers]. So for sure we will never schedule her on Wednesday evening" (Participant 1, employer, SME A). Other commonly reported strategies included employers reducing the barriers to employee engagement via measures such as in-kind incentives (e.g., providing a meal during the activity) and logistical support: "We really took care of everything for them [employees partaking in a fundraising activity for a local nonprofit]. We had made a schedule. We had cleared their agendas. So it went well" (Participant 3, employer, SME C).

Diversity of employer-supported volunteering forms

Participants reported that SMEs' involvement with the local community took many forms, including in-kind donations,

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lending equipment for community events, and participation in fundraisers for local causes or organizations. Strategies used to promote or facilitate employees' involvement in these activities were vastly informal. The employer from the medium-sized business studied (SME C) reported that her business had a policy on community engagement and activities explicitly focused on fostering employee volunteering. However, none of the SMEs in the study had a formalized approach to or dedicated policy for ESV. Many forms of ESV were described, but the most cited practice was expressing gratitude for employees' involvement. This took place through different means, ranging from implicit approval and verbal thanks to more concrete and formal gestures, such as recognizing an employee's contribution in internal communication tools. SMEs had a tendency to support local, known community organizations through their community engagement practices.

Barriers and obstacles to small and medium enterprise-nonprofit partnership development in the context of employer-supported volunteering

Participants identified several individual-, organizational-, and community-level factors that could hinder the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships in the context of ESV initiatives.

Individual-level barriers

The main individual-level barrier to SME-nonprofit partnerships identified by SME employees and employers was a lack of awareness of involvement opportunities. Some cited a lack of knowledge about nonprofits and opportunities for involvement in their community, which could limit the identification of potential interorganizational synergies.

Organizational-level barriers

In terms of barriers at the organizational level, participants noted that SME-nonprofit partnerships could be hindered by intersectoral distrust, conflicting processes and practices between the two sectors, and difficulties in measuring the impacts of initiatives.

Climate of intersectoral distrust

Respondents noted that intersectoral mistrust was an important challenge to the development of ties between SMEs and nonprofits. Some respondents mentioned that certain nonprofit representatives were quite resistant to the idea of seeking partnerships with businesses and held a generally negative view of the business sector. This could stem from suspicion regarding businesses' intentions for participating in community involvement and the fear that they may exploit these opportunities for marketing purposes. For their part, SME employers reported that past interactions with nonprofits that appeared disorganized or half-hearted negatively impacted their desire to collaborate. A nonprofit representative reported witnessing caution on the part of businesses being solicited for financial donations, reflecting potential trust-building challenges:

> But entrepreneurs are heavily solicited. They are cautious. And I understand them. You know, they don't say yes right away. They ask questions: so, what will you do with that money? Often, it's like you want this, but what will you do with it? You ask for a sponsorship, but who will it go to? They ask questions. (Participant 6, nonprofit)

Conflicting processes and practices

SME employers and nonprofit representatives both mentioned instances where members of the other sector had behaved in a way that did not match their expectations. For example, an employer mentioned having received a support request from a nonprofit via email. Because this was not the employer's preferred mode of communication (the employer preferred the telephone) and made the exchange feel "impersonal," it lowered their interest in establishing a collaboration. Conflicting behaviours and expectations could stem from misunderstandings or a perceived lack of transparency, and they could hinder the desire of both nonprofit representatives and SME employers to embark in a partnership.

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Difficulties measuring the impact of employer-supported volunteering initiatives

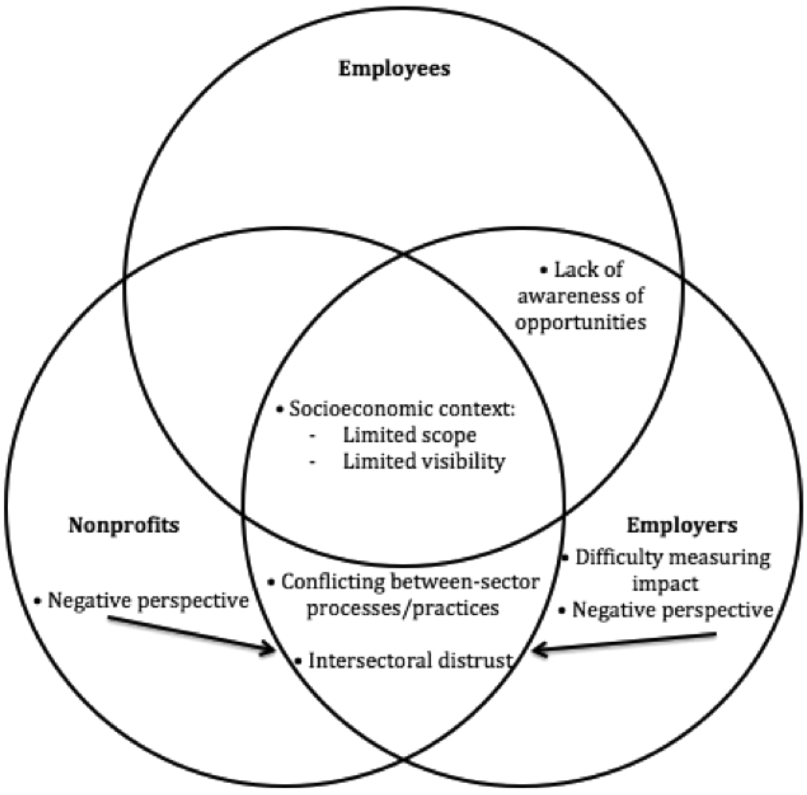
Some SME employers noted that assessing ESV outcomes can be challenging, especially at the organizational and community levels. This could limit the perceived added value of partnering with nonprofits. They reported relying on their "felt" impressions to capture the impact of ESV initiatives: "Well, it's very difficult to talk about impact because it's things, it's feelings there" (Participant 7, nonprofit, former SME employer).

Community-level barriers

At the community level, SME employers and community representatives identified that neighbourhood and local community characteristics, such as the socio-economic context, could limit SME-nonprofit partnerships. For example, participants mentioned that the financial resources available within their semi-rural community could limit the scope and visibility of community events, thus limiting collaboration opportunities: "We're not a rich place, okay? Everyone has limited means. So when you want to organize something, it's hard to organize something that will stand out, okay?" (Participant 7, nonprofit, former SME employer)

Figure 1 presents barriers and obstacles to the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships.

Figure 1. Barriers to the Development of SME-Nonprofit Partnerships in ESV Initiatives.



FACILITATORS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE-NONPROFIT PARTNERSHIPS IN THE CONTEXT OF EMPLOYER-SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING

Participants identified several individual-, organizational-, and community-level facilitators for the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships in the context of ESV.

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Individual-level facilitators

At the individual level, participants mentioned how a sense of belonging and a connection to the local community could facilitate SME-nonprofit partnerships.

Community attachment

Community attachment and caring emerged as an important theme among both SME and nonprofit representatives. This manifested first through an awareness of interdependencies between sectors. Participants described how both sectors need to work together to ensure the long-term well-being and sustainability of their community. Nonprofit representatives generally perceived local business representatives as actively involved in the community, as illustrated by this quote:

> We can't go one without the other here in [our municipality], precisely because there are not a lot of businesses, there is not a large population. And everyone needs to work together to keep [the municipality] alive. So it goes without saying that we work together. Merchants will often participate in all kinds of organizations for the benefit of the population. (Participant 7, nonprofit)

Another manifestation of community attachment involved affective commitments to specific causes or local nonprofit organizations. For SME employers, the desire to give back and contribute to local community development fuelled an openness to supporting and collaborating with nonprofits:

> It's evident that to date, the volunteer centre is my hobbyhorse, and it's … Mr. [X, volunteer centre director] who transmitted his passion to me. [The employees], they are passionate people who are there to help people. I tip my hat to them at 150 percent. (Participant 1, employer, SME A)

The affective commitment of SME employers was deemed particularly relevant to the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships, as many participants considered that employers and owner-managers largely led or facilitated the community engagement activities.

Organizational-level facilitators

Participants identified organizational practices that were associated with the development and continuity of SME-nonprofit partnerships. These included the affirmation of organizational strengths, the recognition of the contributions of cross-sectoral partners, the multiplication of intersectoral interactions (cross-pollination), and the formulation of clear objectives.

Affirming organizational strengths

The ability of nonprofits to position their added value and unique expertise appeared to facilitate SME-nonprofit ties. Participants from all categories described the successful efforts of the local volunteer centre to increase its visibility among the local community, including the business community, by having a representative attend various events and openly communicate its mission, activities, and accomplishments. The volunteer centre director was described as particularly skillful at demonstrating through various channels their organization's unique expertise to the local community and the business sector (e.g., providing training on active listening skills):

> [They] position themselves very well in relation to the business community, and they really position their organization as a player, an integral part of community development. (Participant 2, employer, SME B)

Efforts deployed by a nonprofit representative to affirm their organization's strengths contributed to its positive reputation as open, transparent, and valuable within the local business community.

Recognizing and valuing contribution

Participants also mentioned the importance of recognizing and valuing contributions to strengthen SME-nonprofit relationships. Both SME and nonprofit representatives recognized the important role played by members of the other sector

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in local community development and the success of community engagement activities (such as ESV). Explicitly communicating this appreciation was also highlighted as an important relationship-building behaviour. For example, the volunteer centre's director reported that local entrepreneurs had previously expressed that the simple act of acknowledging their support with a thank-you letter helped set the centre apart and promoted sustainable partnerships. As a subtle yet important feature, it was phrased as expressing gratitude rather than celebrating the performance of an individual or entity. The focus appeared to be on the impact:

> But one of the things we do that they notice too, I've always been inclined to do it, [is send thank-you letters]. "You're one of the rare organizations who send us thank you letters" [they say]. That recognition there, I think we're nurturing ties. (Participant 6, nonprofit)

Cross-pollination

Nonprofit representatives reported fruitful examples speaking to the importance of multiplying inter-sector interactions in order to establish ties between nonprofits and SMEs. This was achieved by facilitating introductions to members of the other sector. For example, the volunteer centre director reported seeking to connect members of their staff to the staff of local enterprises. Moreover, they noted that developing multiple connections between nonprofit staff members and SME employees allowed for the natural unfolding of individual affinities and informal complicity between organizations:

> Like with [Business A], [Mr. Smith[1]] dives right in at 100 miles an hour, you know? But with [Business B], it's [Ms. Jones[1]]. People connect with others too. That's important as well.… They share tasks and they often go according to affinities. (Participant 6, nonprofit)

Formulating clear objectives

Nonprofit representatives discussed the importance of being "clear with [SME representatives] on what we are asking of them" (Participant 6, nonprofit) from the outset in order to facilitate the development of partnerships. This allowed SME representatives to understand the nonprofit's needs and the expectations regarding their role and the scope of their involvement.

Community-level facilitators

At the community level, facilitators included the existence of spaces fostering SME-nonprofit interactions and the visibility of ESV initiatives.

Intersectoral interaction spaces

Participants described community characteristics that allowed for the creation of spaces and opportunities for members of the local business and nonprofit sectors to interact in both informal and formal ways.

One pathway to the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships via intersectoral interactions was through familiarity between members of the business and nonprofit sectors. It was attributed to the small size of the community and often facilitated through word of mouth. SME employers noted a preference to get involved with locally based nonprofits that they were familiar with, saying that their existing social networks had sometimes contributed to the establishment of new partnerships via informal introductions. For example, the owner-manager of SME A reported having been introduced to the volunteer centre director by another local business owner. This encounter had led them to organize fundraising activities for the volunteer centre and they encouraged their employees to participate.

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The three SMEs that participated in the study were involved in activities to support the local volunteer centre, with some activities involving employee volunteering (e.g., the preparation of goods for fundraising sales, paid volunteer time). In addition to partnering with the volunteer centre, the employer from SME B reported that their business was involved with a finite number of nonprofits, all of which they had pre-existing ties to. As for formal intersectoral interaction spaces, respondents described the role some organizations played in connecting actors from both sectors and publicly recognizing their contributions to community development. The local Chamber of Commerce, for example, was consistently open to collaborating with nonprofits and acknowledging their contributions to local community development. Indeed, respondents reported that the Chamber of Commerce had begun publicly recognizing local actors for significant contributions to the regional municipal county's development:

> Often we'll pay tribute to someone who's done something to improve the region. It's not necessarily growing their business … [it is] businesspeople who've helped in the community sector. (Participant 7, nonprofit)

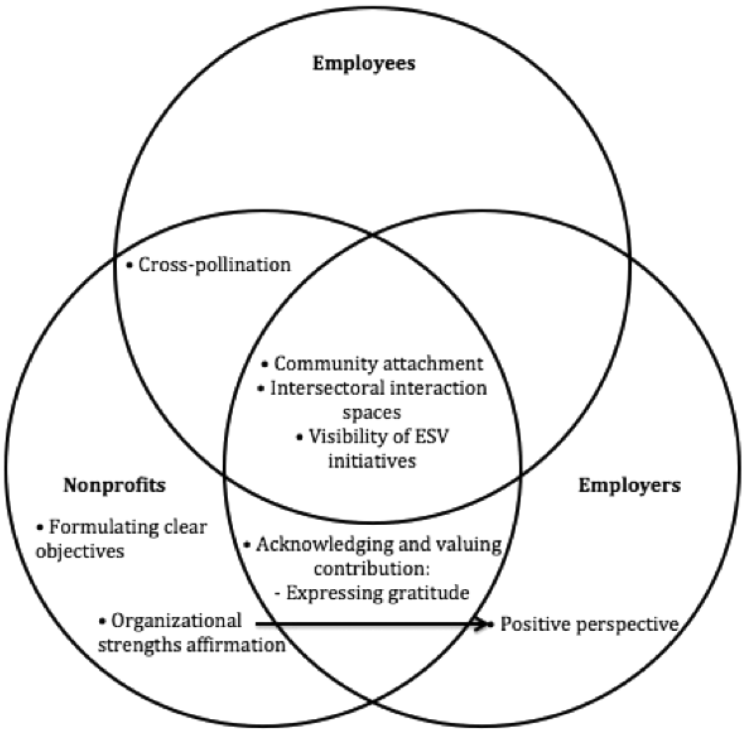
At the time of data collection, the volunteer centre's director had recently been awarded this distinction for his role in providing services to the community, which further enhanced the volunteer centre's visibility among businesses and within the larger community.

The visibility of nonprofits and employer-supported volunteering initiatives

Respondents identified that local media outlets played a role in raising awareness about local nonprofits and community initiatives: "You don't go two weeks without hearing about the volunteer centre in the paper, on the community TV channel, on the radio" (Participant 6, nonprofit). Due to SME representatives' preference to get involved with familiar local nonprofits, this appeared to facilitate the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships by contributing to leveraging and legitimizing specific community organizations and causes within the community.

Figure 2 presents facilitators and opportunities for the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships.

Figure 2. Facilitators to the Development of SME-Nonprofit Partnerships in ESV Initiatives.



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The perceived outcomes of employer-supported volunteering in small and medium enterprises

Participants perceived that successful SME-nonprofit partnerships created in the context of ESV contributed to outcomes for nonprofits, SMEs, and the local community.

Outcomes for nonprofits

SME employees reported that their ESV experiences increased their awareness of nonprofits' services and activities as well as opportunities for further involvement. This may contribute to increasing the number of volunteers for nonprofits. Indeed, an employer observed that an ESV activity organized with the local volunteer centre had mobilized some employees who had not previously volunteered. Moreover, they recalled that ESV experiences had encouraged some of their employees to continue volunteering on their own.

> Not everyone … incorporated volunteering in their personal life. And I know there are a few who continued to do it after, who got involved. I think there is a financial advisor from here who did income tax returns, who helped people, who gave his time in that way. There are people who helped at the reception. So it was an interesting experience, I think, for people of the [volunteer centre] but for people from [our business] as well. (Participant 3, employer, SME C)

Some participants from other respondent categories (SME employees, community volunteers) confirmed this observation. For example, a retired employee who volunteered at the local volunteer centre mentioned that participating in an ESV activity while they were still in the workforce had initiated their desire to volunteer with the elderly. However, ESV was not always perceived as a lever for increased volunteer involvement. One employee perceived their current level of volunteer involvement, which was facilitated by their employer, as sufficient.

Nonprofit representatives reported that as employers and employees became familiar with their organization, they sometimes became sources of additional support and advocacy by undertaking activities such as promoting the organization and its services within the community, providing financial contributions, and helping to raise money:

> They say … send some of your members, some employees and volunteers and they'll hand out leaflets to promote the service … they allow us to promote our services and organization without doing too much because "no, no, our employees will do that. We will have a draw and we're the ones who are paying for it." (Participant 6, nonprofit)

Thus, nonprofit representatives felt that SME employee involvement facilitated by ESV contributed to improving their organization's visibility in the community.

Outcomes for small and medium enterprises

Participants discussed both individual- and organizational-level outcomes for SMEs. At the individual level, employees identified psychological benefits associated with ESV. They expressed deriving enjoyment and gratification from participating in ESV activities. They also perceived that their involvement fostered the development of empathy and open-mindedness, which were sometimes seen as having a positive spillover effect into their work:

> It probably brought me closer to the human side [of my profession]. It allows [me] to better understand people's reluctance and difficulties, to better understand their environment … probably primarily when it comes to work but probably also in my personal life. I probably listen more, and I'm probably more attentive. (Participant 5, employee, SME B)

Employees also described perceived outcomes linked to organizational commitment. They reported that seeing their employer actively invest time in community causes fostered their organizational pride and enhanced a sense of good "person-organization fit," whereby their employer's values align with their own. Employers also reported finding their involvement

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gratifying. In addition, some employers noted that organizing and participating in ESV initiatives could enhance their social capital by developing their personal social networks, which could lead to opportunities for business development.

At the organizational level, an important theme that emerged from the perspectives of employees and employers alike was ESV's contribution to the reputation of a business. According to employers, the local clientele acknowledged and expressed gratitude toward SMEs' involvement in the community. One employer reported receiving feedback from customers who chose to support their business due to their involvement with the volunteer centre, illustrating that ESV can have direct financial benefits. The other employers believed that consumer choices are based on a wide array of factors that may or may not include SME community engagement. Accordingly, they did not perceive a substantial financial impact from their involvement with ESV. Employers did find that improved reputation due to community involvement could facilitate employee recruitment and retention, and customer retention.

A second organizational outcome encompassed the perceived benefits of ESV activities on the work climate through strengthened relationships among employees and with their employers. Indeed, employees and employers found that ESV activities enabled them to get to know each other on a more personal level. This promoted a sense of cohesion and social support, an outcome sometimes communicated to nonprofit representatives:

> I once had a comment from an employer who said [ESV] had improved relationships in his business.… He said … now everyone speaks to each other … they have some pride now. They don't just come to punch in and weld anymore, you know. There is something else. (Participant 8, nonprofit)

Outcomes for the local community

Nonprofit representatives and employers identified certain types of employer-supported initiatives (e.g., fundraising activities) as contributing to community development in several quantifiable ways. For example, an employer reported that the money collected within their business had contributed to the purchase of specific items that benefited the local community in concrete, observable ways:

> We helped purchase a vehicle for the distribution of Meals on Wheels. Or sometimes it'll be for the economic development of a community. In [the municipality], we paid for an outdoor pool. So it brings new residents, it brings economic development, it brings community development. So yes, impacts are very concrete. We see them on the field there, a lot. (Participant 3, employer, SME C)

> Nonprofit representatives and employees believed that ESV involvement fostered an increased awareness of community needs and services among SME employees and employers. A volunteer reported that participating in a group volunteering activity at the local volunteer centre had increased their awareness and their colleagues' awareness of community needs and of the volunteer centre's contributions—"it made us realize that yes, there is a real need"—as well as the volunteer centre itself: "there are some people who didn't know about [volunteer centre X]" (Participant 15, community volunteer, former employee of SME C).

In turn, nonprofit representatives reported that this increased awareness allowed employee volunteers to refer people they knew (e.g., acquaintances or family members) to community services because they gained greater awareness of their existence. This was thought to increase nonprofit organizations' ability to serve their community. The volunteer centre director described this phenomenon as "naturally occurring referral networks":

> People tell us they didn't know this person could have this service … we call this naturally occurring referral networks. And here, we've often had, for example, a woman calling and saying, my daughter who told me to call you because I could have volunteer transportation or Meals on Wheels. (Participant 6, nonprofit)

Finally, participants described how ESV contributed to strengthening community relationships in three different domains: a) within SMEs, b) between SME and nonprofit representatives, and c) between SME representatives and members of

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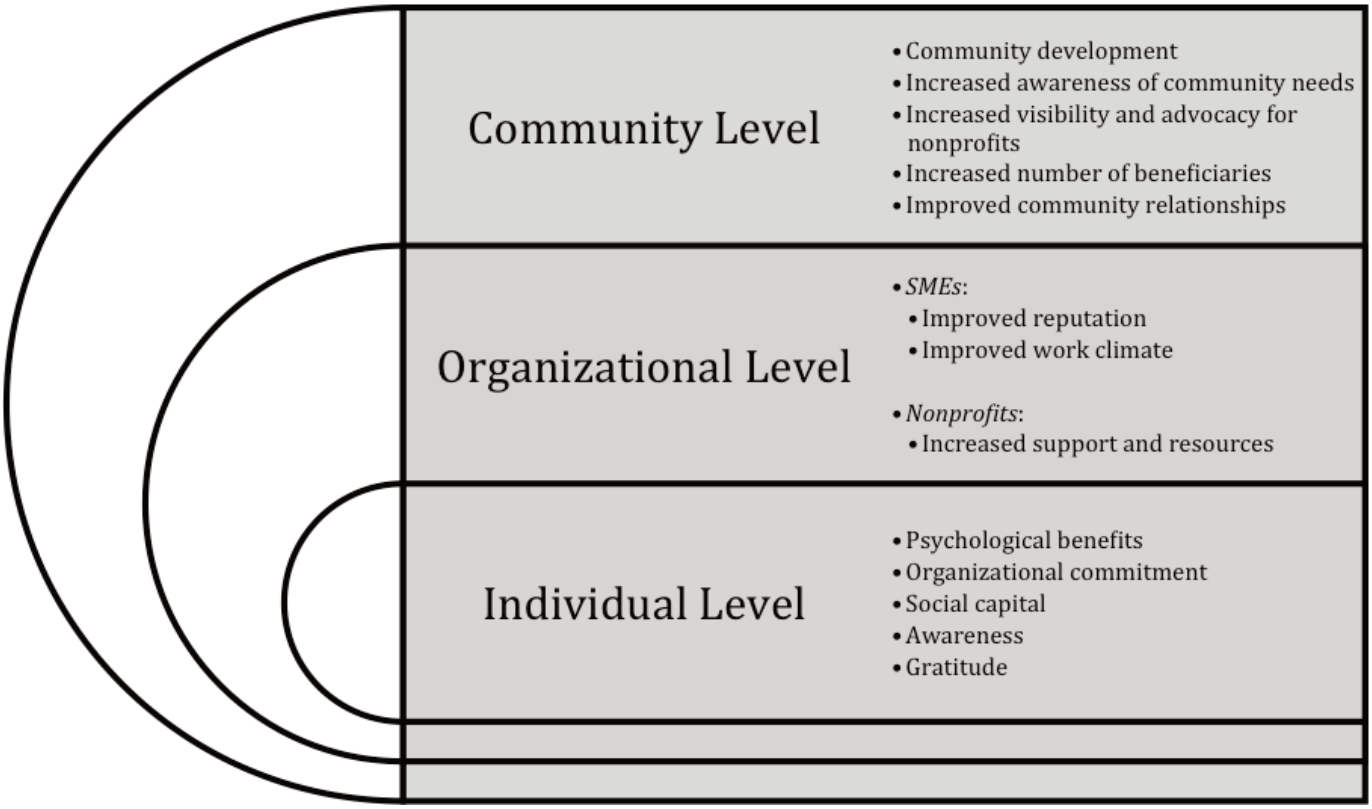
the local community. In relation to the second domain, both employers and nonprofit representatives reported that ESV allowed them to establish lasting intersectoral partnerships. The volunteer involvement of SME employees also allowed nonprofit representatives to get to know employees from their local community.

In relation to the third domain (enhanced relationships between SME representatives and members of the local community), participants indicated that participating in ESV activities in the community allowed them to interact with their clientele in a different context and helped develop trusting relationships (e.g., getting to know them on a first-name basis, learning about their personal challenges). An employee reported that this improved relationship helped develop SME representatives' ability to better serve and respond to individualized client needs.

Figure 3 presents a summary of the perceived multi-level outcomes of ESV.

Figure 3. Perceived Multi-Level Outcomes of Employer-Supported Volunteering



DISCUSSION

This study documents how ESV manifests within the context of SMEs in a semi-rural municipality of Francophone Québec. It sheds light on multi-level facilitators and barriers to SME-nonprofit partnership development, thus making it possible to identify promising practices for the expansion of joint ESV initiatives. The results also reveal perceived community benefits, which highlights the role of these partnerships in local community vitality.

Employer-supported volunteering: An organic process stemming from community engagement practices

This study documents how SMEs regarded the concept of ESV. The results suggest that participants did not particularly

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identify with the ESV vocabulary used in the context of large businesses. Rather, they called for a perspective shift to consider employee participation as embedded within a broader approach to community engagement rather than as a distinct activity. ESV was characterized by diversity (i.e., employees were involved in a variety of activities) and flexibility (i.e., employers showed support and approval by seeking to reduce the barriers to involvement in different ways). These findings contrasted with the formalized understanding of ESV primarily found in the literature (Allen, Galiano, & Hayes, 2011; Caligiuri, Mencin, & Jiang, 2013; Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015; Muthuri, Matten, & Moon, 2009; Peloza & Hassay, 2006) or in governmental initiatives (Ontario, 2019). Moreover, these results suggest that in order to understand community engagement trends, it is important to identify and use vocabulary that is compatible with the cultural context. Although further research and comparative studies are needed, the vocabulary currently used to collect data on ESV may fail to adequately capture the reality of SMEs in Francophone Québec.

The role of nonprofits in community vitality

Research on ESV has largely omitted the perspective of nonprofits. Scholars have raised concerns about the challenges faced by nonprofits due to power imbalances (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2004) and suggested that the perceived benefits of ESV for nonprofits may be more about potential than reality (Samuel, Wolf, & Schilling, 2013). By incorporating the perspective of SME employees and employers as well as community actors (e.g., nonprofit employees and volunteers), this study identified circumstances that foster the development of successful SME-nonprofit partnerships and mutually beneficial outcomes. This supports a win-win-win scenario, as proposed in the literature (Caligiuri, Mencing, & Jiang, 2013). The study documented the active role nonprofits can play as partnership instigators. This contrasts with findings from the corporate volunteering literature, which finds large businesses to be the main initiators (Samuel, Wolf, & Schilling, 2013). In this study, various nonprofit practices (formulating clear objectives, affirming organizational strengths, cross-pollination, acknowledging and valuing the contribution of local businesses) were found to help develop and sustain partnerships with local SMEs. These practices appeared to foster the development of mutually beneficial partnerships, as opposed to more traditional philanthropic or "patronizing" partnerships in which businesses take on the role of providers and nonprofits are viewed as dependent recipients (Austin, 2000; Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Cho & Kelly, 2014; Jamali & Keshishian, 2009). Indeed, initiating partnerships with SMEs appeared to position nonprofit representatives advantageously and enable them to demonstrate their expertise relative to local community needs and specific skills. This contributed to the creation of both "mission-related collaborations" (supporting nonprofits' core activities and target audience) and "marketing collaborations" (advertising and promoting local nonprofits) with local SMEs, as per the typology of business-nonprofit collaborations presented by Ruth Schiller and Micahl Almog-Bar (2013).

Visibility and mutual benefits

Numerous studies and reports by community organizations have focused on the identification of benefits in the workplace (Volunteer Canada, 2014) associated with ESV. In contrast, this study underscores the importance of enhancing the visibility of the nonprofit initiatives and activities that businesses are contributing to and their community impact. This appeared to help build the case for the role and relevance of business-nonprofit partnerships.

In this study, the volunteer centre's ability to extend its visibility beyond beneficiaries to reach and mobilize members of the business community emerged as a benefit. This appeared to be facilitated by three levels of factors: a) individual-level factors (e.g., the volunteer centre director's passion for local community issues); b) organizational-level factors and practices (e.g., efforts to enhance the volunteer centre's visibility and publicly showcase its strengths alongside recognition of the business sector's role in community development); and c) contextual factors (e.g., mechanisms in place to recognize both sectors' contributions to community development at the Chamber of Commerce and local media involvement in promoting community initiatives and organizations). Combined, these multi-level factors fostered positive perceptions of the nonprofit sector among the business sector and provided opportunities for SME-nonprofit interactions. Concurrently, it

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a385

challenged mistrust between the two sectors, which emerged as one of the main barriers to intersectoral partnerships. A social-ecological perspective offered a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay of these multi-level factors, their role in the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships, and their resulting social capital, which is defined as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). The results suggest that research on ESV can benefit from systemic analysis that considers the influence of broader contextual factors. Future research may consider using systemic frameworks to further analyze ESV partnership dynamics. Elinor Ostrom's (1990, 2005) Institutional Analysis and Development Framework could be relevant, as it can be used to improve conceptualizations of inter-organizational collaboration (Amsler & O'Leary, 2017).

Recognition of impact and in-kind

Previous research and documentation on ESV has primarily focused on the individual aspects of recognition. The resulting recommendations include a call for businesses to incentivize participation and reward individuals who contribute the most hours to a cause (Boccalandro, 2009). An important contribution of this study was to provide a different outlook on the role of recognition, one that emphasizes impact at the community rather than the individual level. This appeared to stem from cultural factors and rural community characteristics (e.g., caring for the local community and seeing community engagement as a means to help keep the community alive). In the context of interdisciplinary collaboration, reciprocal knowledge affirmation, which can be defined as "the mutual recognition by team members that they respect, value and affirm each other's expertise identity" (MacPhail, Roloff, & Edmondson, 2009, p. 328), moderates the relationship between expertise, diversity, and collaboration. The results show that in the context of ESV, the process of identifying and validating the expertise of members of the other sector and their contribution to community development (e.g., within the Chamber of Commerce and through letters of thanks sent to SME partners) appeared to foster mutually positive perspectives. It helped provide a sense of meaning to their involvement, which is an important driver of volunteering (Rodell, 2013). Moreover, the identification and acknowledgement of concrete contributions to local community development (e.g., the purchase of a vehicle for Meals on Wheels) highlighted community outcomes from SME engagement, thus promoting their participation. Therefore, while individual recognition and incentive measures may promote involvement to a certain extent, this study shows the importance of acknowledging community impact and contribution. This calls for a shift from recognizing highly engaged individual volunteers (e.g., through certificates of accomplishment) to better identifying and communicating local community involvement and ESV impacts. Furthermore, results suggested the relevance of recognizing the in-kind contributions of local businesses, which were perceived as contributing to meeting local community needs.

Tracking specific barriers and hurdles

Little is known about potential barriers and challenges to ESV. Barriers to the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships in this study were mostly related to information gaps (e.g., a lack of awareness of involvement opportunities) and a lack of understanding of the expectations and preferences of the other sector. Promoting the visibility of community initiatives and opportunities for intersectoral interactions could help address some of these partnership development challenges. The potential for negative cross-sectoral views documented by this study should be considered when aiming to support the development of intersectoral social ties. While the business case for ESV can encourage corporate community involvement, this research supplements recent study findings suggesting that overemphasizing it may deter both employees and potential community partners (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015; Morgan & Burchell, 2010; Muthuri, Matten, & Moon, 2009). For SMEs, committing to support community needs through tangible contributions (e.g., in-kind donations, employee involvement) is more conducive to community partnerships than a focus on business outcomes.

Limitations

Study limitations include the number of participants in each respondent category and the fact that the study was conducted

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in a single location. Conducting studies in other contexts (e.g., other industries, an urban setting, Anglophone Canada) would supplement these findings. Moreover, this study focused on successful SME-nonprofit partnerships. This limits insight on the challenges faced by SMEs that are not actively involved in community engagement. Nevertheless, the diverse perspective in this study and the focus on successful SME-nonprofit partnerships resulted in a better understanding of the multi-level factors that foster ESV.

Practical implications

Results from this study suggest that in the context of SMEs and smaller (e.g., rural, semi-rural) communities, it can be more fruitful to approach ESV with a community-oriented vision focused on community development, rather than attempting to replicate formal ESV programs and procedures used by large corporations.

Since employers and employees prefer to get involved with local, familiar causes, nonprofits need to promote their organization, its activities, and local community needs beyond their target audience of beneficiaries. This can be achieved by offering public workshops or events that showcase their areas of expertise, raising public awareness about ongoing activities and initiatives (e.g., through local media outlets), participating in local business events (e.g., at the Chamber of Commerce), and organizing events for members of both sectors (fundraising events). To facilitate intersectoral understanding, nonprofit representatives should use inclusive vocabulary focusing on the joint goal of community development—rather than refer to the notion of "volunteering" when soliciting support—and formulate concrete requests for in-kind support, expertise, or skills (e.g., asking for food for an event, gift certificates for a draw, or tech support for a website). Nonprofits should also aim to explicitly express gratitude for SMEs' wide array of contributions (e.g., in-kind donations, employee volunteering, financial donations, etc.) and their outcomes at the local community level. Finally, nonprofit representatives should seek to introduce multiple members of their staff to SME representatives in order to promote the development of intersectoral ties (e.g., asking a staff member to attend a meeting, organizing a mixer with SME employees).

Having a better awareness of community initiatives (e.g., subscribing to a nonprofit's newsletter) would help local businesses stay up to date on involvement opportunities. It could also help them identify the different types of resources they could contribute to their local community (human, expertise, financial, in-kind). In order to promote better identification, assessment, and appreciation of their contribution to the community, SMEs could also create opportunities to discuss community development strategies among entrepreneurs (e.g., at the Chamber of Commerce) and with nonprofits representatives. Further, they could track estimates of in-kind contributions to community initiatives in their annual reports.

Governments could play a role in raising public awareness of how SME-nonprofit partnerships contribute to local communities. They could foster involvement by disseminating information about SME community involvement practices and their outcomes, offering tax credit incentives for different types of in-kind contributions, or matching in-kind contributions.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of the multi-level facilitators and barriers to the development of SME-nonprofit partnerships in the context of ESV. It investigated influencing factors at the individual, organizational, and community levels as perceived by local business and community actors within a semi-rural municipality. In the context of SMEs, ESV appears to be embedded within a broad array of community-oriented business activities, rather than formally identified or implemented. The study showed that although SMEs can reap benefits when they engage in community involvement, synergistic contributions to meaningful local community outcomes contribute to the strength of SME-nonprofit partnerships. Thus, this study provides support to the social argument for SME community engagement and to reframing its role as more holistic and dynamic.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was conducted as part of an interdisciplinary research project entitled E=MC^2 (Engagement=Mobilizing Communities and Collaboration) funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The authors wish to thank Dr. Celine Pinsent and members of the E=MC^2 research team for their feedback and contributions, notably Brian Carrière for his knowledge of business social responsibility. They also wish to acknowledge the participation of the Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec (FCABQ), a nonprofit representing a network of 114 volunteer centres across the province of Québec, in the development of this study, and the people from the specific community where the study took place.

NOTE

1. Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS / LES AUTEURS

Myriam Gagnon, PhD, is a graduate from the University of Ottawa's doctoral program in Clinical Psychology. Under the supervision of Dr. Louise Lemyre, her doctoral dissertation consisted in a multi-method analysis of the role of employer-supported volunteering in local community involvement within Francophone Québec. Her research interests include community engagement and community resilience. Email: myriam.gagnon@uottawa.ca .

Myriam Beaudry, MA, is a Doctoral Candidate in Experimental Psychology at the University of Ottawa. Email: myriam.beaudry@uottawa.ca .

Alexandra Guay-Charette, PhD, is a graduate from the University of Ottawa's doctoral program in Political Science. She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the School of Community and Public Affairs at Concordia University. Email: alexandra.charette@concordia.ca .

Louise Lemyre, PhD, FRSC, is a full professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Psychology, and The R.S. McLaughlin Research Chair on Psychosocial Aspects of Population Health. Email: louise.lemyre@uottawa.ca .

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a385

ANSERJ

Vol. 12, No. 1
Spring / printemps 2021
pp. 58 – 68

Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

Non-credit Nonprofit Management Education: Beyond Mapping and Towards a New Research Agenda

Michele Fugiel Gartner
Mount Royal University / University of St. Andrews

ABSTRACT

Nonprofit management education (NME) has received attention from scholars and practitioners over the past thirty years. Much of the research on NME focuses on credit-based university courses, primarily reflecting a U.S. context. Left out of analyses are non-credit NME offerings. This article relocates to an English-speaking Canadian landscape where a substantial number of non-credit NME courses are found. Mapping methodologies, favoured to showcase the breadth of NME, cannot offer deeper insight into questions and critiques of non-credit NME curriculum and instruction. This article shows how syllabi review and critical qualitative inquiry can deepen knowledge of non-credit offerings. A new research agenda for non-credit NME is required to support nonprofit managers to achieve their social goals.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis une trentaine d'années, la formation en gestion des organismes sans but lucratif (OSBL) a retenu l'attention d'universitaires et de praticiens. Cependant, une grande partie de leurs recherches sur la gestion des OSBL se concentre sur des cours universitaires offrant des crédits, et reflète un contexte principalement américain. Les cours sans crédit sur la gestion des OSBL sont omis des analyses. Cet article se focalise sur un paysage canadien anglophone où l'on retrouve un nombre important de cours sans crédit sur la gestion des OSBL. Certaines méthodologies de schématisation, privilégiées pour mettre en valeur la portée de tels cours, sont inefficaces pour offrir un aperçu plus approfondi des questions et critiques concernant le curriculum et l'enseignement de cours sans crédit sur la gestion des OSBL. Cet article montre comment la revue de plans de cours et l'enquête qualitative critique peuvent en revanche servir à approfondir la connaissance de ces cours sans crédit. Ainsi, un nouveau programme de recherche pour les cours sans crédit sur la gestion des OSBL s'avère nécessaire pour aider les gestionnaires d'OSBL à atteindre leurs objectifs sociaux.

Keywords / Mots clés : Nonprofit management education; Non-credit nonprofit management education; Canada; Postsecondary certificates; Continuing education; Syllabi review; Critical qualitative inquiry; Instructor reflexivity / Formation en gestion des organismes sans but lucratif; Formation sans crédit en gestion des organismes sans but lucratif; Canada; Certificats postsecondaires; Formation continue; Revue de plans de cours; Enquête qualitative critique; Réflexivité de l'enseignant

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a394

INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit management education (NME) has received increasing attention from scholars and practitioners over the past thirty years (Baggetta & Brass, 2014). Growing research interest in the field is attributed to several factors, including the development of professional and management education, the growth of the nonprofit sector, business interest from university administration and philanthropic funders, the development of professional organizations, and student demand (O'Neill, 2005). Changes in the provision of social services away from government agencies and into the nonprofit sector have necessitated increased capacity among nonprofit organizations, including nonprofit managers (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2005). One way to achieve this new capacity is through NME in universities (Mirabella & Wish, 2001). Interest in NME is further evidenced by the existence and development of professional bodies such as the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (2015), which offers curricular guidelines and research conferences.

While the growth of NME is evident, gaps in understanding about these offerings remain. A significant focus of research on NME has been on credit-based courses at the graduate and undergraduate level (Bezboruah & Carpenter, 2020; Paton, Mordaunt, & Cornforth, 2007). Research on NME has most often focused on a U.S. context. Left out from these choices are non-credit NME offerings, which are increasing among academic, civil society, and corporate providers but suffer critiques of quality and effectiveness.

This article adopts a problematizing approach for considering gaps in non-credit NME research. Problematization is beneficial when fields of research are nascent. Concepts, such as non-credit NME, may have been identified, but confusion and a lack of clarity remain (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). This approach allows for the interrogation of current knowledge assumptions and offers new ways of thinking about a specific phenomenon. A problematizing approach does not seek the work of a systematic review. The goals are not to spot gaps; instead, this review looks across the literature to identify what new information can be uncovered (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). It aims to look beyond what is known within credit-based, U.S.-centric NME. Doing so raises multiple avenues for future research.

Literature has helped map types of NME on an international scale, including in the U.S. (Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & Wish, 2001) and throughout Europe and Asia (Mirabella, Gemelli, Malcolm, & Berger, 2007; Murdock, Tekula, & Parra, 2013; Paton & Mordaunt, 2001). This article situates the research lens on Canada, where a significant percentage of NME courses exist in non-credit formats. The lens highlights how mapping is limited for addressing jurisdictional and pedagogical differences in how NME education is conceived and implemented (Murdock et al., 2013). Mapping methodologies alone cannot offer insight or answer queries and critiques of non-credit NME curriculum and instruction. Instead, alternative methodologies are required.

First, this article sheds light on the phenomenon of non-credit NME and why it is a vital area for research interest. It then relocates the research lens to a Canadian landscape (English speaking) that holds many non-credit NME offerings. It presents the limits of mapping methodologies, offering that these techniques do little to interrogate current assumptions for designing non-credit NME curricula and their instruction. Two alternatives, syllabi review and critical qualitative inquiry, are offered to supplement mapping methodologies. The article concludes that research must increase its interest in non-credit NME courses, situate research outside of the U.S., and find methods beyond mapping to create a fulsome view of contemporary non-credit NME curriculum and instruction.

"SEPARATE AND PARALLEL": ATTENTION TO NON-CREDIT NME WITHIN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Non-credit NME has received less interest in academic research than its credit-based peers (Arena, 2013; Lee, 2002).

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a394

While the significant studies of NME within the U.S. have acknowledged non-credit NME in their mapping, most deeper analysis and subsequent research has focused on credit-based offerings (Bezboruah & Carpenter, 2020; Mirabella, 2007, 2013; Mirabella & Wish, 2001). However, over half of the U.S.-based institutions with credit-based NME also offer some non-credit NME through graduate certificate programs or continuing education courses (Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & Wish, 2001).

Non-credit NME programs have increased since 1996, when research reported 90 U.S.-based universities offering non-credit or continuing education NME offerings, contrasted with 164 reported as of 2021 in the nonprofit management education database housed at Seton Hall University (Mirabella, 2007). However, while there is a numerical increase, there is some question as to whether the rate of this increase has been consistent over time, with earlier research reporting significant increases between 1996 and 2002 but later research showing a slowing of growth between 2002 and 2006 (Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & Wish, 2001). Early research noted that courses within non-credit NME offerings varied by institutional interests, with some focusing on the operational requirements of nonprofit organizations through management, leadership, fundraising, or governance courses, while other institutions focused on the collaborative foundations of the nonprofit sector through courses in participatory research, community collaboration, and building social capital (Mirabella & Wish, 2001).

While most credit-based NME courses are concentrated within public administration or business departments, non-credit courses are placed within continuing education or professional development centres (Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & Renz, 2001). This positioning contrasts with credit-based certificates that sit within academic disciplines. These placements offer students access to courses applicable to professional development within their careers or workplaces (Lee, 2002).

The challenge of these non-credit placements within continuing education is that they often sit in “separate and parallel” (Lee, 2002, p. 189) worlds within institutions. This placement has led to a lack of research attention, as continuing education departments may not be incentivized to produce their research or may not engage their instructors to do so. Mordecai Lee (2002) argued that this knowledge gap also means a lack of understanding of what comprises these courses, their applicability to the field, and their credibility among other courses. This knowledge gap leads to a concern or suspicion that non-credit offerings are not as rigorous as credited NME or may only be for practitioners rather than a field of research interest.

Compounding the non-credit knowledge gap are the more recent innovations between non-credit NME offerings and new online platforms. These innovations have taken university- and non-university-based non-credit NME into online delivery and are rapidly evolving. These offerings include bespoke online platforms created by universities to offer non-credit courses, including MITx, an online, open enrolment, non-credit education platform launched by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Other universities, such as Stanford, the University of Michigan, and the University of Toronto, have opted to partner with the open education platform Coursera to provide their non-credit courses (Crotty, 2011).

Other non-university based providers, such as the Khan Academy and Udacity, have established a significant online, non-credit presence in the field of higher education across multiple discipline areas (Anders, 2012). Intermediary organizations within the nonprofit field, such as Nonprofit Ready and Philanthropy University, have also developed their own non-credit NME offerings. These courses have not been mapped within existing academic NME literature.

In light of increased pressure on credit-based courses within higher education, including lower student completion and higher rates of student loans, non-credit offerings are becoming more attractive for their price points, flexibility, and ability to meet employers’ workforce development goals (Arena, 2013). Non-credit NME courses and programs require ongoing

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support from universities to gather feedback from students and faculty, analyze demographics, and understand employment trends. With organizational support, non-credit continuing education can complement credit-based courses in academic institutions and expand to students who would otherwise not be able to access their credit-based offerings (Arena, 2013; Lee, 2002). However, amid non-credit NME innovations, concerns remain that despite the growth and appeal of these offerings, there are no reporting systems that can capture programmatic and student outcome information (Davaasambuu, Cinelli, D'Alessandro, Hamid, & Audant, 2019). Without more research interest, both mapping and more in-depth interrogation, it is not easy to fully view the range and impact of non-credit NME offerings.

Acknowledging these rather large gaps and building on previous research, this article problematizes what is known about non-credit NME. Where U.S.-based literature has demonstrated research interest in credit-based NME offerings, this article offers Canada as a landscape with a substantial number of non-credit NME offerings. This relocation offers two main benefits. First, it highlights that non-credit NME is also found within jurisdictions outside of the U.S., compounding rationale for research interest. Second, it shows the limits of mapping methodologies to account for the contextual and cultural within non-credit NME curriculum and instruction. As this section has indicated, in a rapidly evolving non-credit environment, one outside of university credit-based courses, it is essential for research to deepen its understanding of non-credit NME.

NON-CREDIT NME: THE PREVALENCE OF POSTSECONDARY CERTIFICATES IN CANADA

There are an estimated 170,000-plus registered charities and nonprofits in Canada, accounting for 8.1 percent of the GDP, equivalent to CAD$151 billion. The nonprofit sector employs approximately two million people, 11 percent of the working population, a similar percentage to that of the U.S.-based nonprofit workforce (Imagine Canada, 2019; Independent Sector, 2019). Additionally, 44 percent of the Canadian population (13 million) are volunteering their time for an average of three hours per week (Imagine Canada, 2019). With a robust nonprofit sector in Canada, evidenced by its size and economic importance, there is value in studying the NME programs that support this sector and its employees. The focus on U.S.-based NME has meant that limited attention has been given to the forms and formats of NME in the U.S.'s northern neighbour (Mirabella et al., 2007; Mirabella, Sulek, & Teo, 2021; Nenshi, 2008; Tremka & Karman, 2015).

To review the literature on NME within Canada, this article bounded its inquiry to English speaking Canada and focused on academic journals and grey literature. In a seminal study mapping NME within Canada, Roseanne Mirabella, Giuliana Gemelli, Margy-Jean Malcolm, and Gabriel Berger (2007) identified 19 NME programs across Canada. These included post-graduate diplomas; master-level degrees; and certificates in fundraising, leadership, and community development. Notably, within this mapping, the authors identified no natural disciplinary home for these NME courses. They cited that while 29 percent were found in business schools and 11 percent within public administration, 42 percent were located within graduate education; continuing education; applied arts; and science, technology, and education departments. In Canada's specific case, NME was often found within community studies departments (Mirabella et al., 2007). Adding to these mapping efforts of Canadian NME, Naheed Nenshi (2008) found 47 postsecondary institutions offering over 700 courses in NME.

More recently, Angela Tremka and Hanna Karman (2015) undertook a preliminary environmental scan of postsecondary NME programs on Canada's voluntary sector. They identified 88 programs focused on NME across Canada through Charity Village. The largest category of the listing was comprised of NME focused on fundraising and nonprofit management. Other categories include a focus on specific topics, such as volunteer management. The listings also include topics that overlapped with NME, including arts and culture organization administration, social services, and general operational administration. Furthermore, Roseanne Mirabella, Marty Sulek, and Terence Teo (2021) revisited the earlier mapping of NME across Canada to find 75 programs across 67 postsecondary institutions.

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Mirabella et al. (2007) first observed the absence of a natural disciplinary home for NME in Canada. Tremka and Karman (2015) reaffirmed this finding with their research showing nearly half of Canadian NME programs exist in the form of postsecondary certificates (see Table 1). In the cases of NME postsecondary certificates, they are most often offered as non-credit options and are found away from disciplinary homes, such as within departments of continuing education (Lee, 2002). Whereas credit-based graduate programs might offer nonprofit management curriculum through social work or community studies, postsecondary certificates offering this curriculum have titles of nonprofit and voluntary sector management (Mirabella et al., 2021).

Table 1: Canadian NME course offerings

Course type	Description[1]	Percentage
Certificate program	Less than one year, or one or two full-time semesters	47.4%
Graduate program	Approximately one to three years, or three to nine full-time semesters	32.2%
Diploma program	Two years minimum, or four to six full-time semesters	13.2%
Undergraduate program	Approximately four to five years, or eight or more full-time semesters	5.3%

Source: Tremka & Karman (2015)

The significant percentage of non-credit NME courses in Canada reflects unique jurisdictional and cultural contexts (Murdock et al., 2013). These contexts provide a rationale for why research on NME outside the U.S. environment remains essential. One possible explanation for Canadian non-credit NME resides in the geography of the country. Postsecondary education is the responsibility of provincial governments, with no federal department overseeing postsecondary policy on a national basis (Kirby, 2007). Following World War I and the economic development of Western Canada, many higher education institutions located in Eastern Canada began offering an extension of their educational services to rural and remote communities to boost adult education and professional development. These activities included lectures, competitions, and arts events. In the 1960s and 1970s, the rise of the community college system across Canada meant more formalized continuing education opportunities became available (Draper & English, 2016). The granting of degrees was the domain of public universities, with public colleges and private career colleges offering academic and vocational programs leading to certificates and diplomas (Kirby, 2007).

Continuing education as a function of the provincially driven system became a feature of the Canadian postsecondary landscape. While neither a straightforward nor a legal definition of continuing education exists, further education, continuing studies, and adult education are all used interchangeably (Adamuti-Trache & Schuetze, 2009). Canadian continuing education has offered learners opportunities to meet their professional development needs, benefit their enrichment, and further their knowledge and skills. Continuing education also offers linkages to communities and external agencies through various means of collaboration, including curriculum design and students' engagement (McLean, 2007). The provincial responsibility for economic growth and the diversity of economies across the country has meant that some sectors have developed more utilitarian postsecondary offerings, focusing on vocational and workforce training (Kirby, 2007). The development of the nonprofit workforce may be the case with NME in the Canadian landscape.

Another explanation of the development of non-credit NME is related to government funding. Simultaneously, when NME was beginning to expand within U.S.-based universities during the 1990s, there was a lack of government funding for

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higher education in Canada. Instead, Canadian higher education institutions had to find existing disciplines to accommodate the NME offerings or create more profitable, non-credit courses housed within continuing education and professional services departments—which is ultimately what happened (Mirabella et al., 2021). The prevalence of postsecondary NME certificates in Canada provides an opportunity to investigate an understudied area of NME. While mapping gives an idea of breadth, it does not help understand NME offerings more deeply, especially in jurisdictional and cultural contexts. The lens of this research problematizes a lingering question from current research: what do we know about NME programs outside of disciplinary homes, programs placed in departments such as continuing education and community studies?

TWO ALTERNATIVES TO MAPPING: SYLLABI REVIEW AND CRITICAL QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Thus far, this article has considered the prevalence of mapping methodologies for understanding NME education. This section will offer two alternatives to mapping that offer a greater understanding of non-credit NME specifically and NME more generally. There are two fundamental reasons why non-credit NME requires alternatives to mapping. The first is that non-credit NME suffers a critique of quality. Without the credit-based and disciplinary homes of their NME peers, there is a concern about its effectiveness. There is no standard quality-control mark that non-credit NME courses can obtain to display their value. Much of their quality assurance relies on reputation (Arena, 2013; Davaasambuu et al., 2019; Lee, 2002). Second, non-credit courses within Canada are often taught by contract instructors. These instructors are not usually permanent, full-time faculty, but rather operate peripherally to the research functions of their institutions. They miss out on setting research agendas within their fields and in advancing doctoral education (Mirabella et al., 2021). Without a home discipline, contract instructors are disconnected from opportunities for research theorizing on credit- or non-credit-based NME.

The terms used to critique non-credit NME, such as quality and effectiveness, reflect the impact of neoliberal performance measurements on higher education (Olssen & Peters, 2005). The overlooked positionality of non-credit NME, laying outside of disciplinary confines and without a clear home, may be a benefit rather than a hinderance. In falling under the radar, non-credit NME could avoid the quality-control fate of its credit-based peers and offer opportunity for the application of more interpretive and reflexive methodologies. These methodologies eschew the need to prove quality and effectiveness and seek to acknowledge contextual and jurisdictional differences in the design and implementation of non-credit NME. Research must find a way to expand the methodologies used for understanding non-credit NME curriculum and instruction while offering contextual applicability and instructor reflexivity.

Two alternatives for bridging this knowledge gap have already been used within credit-based NME studies. The first is the syllabi review. Syllabi review offers the ability to analyze different course elements, including course goals and objectives, required texts and reading, class schedule and content, and assessment methods (Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009). In one example of a review of syllabi from a range of 110 courses across 22 U.S.-based NME programs, more than three-quarters were exclusively or mainly operational in focus. Less than one-tenth of the courses were at the opposite extreme: exclusively or mainly contextual in focus (Baggetta & Brass, 2014). The review highlighted how credit-based NME offerings neglect more contextual approaches and remain too focused on management and operational goals. This operational focus may reflect the particular formation of U.S.-based NME offerings, as another syllabi review comparing courses between the U.S. and Canada showed variations in titles. Terms such as social change, community organizing, collaboration, and environment were used more often in Canadian NME courses than the management skills and resource development that featured in their American counterparts (Mirabella et. al, 2021). Syllabi review could additionally offer a review of Canada's cultural variations between English, French, and Indigenous cultures.

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Syllabi review of credit-based NME has uncovered significant concerns that mapping misses. First, the focus on operations overlooks the value of educating students about the contexts they work and reside in. Context-based approaches drawn from social sciences could better ground students within the realities of their jurisdictional situations:

> For the education of nonprofit managers to be complete—and for their future actions to be as effective as possible—it is important for them to understand the broader systems within which their organizations are situated. (Baggata & Brass, 2014, p. 594)

NME needs to explicitly integrate social science theories, themes, and courses and not just assume that students will implicitly understand the broader contexts they work and reside in (Baggata & Brass, 2014).

Second, the standardization of courses and accreditation processes could lead to a narrowing of educational goals. Mirabella (2013) asks, "How do course descriptions translate into course goals?" (p. 85). In a syllabi review, Mirabella (2013) looked at 25 NME courses related to program evaluation. She categorized them into five primary course objectives: evaluation design, understanding the evaluation process, the critical analysis of evaluation methods, understanding issues within the evaluation, and personal reflection and growth. Her critique of these syllabi was that over two-thirds of all course goals were related to a rationalist approach to program evaluation. She argued the focus on logic models falls short of being able to evaluate across diverse cultural, social, and political contexts (Mirabella, 2013). Syllabi reviews offer exploration and interrogation of non-credit NME in a way that mapping cannot.

A second alternative to mapping is to engage with critical pedagogies to better explore NME instruction. Nonprofit managers need to understand the specific contexts of their work and apply concepts appropriate to their social mandates. The goal for all NME offerings should be to "educate nonprofit managers for the impossible" (Mirabella, 2013, p. 95). Suggesting five approaches for this task, Mirabella (2013) reframes how the development of NME can extend beyond operational priorities by: interrogating approaches to authority, pushing for greater interdisciplinarity, offering a care-centred approach, reorienting understandings of accountability, and bringing in more reflexive approaches into teaching. The first step in achieving these aims is through the development of greater instructor reflexivity in how NME is designed and implemented.

The inclusion of critical pedagogies enhances social justice aims within NME (Mason, McDougle, & Jones, 2019). As a critical practice, instructor reflexivity embraces the subjective understandings of reality as a basis for thinking more critically about the impact of assumptions, values, and actions on others (Cunliffe, 2004). However, reflexivity without a process or framework for operationalization can be vague and can seem unachievable. While instructors of non-credit NME, as nonprofit practitioners, may not have training in critical perspectives, mentoring and the sharing of resources can help foster inclusion within their courses (Mason, McDougle, & Jones, 2019).

For instructors, specific frameworks are helpful to encourage curricular decisions. Among critical NME pedagogies, critical qualitative inquiry offers a specific framework that seeks to prepare students for their work within nonprofit sectors. Critical qualitative inquiry (CQI) was developed by A. Emiko Blalock (2018) building on the work of Penny Pasque and Michelle Pérez (2015). It was developed from the insight that students enrolled in NME programs are more likely to work within the nonprofit sector. In an effort to understand the context of their work—including social, economic, race, and gender issues—CQI addresses a frustrating lack in existing frameworks to advance critical pedagogies in NME. By embracing a CQI approach, instructors can enhance their own reflexivity and provide new tools for their students' education in nonprofit management.

CQI centres on the role of power in understanding social situations through methodological approaches. It has five elements: being informed by past and present contexts, problematizing power, employing instruments for social change and

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action, using methodological approaches for communities, and undertaking social justice research (Blalock, 2018). CQI can help nonprofit practitioners, both students and instructors, see their roles and themselves within the systems in which they work. Table 2 outlines five applications of how CQI can be used in the NME classroom, including through presenting historical research, introducing alternative perspectives, identifying critical autobiography, understanding community work, and centring subjugated knowledge (Blalock, 2018).

Table 2: Critical qualitative inquiry application to NME

Five concepts for CQI*	Application in NME curriculum**
Informed by past and present contexts	Historical research Reconsider assumptions Identify legacies Introduce alternative literature
Problematizing and complicating power	Alternative perspectives in the classroom Critical discussions Counter-narratives
Instruments for social change and action	Critical autobiography
Community involvement and research	Understanding community work Sensitive engagement
Social justice research as iterative and embedded	Centring subjugated knowledge Transparent research

Source: *(Pasque & Pérez, 2015); **(Blalock, 2018)

While mapping methodologies have shown the landscape of NME, they have primarily focused on credit-based courses. Non-credit NME remains under-mapped while also suffering from a lack of understanding of course content, pedagogy, and instruction. Questions of quality assurance of both curriculum and instruction constrain non-credit NME but could be rendered unimportant through the application of more contextual and reflexive methodologies. In jurisdictions where non-credit NME is prevalent, such as Canada, alternative methods could provide additional support for the contextual uniqueness of non-credit options and the engagement of non-credit NME instructors. Two alternatives, syllabi review and critical pedagogy inclusion, would provide new understandings for non-credit NME courses. Mapping is not enough for non-credit NME to overcome its critiques. Research should focus on alternative methods for filling the knowledge gap, especially with the expansion of non-credit NME by third-party, non-university providers.

CONCLUSION

Nonprofit managers need the skills and tools necessary to develop and carry out work within their community. Non-credit NME serves as an opportunity to support current and future nonprofit staff. Research on credit-based NME continues to shine a light on how offerings are growing. However, gaps in knowledge of NME remain, especially outside of a U.S.-based context and in non-credit offerings. Mapping has dominated NME research methodologies, but often non-credit courses are left out of these samples. This omission is significant, as non-credit courses are subject to more critiques over credibility than their disciplinary peers.

This article problematizes the lack of research interest in non-credit NME. This lack of interest may be due to the placement of non-credit NME within continuing education or professional departments where there is less priority for research and

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a394

theoretical engagement for instructors. With a prevalence of non-credit NME offerings in the form of postsecondary certificates, Canada provides a valuable landscape for exploring alternative methodologies for knowledge production. Both syllabi review and critical pedagogies offer new ways of closing the non-credit NME knowledge gap.

This article offers several paths for future research, including case studies of non-credit NME courses, additional exploration of non-credit NME development, and the impact of third-party non-credit NME providers. The pedagogies used to create non-credit NME courses will directly impact nonprofit managers, their organizations, and ultimately, the beneficiaries. Renewed interest in and a research agenda for non-credit NME will provide greater support for nonprofit managers and leaders.

NOTE

1. For a description of the levels of postsecondary study in Canada, see Aditi Bakht (n.d.).

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Charity Village, https://charityvillage.com
Coursera, https://www.coursera.org
Khan Academy, https://www.khanacademy.org
NonprofitReady, https://www.nonprofitready.org
Nonprofit Management Education Current Offerings in University-Based Programs, Seton Hall University, https://academic.shu.edu/npo
Philanthropy University, https://philanthropyu.org
Udacity, https://www.udacity.com

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR / L'AUTEUR

Michele Fugiel Gartner is an Instructor within the Non-profit Management Extension Certificate at Mount Royal University, Calgary, AB, Canada. She is pursuing doctoral studies at the School of Management and the Centre for the Study of Philanthropy & Public Good, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, UK. Email: mfgartner@mfgchange.com.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a394

ANSERJ

Vol. 12, No. 1
Spring / printemps 2021
pp. 69 – 81

Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

Économie sociale et biens communs : cas de l'Association villageoise de Foabougou dans la zone de l'Office du Niger au Mali

Mamadou Koumaré
Université des Sciences Sociales et de Gestion de Bamako, Mali

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the production and management of collective goods and services by social economy organizations in Mali. Specifically, the article analyzes how a village association—a cooperative community organization—becomes involved in local socioeconomic development by pooling means and resources to produce self-managed collective goods and services for the benefit of its members, but also of non-members who have to pay more. This mode of organization allows rice producers to secure their living conditions in one of the largest hydro-agricultural enterprises in West Africa, as well as to participate in the development of their community.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article aborde la question de la production et de la gestion de biens et services collectifs par les organisations de l'économie sociale au Mali. Précisément, l'article analyse la participation d'une association villageoise—une organisation communautaire à caractère coopératif—dans le développement socioéconomique local, par la mise en commun de moyens et de ressources afin de produire des biens et services collectifs autogérés au profit de ses membres, mais aussi de non-adhérents qui doivent payer plus. Ce mode d'organisation permet aux producteurs de riz de sécuriser leurs conditions de vie, dans l'une des entreprises hydro-agricoles les plus vastes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, et aussi de participer au développement de leur communauté.

Keywords / Mots clés : Village association; Collective or common good; Social economy; Community management or self-management; Economic and social development / Association villageoise; Bien collectif ou commun; Économie sociale; Gestion communautaire ou autogestion; Développement économique et social

INTRODUCTION

L'Office du Niger est un vaste aménagement hydro-agricole créé au Mali en 1932 par la France. À cette époque, l'objectif était d'irriguer la vallée du fleuve Niger afin de produire du coton pour l'industrie française et du riz pour nourrir les travailleurs agricoles et plus tard les populations de l'Afrique occidentale française. De cette date à aujourd'hui, l'entreprise agricole a connu beaucoup de mutations, notamment dans les années 1980, à travers le Programme d'ajustement

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a391

structurel (PAS). L'objectif du PAS à l'Office du Niger était le rétablissement de ses équilibres économiques et financiers. C'est dans ce contexte que l'Office s'est retiré des activités d'accompagnement, jugées non rentables, au profit des organisations paysannes comme les *tons* villageois, association de village[1] et les sociétés coopératives créés à cet effet. Désormais, ces organisations sont responsables du crédit agricole, de l'accès des producteurs aux intrants, des opérations de battage, de décorticage et de commercialisation du riz et enfin du développement communautaire. Dès lors, nous assistons à un foisonnement d'organisations à caractère coopératif dans ladite zone, notamment des associations de village qui font l'objet de notre analyse. Dans ce cadre, nous avons choisi dans cet article de nous pencher sur le cas de l'association du village de Foabougou, lequel est situé dans la zone de l'Office du Niger, afin de voir comment ses membres mettent en commun leurs ressources pour produire et gérer des biens communs de façon autonome au profit de l'intérêt individuel et collectif.

L'article comporte quatre sections. La première pose la problématique de notre étude. Quant à la deuxième, elle apporte un éclaircissement sur les concepts clés de notre étude. La troisième section présente la démarche méthodologique, tandis que la quatrième présente les résultats de notre étude de cas sur le développement socioéconomique local. Enfin, nous discutons les résultats.

PROBLÉMATIQUE

L'Afrique a longtemps développé, à travers les organisations communautaires, des modes de production de biens et services communs fondés sur des solidarités socioculturelles ou ethniques au service de la reproduction économique, sociale et politique. En effet, les pratiques socioéconomiques africaines se caractérisaient par l'esprit communautaire et coopératif qui repose sur « des valeurs éthiques et morales, des consensus dans les échanges de travail, des systèmes de transmission des connaissances, des réflexes d'entraide et de défense » (Peemans, 2004). C'est dans ce contexte que certaines organisations communautaires comme les Naam[2] au Burkina Faso, les samarya[3] au Niger et les tons au Mali ont vu le jour pour donner sens au vivre ensemble par la production de biens et services communs.

En plus des organisations traditionnelles, nous avons assisté, à partir des années 80, à l'émergence d'autres formes d'organisation comme riposte à la précarisation des conditions de vie à la suite du PAS.[4] En effet, cette période, marquée par une paupérisation des populations, a connu une véritable explosion d'organisations d'économie de type mutualiste, associatif et coopératif qui garantissent des fonctions de production économique, ainsi que de médiation sociale et politique (Assogba, 2000). Ces organisations sont chargées de répondre aux besoins des membres en matière de production, de commercialisation, de financement et d'accès aux services sociaux (logement, éducation, formation, santé).

Cependant, la place des pratiques socioéconomiques des producteurs locaux en Afrique, à travers des organisations sociales et solidaires, a longtemps été ignorée par beaucoup de chercheurs et spécialistes du développement. En effet, ces pratiques étaient considérées comme marginales car relevant beaucoup plus de la survie que d'une logique de développement (Lapeyre, 2006). Cependant, grâce à de nouveaux travaux de recherche, nous assistons depuis un temps en Afrique à une reconnaissance de ces pratiques socioéconomiques comme levier de développement local.

Ce nouveau regard sur les pratiques solidaires d'acteurs locaux comme champ d'étude et de développement continue de s'imposer comme une réalité incontournable (Peemans, 2005). Nous inscrivons notre recherche dans ce cadre à travers l'analyse des initiatives et pratiques d'entraide et de solidarité de production et de distribution de biens et services collectifs. En effet, à l'instar d'Andriamanindrisoa (2004), nous postulons que ces pratiques d'œuvrer ensemble, à travers des associations, relèvent d'une reproduction de type traditionnel, puisque les activités adoptées sont souvent celles que les aînés ou les grands-parents pratiquaient déjà. Elles s'inscrivent donc dans une forme de continuité, tout en s'adaptant aux mutations par l'acculturation, c'est-à-dire par l'incorporation et la modernisation. Elles concourent ainsi à

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travers « des réseaux de réciprocité et de redistribution » (Didier, 2010) à assurer la satisfaction des besoins socioéconomiques et sociopolitiques ignorés ou peu pris en compte par l'État et le marché.

Notre recherche se donne comme objectif de rendre compte des pratiques socioéconomiques d'acteurs locaux qui, comme le remarque Lapeyre (2006), sont loin d'être des « non-acteurs ». En effet, nous partons de l'idée que les « acteurs d'en bas » ne sont pas dépourvus de logiques de développement (Girard, 1994). Cela nous amène à formuler l'hypothèse selon laquelle les stratégies et pratiques associatives solidaires d'acteurs locaux pour la production de biens et services communs contribuent de manière significative au développement local. Celles-ci visent à mettre l'économique au service du développement local et du renforcement des liens sociaux et relèvent donc d'une logique de développement. Pour vérifier notre hypothèse, nous avons choisi d'étudier le cas de l'association villageoise de Foabougou. Ce choix s'explique par le fait que cette association est à la croisée des pratiques traditionnelles et modernes de production de biens communs en milieu rural. Elle nous offre donc la possibilité de questionner la place et le rôle des organisations traditionnelles à caractère coopératif dans le développement socioéconomique local. À travers ce choix, nous nous posons la question de savoir comment et en quoi cette association traditionnelle, confrontée à la modernité, contribue au développement de ce village—et au fait de toute la localité—à partir de la production de biens et services communs.

CLARIFICATION DES CONCEPTS DE L'ÉCONOMIE SOCIALE, DE DÉVELOPPEMENT LOCAL ET DE BIEN COMMUN

Dans cette section, nous définissons les perspectives conceptuelles et théoriques selon lesquelles nous envisageons les concepts clés de notre étude, c'est-à-dire l'économie sociale, le développement local et le bien commun.

Pour le concept de l'économie sociale, nous avons surtout exploité les travaux de Defourny (2006) qui ont l'avantage de mettre l'accent sur deux approches envers une définition de l'économie sociale, à savoir l'approche juridique et l'approche normative. L'approche juridique définit l'économie sociale selon les types de statut, soit la société coopérative, la mutuelle et les organisations associatives. Quant à l'approche normative, elle met en avant les valeurs et normes qui caractérisent l'économie sociale :

1. La finalité de service aux membres ou à la collectivité plutôt que de profit;
2. L'autonomie de gestion;
3. Le contrôle démocratique par les membres;
4. La primauté des personnes et de l'objet social sur le capital dans la répartition des excédents.

Pour notre étude, nous adhérons à l'approche normative (Defourny 2006). Ce positionnement théorique nous permet de rendre compte des réalités des pratiques des associations villageoises en matière de services aux membres ou à la collectivité et non la recherche de profit. En effet, l'une des caractéristiques de notre association villageoise est le service aux membres et à la communauté. En cela, elle répond directement à deux des principes de l'approche normative, à savoir la finalité de service aux membres ou à la collectivité plutôt que de profit et la primauté des personnes et de l'objet social sur le capital dans la répartition des excédents. En effet, les initiatives développées par l'association villageoise s'inscrivent dans le cadre de l'utilité de service aux membres et au développement de la localité. À cet effet, toutes les ressources générées sont utilisées de façon autonome et communautaire par ses membres qui ont les mêmes droits et la même voix dans la prise de décision.

À propos de l'utilité de service ou de finalité de services aux membres ou à la collectivité, les initiatives d'économie sociale et solidaire répondent généralement, selon Debuyst (2006), à des raisons d'être suivantes :

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1. L'inscription dans la mouvance historique d'une culture associative pour la défense et l'amélioration des conditions de vie des ouvriers, artisans, paysans et habitants des quartiers populaires urbains;
2. Les stratégies collectives de survie et de subsistance;
3. La réinsertion socioprofessionnelle;
4. La recherche d'une qualité de vie acceptable (services de proximité, conditions environnementales, aspects socioculturels);
5. L'insertion dans la gouvernance du développement local;
6. Les options citoyennes et d'opposition politique.

À travers ces objectifs, l'on se rend compte que l'économie sociale et solidaire participe pleinement au développement local. À ce propos, selon Démoustier (2002), les organisations de l'économie solidaire sont sollicitées pour mobiliser des acteurs collectifs, requalifier les groupes sociaux, mutualiser les ressources et répondre aux besoins et aspirations de la population. C'est ainsi que l'économie solidaire participe au développement local. En effet, l'auteur présente le développement local comme « un processus qui mobilise des personnes et des institutions cherchant à transformer l'économie et la société locales, en créant des opportunités de travail et de revenu afin d'améliorer les conditions de vie des populations ». De cette manière, on se trouve devant une initiative de développement local quand on constate l'utilisation de ressources et de valeurs locales sous le contrôle d'institutions et de personnes du niveau local, bénéficiant aux personnes et à l'environnement du territoire. Du rapport entre économie sociale et développement local, Fonda (2004) nous apprend que « les entreprises de l'économie sociale considèrent le territoire non comme simple opportunité, mais comme la base de leur activité et de leur développement. »

Pour en revenir aux objectifs de cet article, celui-ci se propose d'interroger la place des organisations de l'économie sociale et solidaire, notamment des associations villageoises, dans l'offre de services aux personnes et à l'environnement du territoire à partir de la gestion et de l'exploitation de biens communs. Dans cette perspective, nous définissons comme bien commun tout bien matériel ou immatériel relevant d'une appropriation commune ou « d'une propriété collective »—donc d'un usage et d'une exploitation collectifs soumis à une gouvernance communautaire, par « l'émergence de formes d'action collective concertée » (Hardin, 1968). Il s'agit donc de biens divisibles dont l'accès est communautairement contrôlé pour l'utilité aux membres sans que leur gestion ne soit soumise à une autorité institutionnelle spécifique. Compris dans ce sens, les biens communs selon Gadrey (2012) désignent des qualités de ressources ou un patrimoine collectif pour la vie et les activités humaines, ou des « qualités sociétales ». Ainsi, selon l'auteur, pour les qualifier de bien commun, il faut un jugement commun d'utilité collective selon lequel tous, par principe, devraient avoir la possibilité d'y accéder ou d'en bénéficier. Dans ce jugement, il y a de l'intérêt général, de l'utilité sociale ou sociétale, des « richesses collectives fondamentales », des finalités ou valeurs de société, voire des droits universels. Vue sous cet angle, l'approche par les biens communs renvoie à la problématique de l'auto-organisation dont le capital social constitue le « liant » indispensable. Du coup, nous sommes bien au centre de la problématique de l'économie sociale et solidaire (ESS) car d'une manière plus générale, les entreprises de l'ESS, quel que soit leur statut, paraissent les plus à même de répondre à des demandes de gouvernance de biens communs venant de la société civile (Pérez et Silva, 2013).

CADRE MÉTHODOLOGIQUE

Notre démarche méthodologique se fonde sur les méthodes socio-anthropologiques que sont la recherche documentaire, la collecte de données sur le terrain et leur analyse.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a391

La recherche documentaire

Afin d'éclaircir les concepts d'économie sociale, de développement local et de bien commun, nous avons procédé à une exploitation de la littérature scientifique pour problématiser notre étude et définir notre perspective théorique par rapport à ces concepts.

Parallèlement à l'exploitation de la littérature grise, nous avons exploité différents rapports et outils de gestion que nous avons trouvés sur place auprès des sociétés coopératives et des associations. Cette exploitation nous a permis de disposer de données quantitatives et qualitatives sur les actions de développement initiées par les organisations, notamment les associations villageoises.

La collecte de données sur le terrain

Pour la collecte de données, nous avons utilisé l'entretien en groupe et l'entretien individuel. À cet effet, nous avons élaboré deux guides d'entretien adressés respectivement aux responsables des organes de gestion et aux membres de l'association. Dans le premier cas, nous avons discuté en entretien de groupe avec les membres des organes de gestion de l'association villageoise, soit en assemblée générale (3), soit en réunion de bureau (2). Les assemblées générales et les réunions de bureau ont l'avantage de réunir un grand nombre de membres, de permettre l'observation des dynamiques internes au groupe et de recouper les sources d'information. Dans le second cas, nous avons débattu individuellement (30), en fonction de leur disponibilité, avec quelques membres de l'association, de la chefferie locale et des groupements de jeunes et de femmes, soustraits de l'influence du groupe car il fallait recouper les sources d'information. Le tableau ci-dessous donne la situation des entretiens.

Tableau 1 : Nombre d'entretiens

Types d'entretien	Cibles	Nombre d'entretiens
Entretiens collectifs	Membres de bureau	3
	Membres de l'assemblée générale	2
Entretiens individuels	Hommes	20
	Femmes	10
Total		35

Dans l'ensemble, les entretiens se sont déroulés dans la langue bambara, parlée par plus de 95% de la population locale. Ensuite, nous avons traduit en français les données recueillies. Les entretiens ont porté sur des sujets tels que le fonctionnement de l'association, les modes de production et de gestion des biens et services communs, et leurs contributions au développement local.

L'analyse des données

Pour l'analyse des données, dans un premier temps, nous avons retranscrit les discours recueillis. Nous signalons que nos données sont qualitatives. Dans un deuxième temps, nous avons procédé à une analyse de contenu thématique afin d'étudier de façon systématique le rapport, l'interdépendance et l'interaction entre les pratiques développées par l'association ainsi que le développement local dans la zone de l'Office du Niger.

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PRÉSENTATION DES RÉSULTATS

Dans cette section de l'article, nous exposons les résultats de nos enquêtes de terrain. Nous mettons l'accent sur les activités de développement socioéconomique réalisées par l'association villageoise de Foabougou, d'abord au niveau du village, ensuite au niveau de la commune.

L'association villageoise de Foabougou : mutualiser les ressources pour produire des services collectifs autogérés

Organisation multifonctionnelle, cherchant en général à réunir tous les exploitants d'un même village, l'association villageoise continue d'être un outil indispensable de développement socioéconomique dans la zone de l'Office du Niger à travers des services multiformes autant individuels que collectifs. Il est bon de rappeler que le contexte de création des associations villageoises dans la deuxième moitié des années 80 a été marqué par le début de la restructuration de l'Office du Niger, sous la houlette de la Banque mondiale. Par cette restructuration, l'entreprise agricole a vu ses missions recentrées. En effet, elle s'est retirée de certaines activités comme l'accès des paysans aux facteurs de production (équipements, crédits de campagne, intrants agricoles comme les semences et les engrais), la commercialisation des produits, et l'accès à des services sociaux de base. Afin de prendre désormais en charge ces différentes activités, les associations villageoises ont été créées ou ressuscitées (car elles font partie du patrimoine organisationnel local) dans chaque village de la zone. Ce rappel contextuel permet déjà de se faire une idée sur les orientations des différentes pratiques que développent ces associations.

En ce qui concerne concrètement l'association villageoise de Foabougou (notre étude de cas), elle a vu le jour en 1984, dans le cadre de la politique de développement local prônée par le régime d'alors, avec comme cellule de base les associations villageoises. À l'époque, dans la zone de l'Office du Niger, cette politique a bénéficié de l'appui des Pays-Bas qui ont doté les associations villageoises d'équipements collectifs de production et de commercialisation. C'est dans ce contexte que les habitants du village de Foabougou se sont organisés en association villageoise dont l'objectif était la promotion socioéconomique et sociopolitique de ses membres et du village. Cependant, l'association a connu à ses débuts des difficultés de fonctionnement, à la suite de problèmes de mauvaise gestion (détournements, non-maîtrise des outils de gestion) qui ont fortement divisé le village, d'autant plus que l'association du village d'à côté (2 km), à savoir Sériwala, était citée comme la référence de la zone et cette situation dérangeait un peu les habitants de Foabougou. Cette concurrence les poussa à se remettre en cause par la mise en place d'un mode de fonctionnement communautaire qui, même s'il n'était pas démocratique, accordait une grande place à la participation et à l'implication des composantes sociales. Par ce mode de fonctionnement amélioré, l'association villageoise de Foabougou constitue aujourd'hui l'une des meilleures associations villageoises engagées dans le développement villageois participatif.

L'association compte 250 ménages représentés par les chefs de ménage dont l'adhésion est libre et individuelle. Elle intervient selon son mandat dans le domaine de l'agriculture (riziculture et maraîchage) et du développement villageois.

L'association villageoise de Foabougou fonctionne comme une organisation communautaire

L'association villageoise de Foabougou dispose de trois organes de gouvernance, à savoir le comité de gestion, le conseil d'administration et l'assemblée générale. Pendant la période de campagne agricole, de mars à septembre, le comité de gestion se réunit tous les jeudis. Quant aux deux autres organes, ils se chevauchent dans leur fonctionnement. En effet, l'association villageoise de Foabougou fonctionne comme une organisation communautaire avec une importante place accordée au chef de village entouré de ses conseillers et aux composantes sociales du village (organisations des jeunes, de femmes et de religieuses). Dans les prises de décisions, bien qu'il ne soit pas membre du comité de gestion, le chef de village joue un rôle important en tant que garant moral. Ainsi, le comité de gestion, avant d'entreprendre toute action, soumet d'abord l'idée au chef de village qui, il faut le reconnaître, mène le jeu en s'assurant de l'adhésion et de la

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participation des habitants. Ensuite, le comité consulte les leaders des différentes composantes (notamment les jeunes et les femmes) ou organise une assemblée générale des *gwatigis* (chefs de ménage). Lors des rencontres des membres, le mode consensuel s'impose quant à la prise de décisions. La recherche du consensus vise à éviter tout clivage qu'entraînerait un vote. C'est pourquoi, en cas de blocage, le chef de village inclut son réseau de conseillers dans les négociations. Cette démarche permet d'obtenir des compromis.

Une autre pratique permettant à l'association villageoise de Foabougou d'impliquer ou de responsabiliser les membres est la multiplication de petits groupes de travail chargés de domaines spécifiques comme la gestion de l'école communautaire ou celle du problème de la santé (case de santé). Malgré ce dispositif, nous relevons quelques tensions au niveau de l'utilisation des ressources où certains membres reprochent au comité de gestion de ne pas se consacrer suffisamment aux problèmes récurrents de crédits de campagne et de commercialisation ou de ne pas suffisamment les prendre en compte dans l'évaluation des besoins en intrants.

L'animation économique au sein du village repose essentiellement sur l'association villageoise

Sur le plan économique, l'association développe plusieurs pratiques au profit de ses membres et de toute la communauté.

L'accès collectif aux crédits de campagne et aux intrants à travers l'association villageoise

Au niveau de l'association villageoise de Foabougou, l'accès aux facteurs de production agricole concerne tous les habitants du village. Cet accès constitue d'ailleurs sa force. À cet effet, un comité a été mis en place pour l'identification et l'estimation des besoins en intrants agricoles et crédits de campagne. D'abord, ce comité contacte tous les chefs d'exploitation résidant dans le village. Ensuite, il convoque une assemblée générale de validation qui décide de l'option par rapport à l'organisation de la campagne à venir : octroyer directement les financements aux exploitants ou acheter des intrants à répartir entre les membres. Après une première expérience difficile d'allocation de fonds aux exploitants, à la suite de leur utilisation à d'autres fins, l'association villageoise a décidé, il y a plus d'une décennie, d'acheter elle-même les intrants et de les partager entre les membres. Cette option, même si elle exige plus de rigueur dans la gestion quand on sait que les responsables de l'association ont des difficultés à gérer les documents de gestion, a l'avantage de diminuer le coût de cession des intrants. En effet, plus la commande est groupée (donc importante), plus le prix de l'intrant baisse. Aussi, selon le secrétaire général du comité de gestion, « Le fait de procéder à l'achat collectif pour le village leur permet de bénéficier de crédits à des taux réduits. En effet, plus le montant des crédits est élevé, plus bas est son taux d'intérêt. » Depuis quelques années, la Banque nationale de développement agricole (BNDA) accorde des prêts à l'association à un taux de 7%, ce qui est raisonnable quand on sait que le taux d'intérêt peut aller jusqu'à 25% auprès des institutions de microfinancement qui préfèrent les prêts de courte durée (de 4 à 8 mois).

Quant au remboursement de ces intrants, il se fait en espèces. Ainsi, à la fin de la campagne, l'exploitant paie en liquide le prix du nombre de sacs reçus, plus les intérêts de la BNDA et quelques frais de manutention. Une commission de recouvrement est mise en place à cet effet. En cas de difficulté de remboursement, l'association villageoise paie à la place du débiteur qui n'aura désormais accès à ses services qu'après s'être acquitté de sa dette avec pénalité.

Nous relevons que cette pratique est d'une importance capitale dans l'amélioration de la productivité et de la diminution des coûts de production. En effet, l'une des principales difficultés auxquelles les paysans sont confrontés est l'accès à temps aux intrants qui affichent parfois des prix élevés ou manquent sur le marché. La période de précampagne est assez délicate pour les exploitants car à ce moment beaucoup d'entre eux connaissent une difficulté de trésorerie et ne sont pas en mesure d'accéder aux intrants sans l'appui de l'association villageoise. Ainsi, celle de Foabougou, par sa solidité financière, notamment sa capacité à prendre en charge des frais supplémentaires (par exemple, la manutention),

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parvient à faire diminuer le prix de cession des intrants. En effet, selon le président, l'association utilise ses propres ressources et moyens pour la mobilisation des crédits, mais aussi pour l'achat et l'acheminement des intrants jusqu'aux magasins de stockage de l'association dans le village. Le fait que l'association utilise ses propres moyens de transport réduit les frais liés au transport car elle n'achète que le carburant. Aussi, le fait d'utiliser ses propres ressources financières la met à l'abri du prêt bancaire.

Des infrastructures et équipements collectifs pour réduire les charges de production et faciliter la commercialisation
Foabougou est l'un des villages les plus dotés en infrastructures de stockage. Celles-ci ont été construites par l'association villageoise. Depuis son lancement en 1984, avec l'appui de l'organisme néerlandais qui a financé les deux premiers magasins en banco, l'association villageoise de Foabougou a pu réaliser elle-même sur fonds propres deux autres magasins en ciment. En effet, les équipements collectifs de l'association lui ont permis de générer d'importantes recettes au moyen de différentes prestations de services marchands.

Il est utile de signaler aussi que les magasins servent à stocker les récoltes des paysans en riz paddy (riz non décortiqué) ainsi qu'en riz décortiqué. En effet, d'une manière générale, les exploitants de la zone de l'Office du Niger sont confrontés au manque d'infrastructures appropriées pour le stockage car celles construites dans les années 80 avec l'appui des Pays-Bas se sont écroulées ou ne sont plus en bon état parce que faites en banco. Cette situation a conduit l'association villageoise de Foabougou à désormais construire en ciment.

Pour l'exploitation des magasins, à la fin de la récolte, les paysans confient au gérant du magasin leurs récoltes en riz paddy ou décortiqué sur la base de documents écrits. Les magasins sont dotés de deux clés dont l'une est détenue par le président et l'autre par le gérant. Pour l'association villageoise de Foabougou, ce service est gratuit. Il lui permet de rassembler sur place d'importantes quantités de la production du village pour le battage, le décorticage et la commercialisation collective. En effet, au niveau des magasins, tous les équipements intervenant dans ces opérations (bascule, batteuse, décortiqueuse) sont déjà sur place, ce qui réduit les coûts, comme nous l'avons signalé.

En ce qui a trait à la mise en place et l'exploitation des équipements collectifs, l'association villageoise de Foabougou dispose de quatre batteuses et de trois décortiqueuses de riz acquises sur fonds propres. Ces équipements ont été obtenus à partir de l'exploitation de deux premières batteuses acquises sur financement néerlandais et sur prêt pour deux décortiqueuses. Pour leur exploitation, en fonction de la réussite de la campagne, l'assemblée générale des membres fixe les coûts des différents services à rendre aux membres et à d'autres exploitants. Il s'agit principalement du décorticage et du battage. Par rapport au battage, pour les membres, sur dix sacs de riz paddy, un revient à l'association villageoise. Pour un non-adhérent, l'association retient deux sacs sur dix. Concernant le décorticage, la prestation se paie en général au comptant, soit 1 500 F par sac de 100 kg pour les membres contre 2 000 F pour les non-adhérents.

Pour la réussite des opérations de battage et de décorticage, l'association villageoise a engagé cinq ouvriers saisonniers payés journalièrement. L'utilisation des équipements se fait sur demande des membres qui assistent à tout le processus, au terme duquel un document faisant le point par membre est établi. Signalons que ces équipements fonctionnent avec du gasoil, ce qui engendre des dépenses et des frais d'entretien ou de réparation. Ces éléments, particulièrement le prix du carburant, entrent en ligne de compte dans la fixation des prix de location des machines. Les recettes issues de l'ensemble des opérations sont gardées par le trésorier qui tient un compte bancaire avec le président de l'association villageoise. Ces recettes, comme nous le verrons ci-dessous, sont utilisées pour le développement villageois—notamment, l'accès aux services sociaux de base.

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a391

Les produits sont vendus collectivement et l'association villageoise négocie elle-même avec les commerçants grossistes

Concernant la commercialisation, la pratique de l'association villageoise de Foabougou consiste à la vente collective des récoltes une fois que le cours du riz a atteint un prix jugé acceptable par les paysans. Pour cette vente, l'association villageoise ne passe pas par une structure intermédiaire spécialisée dans la vente du riz. Elle démarche elle-même les commerçants grossistes. Pour que les producteurs s'en sortent bien, le prix au kilogramme doit atteindre au moins 300 F CFA. Ce montant est difficile à atteindre malgré la bonne qualité gustative (appréciée dans la sous-région) du riz de l'Office car le marché malien est envahi par le riz thaïlandais de prix inférieur et de qualité moindre. Le fait que les producteurs ne peuvent pas garder très longtemps leurs productions explique aussi leur difficulté à obtenir un montant raisonnable, bien que l'association achète parfois à ses membres en difficulté.

LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DES ACTIVITÉS ÉCONOMIQUES PERMET L'AMÉLIORATION DE L'ACCÈS COLLECTIF AUX SERVICES SOCIAUX

Nous relevons que l'une des forces de l'association villageoise de Foabougou tient de sa capacité à lier développement économique et social. Nous l'avons déjà indiqué, le reproche qui se fait le plus souvent aux associations villageoises est de privilégier la dimension sociale du développement aux dépens de la dimension économique. En effet, en général, les associations villageoises consacrent l'essentiel de leurs ressources financières au financement des activités sociales au point d'épuiser ces ressources. Du coup, ces associations, n'arrivant plus à assurer des services aux membres, sont obligées de mettre la clé sous la porte. L'association villageoise de Foabougou a compris que l'un ne peut aller sans l'autre. En effet, sans une solidité financière, il est impossible de faire des prestations sociales dont la satisfaction motive les membres de l'association à s'engager davantage dans la vie de leur organisation.

À ce propos, le président de l'association de Foabougou affirme,

> Nous tenons à l'équilibre de notre association en ne faisant pas de prestations sociales qui videraient notre caisse comme c'est le cas pour d'autres associations. Nous avons été confrontés à ce problème au début. Désormais les prestations sociales dépendent de la situation de la caisse.

Cette démarche de l'association, pouvant d'un côté être vue comme une forme de retrait et de désengagement, a pourtant l'avantage, dans une optique d'hybridation entre logique sociale et logique économique, de permettre la pérennité et la durabilité de ses actions. Cela explique, entre autres, sa longévité (rappelons qu'elle a été créée en 1984).

En termes de pratiques de développement sur le plan social, nous notons surtout celles consistant à mettre en place des écoles communautaires et des centres d'alphabétisation. En effet, l'accès aux services éducatifs passe par ceux-ci. L'association villageoise de Foabougou joue dans ce domaine le rôle de collectivité publique car presque tous les services offerts sont à mettre à son compte.

Concernant la scolarisation des enfants, l'organisation villageoise a établi une école communautaire de premier cycle de six classes (dont trois en banco et trois autres en ciment). Cette école compte en moyenne 300 élèves et est dirigée par un comité de gestion mis en place par l'association villageoise. Ce comité est chargé d'assurer le fonctionnement de l'école au jour le jour (prise en charge du salaire des enseignants, achat de la craie et d'autres consommables), mais aussi de la sensibilisation des parents pour la scolarisation des enfants. Pour assurer le fonctionnement, le comité a instauré une cotisation mensuelle de 1000 F CFA par enfant. Depuis 2011, l'école communautaire a été érigée en école publique par le conseil communal qui participe désormais à la prise en charge des salaires des enseignants.

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Afin de permettre aux enfants du village de continuer leurs études au second cycle, l'association villageoise de Foabougou et celle du village de Sériwala (à 2 km) ont conjugué leurs efforts pour construire à Sériwala une école de second cycle qui elle aussi est devenue publique, en 2011. Sur ce sujet, le président du comité de gestion nous rapporte, « Compte tenu du fait que l'association n'a pas les moyens d'assurer à elle seule la construction et le fonctionnement d'une école de second cycle, nous avons décidé de fédérer nos moyens avec ceux de l'association du village de Sériwala qui est confrontée au [même] problème. »

Pour la formation des adultes, l'association villageoise a mis en place un centre d'alphabétisation dans les années 90. Cependant, ce centre ne parvient pas à organiser régulièrement des sessions de formation faute d'auditeurs, notamment chez les hommes qui sont moins assidus que les femmes car celles-ci semblent s'intéresser plus à cette formation. L'association estime le nombre d'adultes alphabétisés à seulement 320 personnes dans le village sur un total de 3 936 habitants.

Au vu de ces réalisations, nous osons dire que l'association villageoise de Foabougou remplace pratiquement le conseil communal pour ce qui est de l'accès des habitants aux services de l'éducation. Nous constatons qu'en dehors de la prise en charge d'une partie des salaires des enseignants, le conseil communal a pendant longtemps été pratiquement absent dans la production de services éducatifs même si, ces dernières années, il commence à prendre en charge le fonctionnement des écoles communautaires. Il n'empêche que l'association villageoise, grâce à la mutualisation des moyens, reste le principal acteur dans l'accès à ce service qui est public mais qui perdure grâce à une gestion communautaire.

DISCUSSION DES RÉSULTATS

À travers tout ce qui précède, nous voyons que l'association villageoise dans la zone de l'Office du Niger constitue un acteur majeur de développement touchant à la fois les dimensions économique et sociale. Dans cette entreprise hydro-agricole nationale qu'est l'Office du Niger, les paysans doivent faire face à la mondialisation et à un programme d'ajustement structurel qui a vu l'État se retirer des activités d'accompagnement jugées non rentables. Néanmoins, en dépit de leur précarisation, ces paysans réussissent à développer de plus en plus de stratégies de mutualisation de leurs ressources. Ils ont compris qu'ils doivent s'organiser de façon solidaire pour assumer leur propre développement, ce qui explique le foisonnement d'organisations de l'économie sociale et solidaire dans la zone de l'Office du Niger.

Notre étude de cas nous a permis de mettre en évidence comment l'association villageoise participe à la réalisation du développement local par la mise en place d'équipements et de services collectifs, pour atteindre une forme d'organisation communautaire à caractère coopératif mais sans fondement juridique. En effet, nous avons relevé que la quasi-totalité des réalisations économiques et sociales effectuées dans les différents villages sont pratiquement à l'actif de leurs associations villageoises. Malgré l'avènement des collectivités territoriales dans les années 90, notamment les communes, les organisations associatives continuent d'être un acteur majeur du développement socioéconomique local.

Ce constat s'impose particulièrement dans le domaine économique, où depuis le recentrage des missions de l'Office du Niger, ce sont les organisations associatives villageoises qui ont pris la relève et développent de façon continue des pratiques animant l'économie de la zone. À défaut d'une étude des impacts de ces pratiques, nous pouvons affirmer que les associations villageoises, qui deviennent de plus en plus de véritables sociétés coopératives, sont de véritables outils de développement économique dans la zone de l'Office du Niger. En effet, aujourd'hui, elles assurent l'accès du plus grand nombre de paysans aux facteurs de production, ainsi que la mise en place d'équipements et d'infrastructures de production, de stockage et de commercialisation des produits, non seulement pour leurs membres mais aussi pour les communautés villageoises entières. Ces pratiques concourent à améliorer les revenus des exploitants et par conséquent leur condition de vie. La question est de savoir si elles le font suffisamment et si elles peuvent s'inscrire

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dans la pérennité, quand on sait que la majorité d'entre elles sont confrontées parfois à des problèmes de gouvernance (mauvais choix des dirigeants, mauvaise gestion des ressources, pilotage à vue, etc.) et de manque de ressources qui limitent considérablement leur efficacité. Celle-ci est tellement importante vu que la durabilité et la dimension des actions de développement local dépendent des capacités d'autofinancement des organisations; elles doivent pouvoir compter sur leurs propres ressources, en plus d'avoir la capacité de gérer des ressources importantes. Les paysans doivent désormais faire preuve de plus d'innovation pour continuer à assurer plus de services au plus grand nombre de membres à partir de principes de solidarité et de mutualisation face aux difficultés de financement des activités agricoles. Un autre défi à relever consiste à œuvrer avec d'autres organisations à caractère coopératif et à saisir les conjonctures favorables en s'ouvrant à d'autres acteurs. En effet, il est important pour ces organisations d'avoir un ancrage local et identitaire, mais elles doivent s'adapter à l'évolution de l'environnement institutionnel et organisationnel pour changer de dimension. La capacité des associations villageoises à mobiliser plus de ressources et à développer des pratiques durables plus visibles dépend de leur mode d'organisation et de leur arrimage avec l'extérieur.

Malgré ces insuffisances, nous pouvons dire que notre hypothèse de recherche a été confirmée, car les résultats montrent bien l'important rôle de l'association villageoise dans le développement de la localité. À ce titre, notre recherche rejoint les conclusions d'autres travaux de recherche sur la question. En effet, à propos de l'importance des associations villageoises dans le développement local, Jacop et Delville concluaient que les organisations et groupements en milieu rural africain se réclament du développement; ceux-ci cherchent à améliorer l'équipement des villages, à mettre en place des services sociaux, et à établir des activités productives. Pour les deux auteurs, le fait « de décider collectivement de construire des infrastructures d'intérêt général, de créer des services socio-économiques (banque de céréales, moulin à mil, etc.) témoigne bien d'un projet, au moins implicite, sur le devenir du village, d'une prise en charge, à travers l'équipement, des "affaires publiques locales" » (Jacop et Delville, 1994, p. 11). Dans la même dynamique, Lapeyre (2006) affirme que « les acteurs locaux ne sont en rien passifs mais au contraire activement engagés dans la définition permanente de leur rapport à la nature et de leur mode de vie, afin de sécuriser leurs conditions de vie sur un territoire ». Aussi, pour Andriamanindrisoa (2004), les acteurs locaux développent des pratiques de formalisation et d'incorporation dans la logique des pratiques de vie relativement autonomes; on ne peut pas simplement réduire ces acteurs au rang de pauvres cherchant des offrandes provenant d'ambitieux programmes de lutte contre la pauvreté. Enfin, Parodi (2005) nous apprend que le projet collectif et le plus souvent le développement local sont au cœur même de l'émergence de toute expérience d'économie sociale et solidaire, car chacune de ces expériences contribue en retour à façonner des territoires dans le cadre de proximités aux déclinaisons multiples. La question qui se pose est la reproductibilité dans le temps et dans l'espace de ces expériences et leur contribution durable au développement local et plus largement à celui d'un patrimoine territorial.

CONCLUSION

L'étude des pratiques de production de biens et services communs par l'association du village de Foabougou nous a révélé que les organisations à caractère coopératif de la zone de l'Office du Niger participent à la réalisation du développement local par la mise en place de sources de financement (crédits de campagne), d'intrants agricoles (notamment les engrais), d'équipements collectifs de production, d'infrastructures collectives de stockage et de conservation, et ce au profit de leurs membres et de la communauté entière. En outre, ces mêmes organisations participent à la mise en place de services sociaux, car elles sont construites autour de valeurs d'entraide, de solidarité et de réciprocité qui tentent de combiner utilité sociale et économique.

Sur le plan économique, nous avons démontré que ces pratiques cherchent à lier la croissance des activités à la valorisation des personnes et des communautés : l'amélioration des revenus, le renforcement des capacités, la création et le maintien de l'emploi. Nous avons donc compris que ces pratiques occupent un important rôle dans l'amélioration

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a391

des conditions de vie des paysans et dans le développement du territoire sur lequel ils vivent. Sur le plan social, nous avons retenu que tout en participant à la construction de réseaux de sociabilité, l'association villageoise a développé des pratiques qui ont servi à mettre en place des services sociaux spécifiques (écoles communautaires, centres de santé, etc.). Elle compense de ce fait l'offre de services insuffisante de l'État dans les secteurs de l'éducation et de la santé.

D'une manière générale, l'analyse de ces résultats nous a démontré que l'animation socioéconomique au sein des villages repose essentiellement sur les associations villageoises. En effet, même si ces organisations sont confrontées à des problèmes de coordination et parfois de faiblesse de moyens financiers, elles parviennent à rendre des services socioéconomiques individuels et collectifs à leurs membres, voire à toute la communauté, en lieu et place de l'État qui s'est retiré des services jugés non rentables à la suite de la crise.

L'analyse nous a révélé aussi que plus les associations rendent de services à leurs membres ou aux collectivités, plus elles garantissent les conditions d'une grande participation et implication de l'ensemble des acteurs locaux, facteurs nécessaires à la réussite et au développement durable d'initiatives et d'innovations socioéconomiques locales. Du coup, cela confirme notre hypothèse qui affirmait que les stratégies et les pratiques solidaires d'acteurs locaux, à travers les associations, notamment villageoises, participent au développement local. À ce titre, nous avons trouvé que notre recherche rejoint les conclusions d'autres travaux de recherche sur la question (Andriamanindrisoa, 2004; Lapeyre, 2006; Parodi, 2005). Ainsi, nous estimons pouvoir donner notre contribution au débat sur la reconsidération et la relecture des potentialités de développement local des associations à caractère coopératif séculaires africaines agissant à travers la production de biens et services communs.

NOTES

1. Le *ton* villageois et les associations villageoises sont des organisations communautaires et séculaires qui se définissent comme des instruments d'action et de promotion de la communauté villageoise. Ils constituent la structure opérationnelle locale qui gère le développement économique, social et culturel du terroir villageois dans le cadre du développement local. Ils s'identifient aux intérêts collectifs et individuels de ses membres et reposent sur l'engagement volontaire de chacun d'eux dans la planification, la prise de décision, l'exécution et le contrôle de ses activités.
2. Le groupement *Naam* est une association traditionnelle communautaire au Burkina Faso. Il regroupe les jeunes d'un même village ou d'un même quartier autour d'activités agricoles, sociales et culturelles. Cette forme d'organisation traditionnelle a été réhabilitée dans les années 60 pour regrouper les paysans dans des organisations coopératives.
3. La *samarya* est une organisation traditionnelle d'entraide et de solidarité pour les jeunes en milieu rural au Niger. Elle s'occupe des questions de développement communautaire. Dans les années 70, cette forme d'organisation a servi de base pour la mise en place d'une politique de développement rural dont l'un des objectifs était d'organiser les paysans pour leur meilleur encadrement.
4. Le Programme d'ajustement structurel (PAS) a exigé certaines conditions aux pays, notamment la déflation, c'est-à-dire la diminution de l'effectif des fonctionnaires de l'État. À cet effet, l'État devait fermer certains services de santé et d'éducation. Aussi, pour les fonctionnaires, il devait mettre en place une politique de départ volontaire à la retraite.

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L'AUTEUR / ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mamadou Koumaré est enseignant à l'Université des Sciences Sociales et de Gestion de Bamako (USSGB), Mali. Il est détenteur d'un doctorat en études/sociologie de développement. Adresse : Rectorat de l'USSGB au Quartier du Fleuve, Bamako, Rue 310, Porte 238, BP : 2575. Courriel : koumaresdses@hotmail.fr

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a391

ANSERJ
Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale

Vol. 12, No. 1
Spring / printemps 2021
pp. 82 – 106

Assessing the Social Impact of Mental Health Service Accessibility by a Nonprofit Social Enterprise: A Mixed-Methods Case Study

Aaron Turpin
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto
Micheal L. Shier
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
Kate Scowen
Hard Feelings Mental Health

ABSTRACT

The following study sought to examine the impact of a social enterprise mental health services model by assessing its influence on service accessibility and mental health stigma. A mixed-methods design was developed by collecting data from service users, counsellors, and community members of a social enterprise in Toronto, Ontario, using qualitative interviews and the Mental Health Knowledge Schedule (MAKS) survey. Findings show how the social enterprise increases service access and challenges mental health stigma by engaging in a variety of activities, including providing low-cost counselling, diversifying services, offering a positive and safe non-clinical environment, and engaging with the public directly with a storefront model. An analysis of data finds common themes and discrepancies between respondent groups. Insights on the replication of this social impact assessment model are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

L'étude suivante visait à examiner l'impact d'un modèle de services de santé mentale d'entreprise sociale en évaluant son influence sur l'accessibilité des services et la stigmatisation liée à la santé mentale. Une conception à méthodes mixtes a été élaborée en recueillant des données auprès des utilisateurs de services, des conseillers et des membres de la communauté d'une entreprise sociale de Toronto, en Ontario, à l'aide d'entrevues qualitatives et de l'enquête Mental Health Knowledge Schedule (MAKS). Les résultats montrent comment l'entreprise sociale augmente l'accès aux services et remet en question la stigmatisation liée à la santé mentale en s'engageant dans une variété d'activités, y compris en fournissant des conseils à faible coût, en diversifiant les services, en offrant un environnement non clinique positif et sûr et en interagissant directement avec le public avec un modèle de vitrine. Une analyse des données révèle des thèmes communs et des écarts entre les groupes de répondants. Des informations sur la réplication de ce modèle d'évaluation de l'impact social sont discutées.

Keywords / Mots clés: Social entrepreneurship; Social enterprise; Nonprofit; Mental health; Community-based / L'entrepreneuriat social; Entreprise sociale; Non lucratif; Santé mentale; À base communautaire

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a378

INTRODUCTION

Services addressing the mental health needs of vulnerable social groups in Canada are diverse. Many community-based nonprofit organizations have sought to alleviate issues pertaining to mental health by responding with wellness programs, such as counselling services (Jordans et al., 2019; Lamsal, Stalker, Cait, Riemer, & Horton, 2018), peer and mutual-help groups (Sotskova, Woodin, & St. Cyr, 2016; Turpin & Shier, 2017), or arts-based programming (Bone, 2018; McKeown, Weir, Berridge, Ellis, & Kyrarsis, 2016). However, nonprofits continue to grapple with meeting the demand for accessible services (Ganann et al., 2019; Knight & Winterbotham, 2019), as service users are commonly faced with large wait-lists (Kowalewski, McLennan, & McGrath, 2011; Lamsal et al., 2018) or poorly suited programs that are not capable of providing personalized support (Ibaraki & Hall, 2014; Presley & Day, 2019). Consequently, mental health services often fail to reach those who live on the margins of society (Curtis-Boles, 2019; Eamer, Fernando, & King, 2017), primarily because programs are not capable of addressing the accessibility needs of this group (Pantalone, Scanlon, Brown, Radhakrishnan, & Sprague, 2018; Sevelius, Patouhas, Keatley, & Johnson, 2014). Mental health accessibility can be conceptualized as the ability to connect with mental health resources without prejudice or barriers (Ganann et al., 2019; Knight & Winterbotham, 2019), and can include responding to a wide range of needs, including affordability (Corscadden, Callander, & Topp, 2018; Phalen, 2016), identity and values alignment (Ibaraki & Hall, 2014; Presley & Day, 2019), and physical location (Corscadden et al., 2018).

One way nonprofits have addressed the issue of mental health accessibility is through socially entrepreneurial efforts (Hartley, 2017). Social entrepreneurship is defined by Zahra and Wright (2011) as "the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define, and exploit opportunities in order to enhance social wealth by creating new ventures or managing existing organizations in an innovative manner" (p. 68). Therefore, social entrepreneurship can be conceptualized as factors and characteristics that exist both at the organizational (Turpin & Shier, 2019) and practice level (Olinsson, 2017) of human service organizations, and can include innovative, proactive, and market-based (i.e., activities that contribute directly to economic outcomes) activities combined with strategic risk-taking approaches (Turpin & Shier, 2019).

Social entrepreneurship is conceptually distinct from social enterprise, though both terms share similar theoretical roots (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). As Defourny and Nyssens (2010) explain, social enterprise and social entrepreneurship are equally tied to the pursuit of a social mission (rather than a profit-seeking one) and work to maximize the social impact of an organization. However, a social enterprise model diverges from social entrepreneurship by engaging in the production of goods and services within the marketplace, which results in distinct economic risks that are not witnessed in other approaches to human service delivery (Defourney & Nyssens, 2010). In sum, one specific way socially entrepreneurial nonprofits may engage in the pursuit of a social mission is through the creation of a social enterprise; however, this is not a requirement.

Though the social enterprise model is bourgeoning in Canada, research on these models remains incomplete and mostly outcomes-focused (Suchowerska et al., 2020). Consequently, it is incumbent on researchers to engage in the in-depth analyses of social enterprise models that seek to promote mental wellness, with a focus on identifying specific processes regarding how this approach may contribute to individual and structural outcomes. This study uses a case study methodology to examine a unique social enterprise model in Canada. Specifically, researchers partnered with a community-based nonprofit social enterprise seeking to improve access to mental health services and applied a mixed-methods evaluation to measure the organization's social impact. This study was guided by three research questions: 1) How does [the social enterprise] improve access to mental health services for its service users? 2) What service-based factors associated with [the social enterprise] lead to a reduction in mental health stigma? 3) In what ways does [the social enterprise] storefront reduce stigma associated with mental health services?

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BACKGROUND

Barriers to accessing mental health services

Accessing mental health supports is often prevented by various barriers, including a societal stigma associated with mental health challenges and accessing related treatment. For example, research has shown that social groups (defined by culture, gender, and/or age) may perceive individuals experiencing mental health challenges in a negative way, which may lead these individuals to avoid seeking help (Knifton, 2012; Lee, Ditchman, Fong, Piper, & Feigon, 2014; Lynch, Long, & Moorhead, 2018; Saechao et al., 2012; Shannon, Wieling, Simmelink-McCleary, & Becher, 2015; Yousaf, Grunfeld, & Hunter, 2015). Consequently, many individuals avoid seeking mental health support due to fear of judgement from others (Auger, Abel, & Oliver, 2018; Chen & Kok, 2017; Hepworth & Paxton, 2007; Martin, 2010).

Experiences of stigma have been shown to cause internalized self-judgement in individuals who experience symptomology, resulting in self-stigma and lower self-esteem (Corrigan, 2004). Conversely, studies have shown that individuals with either personal experience of mental health challenges and/or experience of mental health challenges within close social groups are more likely to hold lower stigmatizing views than those who do not have these experiences (Dyrbye et al., 2015; Morgan, Reavley, Jorm, & Beatson, 2017; Pedersen & Paves; Robinson & Brewster, 2016). Other divergent effects may be witnessed among demographic groups. For example, some research suggests that men hold higher levels of mental health stigma than women (Brown, Moloney, & Brown, 2018; Townsend, 2019), though similar studies purport no significant differences among gender, explaining that men and women hold equal stigmatizing attitudes (Earlise, Wiltshire, Detry, & Brown, 2013; Elnitsky et al., 2013).

Literature has also identified that a failure to acknowledge problematic mental health symptomology will also pose barriers to seeking help. In a comparative study involving older and younger adults in the United States, Pepin, Segal, and Coolidge (2009) found that older adults were more likely to interpret symptoms of depression as non-problematic. Similar findings have been identified in other studies, resulting in individuals often ignoring issues that are otherwise treatable (Loewenthal, Mohamed, Mukhopadhyay, Ganesh, & Thomas, 2012). In other cases, individuals may recognize there is a problem but not consider it serious enough to warrant mental health treatment (Chen & Kok, 2017; Kne et al., 2017; Mosher et al., 2014). This may be due to a general lack of knowledge concerning mental health services (Hundt et al., 2018; Saechao et al., 2012), which is often impacted by poor access to mental health resources (Browne et al., 2019; Hundt et al., 2018; Pfeiffer et al., 2016). Acquiring accurate knowledge about the types and purposes of different available mental health services is commonly cited as a precursor to access (Schnyder et al., 2018; Wei, Carr, Alaffe, & Kutcher, 2019). Yet, even when individuals are aware of mental health services, research shows that a lack of confidence in mental health providers can be another barrier to accessing help (Gaston, Earl, Nisanci, & Glomb, 2016; Rughani, Deane, & Wilson, 2011).

Research also cites logistical and programmatic barriers as preventing individuals from accessing services. Logistical barriers can include cost (Browne et al., 2019; Owens, Rogers, & Whitesell, 2011), transportation (Browne et al., 2019; Hundt et al., 2018; Pepin et al., 2009; Pfeiffer et al., 2016), and lack of time (Browne et al., 2019; Hundt et al., 2018). Furthermore, service users may interpret available mental health supports as incompatible with non-Western cultures and, as such, not a viable means to address mental health concerns (Allen, Kim, Smith, & Hafoka, 2016; Bettmann, Penney, Freeman, & Lecy, 2015). For example, language has been considered a barrier, specifically in cases where service users lack the ability to communicate in the dominant language (Saha, Fernandez, & Perez-Stable, 2007). Similarly, refugees in the United Kingdom commented on the unreliability of interpreters (Loewenthal et al., 2012), while refugees in the United States expressed fear that interpreters would break confidentiality (Shannon et al., 2015).

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Social enterprise and mental health services

Though contemporary social enterprise models providing health services began to emerge in North America in the early 1990s (Calò, Teasdale, Donaldson, Roy, & Baglioni, 2018; Mandiberg, 2016) as a novel response to addressing disparities faced in the public health system (Macaulay, Roy, Donaldson, Teasdale, & Kay, 2017), governments have only recently begun to formally acknowledge and emphasize the role these organizations play in supporting people experiencing serious adverse mental health symptomology (Buhariwala, Wilton, & Evans, 2015). A similar rise in empirical interest about how social enterprise models may address health inequities has been witnessed over the past two decades (Suchoweska et al., 2020). It has been recognized that social enterprises providing health services continue to grow within competitive marketplaces in North America (Calò et al., 2019; Mandiberg & Edwards, 2016), providing a complementary role to public health services (such as healthcare) through the use of innovative and adaptive market-based approaches. However, these health-oriented social enterprise organizations may differ from their public-sector counterparts in a few distinct ways, such as benefitting from more flexibility in program implementation, adopting personalized and service-user focused approaches, and developing lasting and meaningful connections between service users, staff, and community stakeholders (Calò et al., 2019). As a result, social enterprise models are often regarded as a complex form of public health intervention, expanding what may be considered as viable activities within this sector (Roy, Baker, & Kerr, 2017).

Models of social enterprise have generally helped alleviate mental health inequities by addressing social problems through innovative interventions that improve social value (Kidd et al., 2015; Roy et al., 2014). The development of social enterprise in Canada is particularly relevant given increasing pressures on governments to increase efficiencies by contracting organizations to deliver social services (Chell, Nicolopoulou, & Karataş-Özkan, 2010; McMurtry & Brouard, 2015). Social enterprise may address these changes by mobilizing local resources to support marginalized populations while involving communities in helping to remove barriers that hinder social well-being (Smith & Stevens, 2010). These approaches also promote self-sufficiency and efficiency, as they will generally redistribute profits back into the community (Defourny, 2004). Research conducted on the use of social enterprise for improving service access while scaling social impact reveals how these models are uniquely qualified to address mental health service inequities. For example, Fowler, Coffey, and Dixon-Fowler (2019) describe a three-stage process in the development of a social enterprise: generating an idea by assessing social needs and assets in a community; developing the idea into an opportunity; and building and sustaining a social enterprise. The generation of an idea often originates from a group of citizens in a community who share well-defined goals based on shared experiences (Kernot, 2009). For instance, a collaboration between a university and a homeless youth agency in the United States led to the development of a socially entrepreneurial initiative that provides youth with vocational and clinical services to improve employment outcomes (Ferguson, 2012). This example provides a real-world application of social enterprise and demonstrates how it can be used to fit various contexts.

A vast majority of case examples and related research focuses on similar social enterprise models that pursue labour market reintegration as a means of supporting individuals experiencing mental health-related issues, contributing to their overall quality of life. Programs are often focused on addressing high unemployment levels (Krupa, Sabetti, & Lysaght, 2019; Lysaght, Krupa, & Bouchard, 2018) and barriers to inclusion for this service user group by providing employment skills and opportunities while challenging discrimination and stigma in the workforce (Buhariwala et al., 2015; Evans & Wilton, 2019). This is often accomplished via the creation of spaces for service users to be employed in meaningful work and/or develop skills through a variety of experiences that contribute to employability (Buhariwala et al., 2015; Evans & Wilton, 2019; Lysaght et al., 2018). In Canada, these skills typically include food preparation, landscaping, cleaning and janitorial services, retail, and packaging (Buhariwala et al., 2015; Evans & Wilton, 2019). These social enterprise models are commonly referred to as work integration social enterprises (Krupa et al., 2019; Lysaght et al., 2018), and they have been found to reduce stigma by increasing public perceptions regarding the legitimacy, value, and competence of persons experiencing a mental health issue.

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There exists some evidence linking participation in health-focused social enterprise programming to specific outcomes of personal well-being among social service users. These outcomes can broadly be categorized as contributing to physical health (including positive health behaviours and physical well-being), mental health (including increased sense of purpose and meaning, motivation, goal orientation, empowerment, confidence, positive coping, resilience, life satisfaction, family and peer support, self-esteem, self-worth, and dignity), and social determinants (including increased social capital, sense of community, trust and safety, employability, and access to services alongside reduced stigmatization) (Calò et al., 2018, 2019; Macaulay et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2014; Roy et al., 2017). Specific aspects of programs have been identified as contributing to the overall efficacy of these outcomes, such as increased collaboration with community and public organizations (Calò et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2015). There are already a number of social enterprises outside of Canada that are demonstrating the possibilities of improving access to mental health services by engaging in collaborative processes. In the United Kingdom, several culturally specific organizations were created to provide diverse counselling services that are delivered by staff drawing from their own experience (Fernando, 2005; Palmer & Ward, 2007). Similarly, another U.K.-based social enterprise, the Wellbeing Service, has adopted the goal of improving access to psychotherapy by providing services in informal social settings to assist individuals in rebuilding social connections while referring them to resources and providing psychoeducation (Hartley, 2017). These interventions have not only proven to be impactful and sustainable but also hold promise as service models that can be scaled broadly (Hartley, 2017). Other aspects of social enterprise models that may impact outcomes include organizational size, location, and staff (Roy et al., 2014).

Though existing research has begun to identify the impact of social enterprises engaged in mental health services, it has done a poor job at ascertaining specific ways in which these unique organizational forms accomplish these outcomes (Suchowerska et al., 2020). Some possible processes identified in conceptual and qualitative research include examining the role of education and skills development, (Macaulay et al., 2017; Roy, 2017), exploring social interaction (Farmer et al., 2017), and looking at the development of a positive and safe service environment (Calò et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2017; Macaulay et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2017). These processes follow the conceptualization of social enterprise as spaces of well-being (Munoz, Farmer, Winterton, & Barraket, 2015), where services adopt a multipronged approach to how well-being is created and maintained (i.e., spoken, felt, and practiced). These processes may simultaneously address various well-being issues, such as loneliness and isolation (Munoz et al., 2015). However, a greater need for boundary-spanning research that connects these processes to the broader community is needed, especially studies that incorporate multiple perspectives (including service users and community members) (Farmer et al., 2016). Relatedly, rigorous mixed-method designs are required to develop a deeper understanding of how outcomes are achieved (Macaulay et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2014), including the role of organizational activities and functioning in the overall development of services (Suchowerska et al., 2020). This study responds to these gaps by employing a mixed-methods case study design. Specifically, the research aims to understand how a nonprofit social enterprise may address mental health stigma and barriers to access through its program design and implementation. Perspectives gathered from service users, staff, and community members are compared to provide a fulsome description of service experiences and engagement with the public, while survey data on demographics and stigma are analyzed.

Case example

The case example used in this study is a three-year-old nonprofit social enterprise located in Toronto, Canada, that aims to address issues of mental health service access by serving two main functions: 1) providing the physical space for and supporting the practice of a group of counsellors and therapists who offer services for a broad range of needs; and 2) creating a retail space that offers curated resources and products that promote well-being. Both aspects of the social enterprise contribute to an entrepreneurial social service approach where profits from retail sales at the storefront are directly channelled into supporting the community of practice. Attached to the storefront space are offices where private practitioners provide short-term therapy (50–60 minutes for a maximum of 12 sessions, with the option of three booster sessions)

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for services users, who self-select their rate from a sliding scale. This model is sustainable, as the social enterprise collects steady profits from the storefront, charges monthly office rental fees, and receives a few modest private donations and other grants from partnership organizations (such as the counselling department at a local university).

Though the organization has successfully implemented a social enterprise that has seen considerable growth in just three years (resulting in an increasing demand to expand to another site), it has not yet been able to assess, in a more systematic way, how it achieves its main goals as an organization; namely, to increase access to mental health counselling services and to reduce the stigma associated with these services. To answer these questions, a mixed-methods evaluation of social impact was designed and implemented.

To supplement the qualitative inquiry, researchers developed hypotheses to be tested quantitatively. Researchers were interested in how engagement with the storefront might impact mental health stigma. Following research findings cited in the literature review, some studies (Schnyder et al., 2018; Wei, Carr, Alaffe, & Kutcher, 2019) show how increased mental health knowledge can reduce stigmatizing attitudes toward help-seeking behaviour among a variety of social groups. A similar effect may be measured by testing whether or not the number of visits to the social enterprise storefront contributes to more positive perceptions of mental health service use. This is because the products in the storefront include various stigma-reducing items, including books, zines, and other educational material designed to shape positive perceptions of mental health and related supports. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

> Hypothesis 1: Increased engagement with the social enterprise storefront is inversely associated with mental health service stigma.

A second variable identified in the literature review as a salient contributor to reducing mental health stigma is experience with mental health issues, both personally (Dyrbye et al., 2015; Pedersen & Paves, 2014) and/or with a close family member or friend (Morgan, Reavley, Jorm, & Beatson, 2017; Robinson & Brewster, 2016). Related personal experiences provide insight into challenges associated with mental health (Conchar & Repper, 2014; Oats, Drey, & Jones, 2017), often leading to a more compassionate perception of people who seek support for mental wellness (Robertson, Carpenter, Donovan-Hall, & Bartlett, 2019). Conversely, research on the effect of having a family member or close friend with a mental health issue and its impact on stigmatizing perceptions is less clear, but it offers some insight into how personal relationships may educate and increase one's awareness of related issues (Griffiths, Crisp, Barney, & Reid, 2011). Based on these findings, the following hypotheses were developed:

> Hypothesis 2: Respondents who have experienced adverse mental health issues will have significantly lower mental health service stigma than those who have not.
>
> Hypothesis 3: Respondents who have a friend or family member who experienced mental health issues will have significantly lower mental health service stigma than those who do not.

METHODS

This study adopts a case study-mixed-methods (CS-MM) design, where researchers have employed a parent case study utilizing a mixed-methods approach (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). Mixed-methods research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methodology in one study, integrating them through all phases (Creswell, 2015), while a case study is defined as the deep investigation of a real-life case, or multiple cases, to better understand its complexity (Yin, 2014). The case itself is understood as a manifestation of a larger phenomenon under study (Onghena, Maes, & Heyvaert, 2019) that can be examined in detail by investigating how it is represented within one or more specific cases (Yin, 2014). For this study, researchers chose a single unit of analysis (the social enterprise) and collected multiple sources of data to examine the case from different angles.

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The CS-MM design has been utilized in other social science research (Guetterman & Mitchell, 2016; Little, Motohara, Miyazaki, Arato, & Fetters, 2013; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2010) and is applied in this study following a methodological structure, as outlined by Guetterman and Mitchell (2016). Researchers chose a single case study design to provide an in-depth analysis of a novel social enterprise model addressing mental health accessibility and stigma. Since a single case study generally adopts a single unit of analysis, it is uniquely qualified to explore a phenomenon with greater precision and nuance (Yin, 2014), compared to multi-site designs, which may lack this ability due to larger and more varied samples. The ability to conduct deep analysis via case study design directly supports the overall aim of the research: to understand how a nonprofit social enterprise may address mental health stigma and barriers to service access through its program design and implementation.

Procedure

To answer the research questions identified in the introduction, researchers collected qualitative data from three groups (service users, counsellors, and community partners) while concurrently gathering survey data from consumers (i.e., community members). Qualitative data sources were used to triangulate findings (Yin, 2014) for research questions one and two, while survey data and further qualitative inquiry were used to answer research question three. This is also known as an embedded case study analysis (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018), where multiple data sources are used to answer the same research questions to provide a more complete understanding of the case. The triangulated approach is most novel, as the majority of research adopting a CS-MM design do not include multiple qualitative sources (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018), despite recommendations to do so (Yin, 2014). Before data collection, researchers obtained ethics review and certification from the University of Toronto Health Sciences Research Ethics Board.

Sampling and participants

Sampling in case studies is generally examined at two levels: choosing the case itself and selecting participants (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). To achieve data triangulation (Yin, 2014), three participant groups were selected for the study: 1) service users (n = 55); 2) counsellors and community partners (n = 28); and 3) community members/consumers (n = 95). Quantitative survey data from the sample of community members/consumers (n = 95) purchasing products in the storefront was also employed. Service users were selected using convenience sampling and were recruited by counsellors renting counselling space at the social enterprise. Specifically, counsellors were provided training on how to select and recruit service users safely, including information on the study itself and guidance on selecting respondents who were deemed low-risk research participants. Counsellors then utilized their clinical judgement to select eligible service users, offering them the opportunity to participate in the research after the service user completed counselling services, while clearly articulating to the service user that there was no expectation of participation (informed consent), participation would not affect their future engagement with the social enterprise, and service user participation was anonymous and confidential. This procedure reflects a purposive sampling method, and it was chosen to protect the safety of service user participants. Counsellors were recruited via email that included study information and informed consent. The email was sent to all counsellors working at the social enterprise, as well as counsellors that provide referrals from partnering mental health organizations and hospitals. This was done to collect a broad range of input from mental health workers on each side of service engagement. All counsellors renting space at the social enterprise, as well as referring counsellors, were contacted for participation in the study. This procedure also reflects a purposive sampling method, in that all eligible respondents were provided with an opportunity to participate in the study. This approach was adopted to maximize the number of respondents in this sample group. Finally, community members were recruited using convenience sampling and were given information about the survey when they visited the store. Convenience sampling was adopted as the most pragmatic approach to recruiting community members given the context (a storefront on a busy commercial street) and the invariability with which community members visited the storefront and had interactions with staff. The social enterprise also advertised the study to community members on its website and social media channels, including embedded

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links to the survey. There were no incentives for any respondent group to participate in this study, and all engagement proceeded only after an informed consent process.

Data collection and measures

To collect qualitative data, researchers developed interview guides for each of the respondent groups following the research questions. Interview guides included similar questions for each group related to program efficacy, access, barriers, and improvements, but the questions were specifically worded for each respondent group. All respondent groups provided responses in an online survey that was created using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, 2020) and accessed via a secure link. Response fields did not limit the word count. Researchers chose to include all aspects (qualitative and quantitative) of data collection on the same online survey to increase access for the study participants. This allowed respondents to engage with the research at a time and pace that was most conducive to their individual needs. It allowed researchers to better access participant groups that they may have experienced difficulties in engaging in-person. Providing a fully digital survey and questionnaire has been cited as one strategy for engaging with hard-to-reach groups, such as counsellors, service users, and community members (Van Wijk, 2014; UyBico, Pavel, & Gross, 2007).

For the quantitative analysis, survey data were collected from community members (i.e., members of the public who engaged with the social enterprise storefront) using an online survey via secure link from Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2020) software. The quantitative survey consisted of two main sections: a range of demographic questions, and questions from a stigma-related measure in the Mental Health Knowledge Schedule (MAKS) (Evans-Lacko et al., 2010).

The Mental Health Knowledge Schedule (MAKS)

This subscale originally included six items assessing attitudes about mental health and treatment, including medication, interventions, and recovery (see Table 1 for a full list of items), which are measured on a six-point ordinal scale: *Agree strongly*, *Agree slightly*, *Neither agree nor disagree*, *Disagree slightly*, *Disagree strongly*, *Don't know*. Researchers collected data from community members (n = 95) using this metric and performed a reliability test of internal consistency and confirmatory factor analysis to assess the overall construct validity of the subscale. Results using the full six-item measure revealed substandard model fit, and, therefore, items five and six were removed to improve overall validity. Final model results testing a four-item factor of mental health stigma indicated good overall validity ($\chi 2 = 24.245$, $df = 23$, $p = 0.3903$, TLI = 0.958, CFI = 0.972, RMSEA = 0.030). A reliability analysis of the four-item factor using Cronbach's alpha demonstrated moderate reliability (0.64).

Table 1. MAKS scale items

Variable	Item
MAKS_1	Most people with mental health problems want to have paid employment.
MAKS_2	If a friend had a mental health problem, I know what advice to give them to get professional help.
MAKS_3	Medication can be an effective treatment for people with mental health problems.
MAKS_4	Psychotherapy (e.g., talking therapy or counselling) can be an effective treatment for people with mental health problems.

To answer Hypothesis 1 (which states that increased engagement with the social enterprise storefront is inversely associated with mental health service stigma), researchers selected two variables measuring previous experience with the social enterprise, including shopping at the storefront and utilizing counselling services, which they addressed through

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two questions: 1) How many times have you visited the social enterprise storefront? 2) Have you received counselling services from the social enterprise, either currently or in the past? Due to the close proximity of the counsellor's offices to the storefront (i.e., in the same building), it can be reasonably assumed that some customers would be current or previous service users, and it was important to capture this as a possible confounding factor. To answer hypotheses two and three (which state that respondents who have experienced adverse mental health issues will have significantly lower mental health service stigma than those who have not, and that respondents who have a friend or family member who has experienced mental health issues will have significantly lower mental health service stigma than those who do not), researchers asked respondents about their personal experiences of mental health, as well as experiences with family and close friends who experienced a mental health issue, using two binary (yes/no) variables: 1) Have you experienced adverse mental health issues before? 2) Have you had a friend or family member who has experienced mental health issues in the past?

Finally, three other demographic variables were included in the community member survey: age, gender, and level of education. Recent research (see literature review) has revealed conflicting evidence on each of these variables and their effect on mental health stigma (Brown, Moloney, & Brown, 2018; Earlise et al., 2013; Elnitsky et al., 2013; Holman, 2014; Townsend et al., 2019). They are included in this study as potential confounding variables.

Data analysis

Researchers analyzed qualitative data by adopting a thematic qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thematic analysis conceptualizes findings by developing general and specific themes through the grouping (i.e., coding) of same or similar data (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Researchers selected this approach for the purpose of identifying detailed aspects of the social enterprise that provide responses to the research questions. To accomplish this, data were compiled by question and separated by respondent group. Researchers left data categorized by question for the purpose of keeping the analysis directly relevant to specific aspects of the social enterprise (e.g., improvements to services or successful elements of the programs). Then, researchers independently coded the data by arranging responses into common groups, known as general themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These themes were cross-referenced between researchers to identify discrepancies, which were accounted for until researchers agreed on same or similar themes. A second round of analysis subjected each general theme to further coding, generating subthemes that were again cross-referenced for the same purposes. This technique follows constant comparison (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and content analysis (Goetz & Lecompte, 1984) methods.

Beyond generating general and specific themes, researchers wanted to further qualify how these themes were represented in the data. To achieve this, they used the final general themes and re-assessed the data to quantify how many times each theme appears within transcripts. The resulting data shows the amount to which each theme appears in the data, both in the number of times it is mentioned by respondents (demarked by *n*), as well as the overall percentage for the question.

To answer research question three, the modified measure of MAKS was entered into a regression model as the dependent variable. Predictor variables included demographic information (storefront visits, service use, personal experiences with mental health, family/friend experiences with mental health, age, gender, and level of education). Researchers tested for significant relationships at the $p = <.05$ level. As well, descriptive statistics for the MAKS scale and demographics were completed.

Findings

Tables 2, 3, and 4 provide summaries of thematic analysis for each respondent group by question.

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Table 2. Survey questions and thematic analysis for service users (*n* = 55)

1) *What are some of the barriers you have experienced in the past that have prevented you from accessing mental health treatment?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Cost	Cost of living; financial precarity; therapist rates; financial support	27	31
Availability	Cultural/language compatibility; working hours	20	23
Fear/apprehension	Fear of judgement; stigma; admitting to requiring help	12	14
Location	Closeness to work and home	10	11
Therapist/therapy match	Matching therapy type and service framework to needs	9	10
Lack of knowledge	Unsure how to find therapist; unsure of types of therapy	6	7
Wait-list	Long wait times for services	4	4

2) *Thinking about the barriers you identified in the previous question, how has this impacted your life?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Inability to cope/work	Inability to get work done/engage in social activities	24	37
Lack of access to services	Inadequate insurance; previous bad experiences with treatment	16	25
Impacts relationships	Inability to be emotionally vulnerable; unhealthy relationships	14	22
Feeling helpless/alone	No emotional outlet; anxiety due to incurring debt	6	9
Unable to move forward	Lack of ambition/energy; low self-esteem; frustration	4	7

3) *What are some of the ways that [the social enterprise] has improved your access to mental health services?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Affordability	Lessening financial stress	38	43
Overall accessibility	Multiple service options; central location; low service restrictions	20	23
Open service environment	Warm/friendly space; not feeling judged; non-clinical environment	9	10
Positive social impact	Improved hopefulness/self-awareness; healthy relationships	9	10
Quality of services	Positive staff interactions; personal values alignment	6	7
Links to other services	Service navigation; referrals/ongoing care; information hub	6	7

4) *How can [the social enterprise] continue to improve access to mental health services?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Scale up services	More sessions/locations/service options	19	34
Program flexibility	Evening/weekend hours; remote counselling	16	28
Providing resources	Online directory; social media; bridging services	11	20
Raising awareness	Increased advertising; promoting in other venues	10	18

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Table 3. Survey questions and thematic analysis for counsellors (*n* = 28)

1) *How does the social enterprise impact your ability to provide services?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Long wait-lists	Closed wait-lists; impact on wait times	24	50
Service efficiency	Quick access from intake to counsellor	16	33
Mental health supports	Diverse services addressing needs	8	17

2) *How does the social enterprise impact access to services for the population you work with?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Timely access	New/viable option to choose from	24	50
Affordable services	Uncostly and quality service	24	50

3) *What are some of the barriers that have prevented clients from accessing mental health services?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Cost/income	Unaffordable service fees; lack of insurance coverage	18	39
Lack of services/fit	Location; physical space; culturally appropriate	12	26
Wait time	Long wait-lists for services	11	24
Stigma	Institutional oppression; public stigma	5	11

4) *Thinking about the barriers you identified in the previous question, how has this impacted your practice?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Overall increased access	Affordability; motivated clients	17	54
Managing wait-lists	Early intake; triaging services	7	23
Serving clients better	Positive rapport; crisis-based therapy; referrals	7	23

5) *How can the social enterprise continue to improve access to mental health services?*

Code	Sub-codes	*n*	%
Scale up services	More sessions; open new locations; more counsellors	14	55
Diversify services	Hire racialized counsellors; group therapy	9	30
Standardize services	Standardized assessments; standardized referrals	6	15

 doi:10.29173/cjnser.2021v12n1a378

Table 4. Survey questions and thematic analysis for community members (*n* = 95)

1) *What impact has [the social enterprise] had on your neighborhood?*

Code	Sub-codes	n	%
Inclusive/welcoming space	Normalizing therapy; creates community	37	36
Access to services	Central location; intensive services	30	29
Provides resources	Informative products; self-care items	23	22
Raises awareness	Challenging stigma; opening mental health dialogue	13	13

2) *Why have you chosen to shop at [the social enterprise]?*

Code	Sub-codes	n	%
Support community	Support local business/services; personal values	36	35
Resources/products	Quality products; helpful/supportive resources	34	33
Receiving services	Comfortable space before/after counselling	20	20
Recommended	Recommended by friend/family	12	12

3) *What aspects of the social enterprise storefront do you find most valuable?*

Code	Sub-codes	n	%
Products	Variety of items; de-stigmatizing; local/ethical	37	35
Open environment	Approachable staff; positive interactions	27	26
Information/knowledge	Learning about mental health/services	22	21
Mental health services	Learning about services/organization	18	18

How does the social enterprise improve access to mental health services for its service users?

Before discussing how the social enterprise improves access to mental health services, service users and counsellors were asked to identify some of the largest barriers to service that individuals seeking help commonly encounter. Overwhelmingly, the high costs associated with counselling services were cited as a primary barrier to seeking support. This included the increased cost of living due to requiring support for mental health, unaffordable rates for talk therapy, living in a precarious financial situation (which is perpetuated by unaddressed mental health needs), and receiving financial support from family and/or friends. One service user captured how issues associated with mental health can have an impact on both financial stability and service access:

> It's a weird position to be in where part of your illness is not having enough money to live and being told that you should pay 150 dollars a week to be okay. In my case, it's cheaper to sedate myself with pot. (Service user #9)

Counsellor and service availability was also a primary issue affecting access to mental health services. This included finding services with the appropriate cultural and language practices, finding services beyond traditional working hours, how well service users felt the therapy service responded to their needs, how the service created a safe space for service users, how many sessions were offered, and how well the service framework and philosophy upheld by the counsellors and organization matched those of the service users.

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One factor relating to access that was identified by service users and not counsellors was a general lack of knowledge regarding how to begin the process of engaging with mental health services. Service users explained that they were unsure of how to find a therapist and did not know about different types of therapy or what might be suitable for them. Analysis also revealed a discrepancy between the frequency with which counsellors and service users cited wait times as a barrier to service access. Specifically, counsellors mentioned this issue a total of 11 times (or 24% of the data for this question), while for service users it only appeared in the data at a rate of four percent (n = 4). This problem was mostly attributed to the long wait-lists commonly found in more affordable mental health counselling services.

The social enterprise was found to address many of these barriers in a variety of ways. Service users and counsellors most commonly identified how the social enterprise addressed high service costs by offering therapy at an affordable rate, commenting on how the sliding-scale system lessened financial stress while providing a limited, yet adequate, amount of sessions. Counsellors likened the cost structure offered at the social enterprise to opening service access for service users with economic barriers (such as having little or no insurance coverage), which in turn reduced caseloads for other service providers as users were provided with quick referrals.

Service users also identified an increase in general access to services when participating in the social enterprise programs. Aspects of the program that supported this theme included an abundance of service options (such as counsellors, therapeutic interventions, and support offered for a range of challenges), the centralized location of the social enterprise, and low program eligibility requirements. A general increase in access to services was also perceived by community members, who discussed how quick and affordable counselling, combined with a central location and intensive services, supported the accessibility of the social enterprise. One community member commented on this experience:

> It destigmatizes therapy by making anyone feel invited and welcome to come into the space, browse beautiful and local goods, and think about how approachable therapy can be. (Community member #78)

Counsellors identified similar program characteristics while explaining how service efficiency (i.e., the period between the first engagement with the social enterprise to meeting with a counsellor) and various mental health supports increased access. Of primary concern for counsellors, however, were the long wait-lists associated with the social enterprise services. Some external healthcare providers explained that wait-list availability had gradually decreased over time as the social enterprise became more popular and managed a larger portion of referrals. This resulted in an abundance of closed wait-lists and fewer options for service users. Many counsellors commented that short wait-lists no longer existed at the social enterprise and that the program no longer had an impact on reducing wait times. One counsellor discussed this problem:

> When [the social enterprise] first started, it greatly impacted wait-times and access to service. Unfortunately, as their profile has grown in the last year, it has become difficult to refer as … counsellors seem to mostly maintain closed wait-lists. (Counsellor #19)

Another aspect included how the social enterprise provided valuable links to similar services while offering excellent mental health resources, including support with navigating external services, being provided with referrals, and using the social enterprise as a hub for information and resources. Community members felt as though this aspect of the social enterprise was even more effective in increasing service access and identified that the social enterprise provides resources such as zines, books, cards, and self-help items that are readily available to the public. Similarly, community members identified the curated mental health products available in the storefront to be impactful and enjoyed the variety of items to browse, including unique local and ethical goods. These products were perceived to be personalized.

The quality of services itself was an important supportive factor in improving access, as found in the data for service users and counsellors. Service users discussed that the quality of services was achieved in part by positive interactions with staff and a personal values alignment between themselves and the counsellor and/or organization. Counsellors

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found the personalization of programs was an important factor contributing to service quality, indicating that service user choice in counsellor added to their autonomy, as did the flexibility in services, which offered many specialized and targeted approaches that could meet service user needs. However, counsellors also indicated incompatible programming at the same rate, stating that many counsellors were no longer available and suggesting that the social enterprise may not be well known to other services.

What service-based factors associated with the social enterprise lead to a reduction in mental health stigma?
Service users did not hesitate to explain how widely held social attitudes related to mental health prevented service access. For example, service users explained how fear and apprehension about mental health services contributed to a hesitation to seek help, including a fear of judgement by others for seeking mental health support, challenges with admitting that help was required, and feeling as though their problems were not suitable for counselling. Counsellors more commonly related this issue to a broadly held *stigma* associated with mental health services that caused service users to feel as though they could not move forward in seeking help.

All respondent groups referenced the comfortable service environment provided by the social enterprise as increasing accessibility. For example, counsellors highlighted how the friendly and nonjudgemental environment provided a safe and supportive place to conduct mental health services. This theme was also found in the community data, appearing in responses to two separate questions. When asked about how the social enterprise impacted the local neighbourhood, community members mentioned how the creation of an inclusive and welcoming space helped to normalize mental health services by creating a community space with a pleasing aesthetic. Supporting these findings, once counsellor commented:

> This enhances its appeal as a place to get help because if feels less intimidating and more appropriate for a lot of people than a medical clinic or hospital setting. This has made it much easier for me to support people who would otherwise not have access to support. (Counsellor #43)

Service users alone described how the social impact of the programs contributed to service access by changing the way they perceived the mental health system. For example, service users described how the programs led to improved hopefulness in their ability to achieve mental wellness, leading to further engagement in services. As well, the adoption of healthy coping strategies and self-awareness skills supported a stronger belief in therapeutic interventions. Service users also cited the impact of positive therapeutic relationships in supporting continuous involvement in mental health services.

How does the social enterprise's storefront reduce stigma associated with mental health services?
Researchers asked community members how the social enterprise contributed to their awareness of and engagement with mental health services. Respondents stated that the storefront provided valuable information and knowledge, including mental health-based resources, that increased public engagement. These resources supported raising awareness about mental health services by generating dialogue about mental health-related issues and challenging common and misinformed ideas relating to mental health. Many community members commented on how the resources supported positive and realistic depictions of mental health.

Researchers were also interested in understanding why community members chose to shop at the storefront and what aspects might have contributed to community members' engagement with the social enterprise. A large amount of data was attributed to community members' desire to support the broader community by engaging with the social enterprise. Specifically, respondents explained that supporting local business and low-cost mental health services aligned with their personal values. Relatedly, community members identified that the unique resources and products offered at the social enterprise provided a selection of positive mental health merchandise that could be purchased while shopping at the storefront. Thus, shopping at the social enterprise reflected more altruistic motivations that provided an opportunity for

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community members to easily participate in a local venture with a social mission. This theme was captured in the response from one community member:

> I wanted to support a business with a strong dedication to mental health awareness and services. I feel that [the social enterprise] is really breaking the boundaries of what a business should be. (Community member #107)

Community members also appreciated how the storefront offered a friendly and open environment. Importantly, community members seemed to enjoy interpersonal interactions with knowledgeable and approachable staff in the storefront, as well as with other members of the public.

Demographic statistics of the study sample are shown in Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the MAKS scale items, as well as the latent factor of mental health stigma, are shown in Table 6. Mean scores for items are largely oriented toward the *Agree strongly* and *Agree slightly* response categories, and the only item with a mean score over two was MAKS_2 ("If a friend had a mental health problem, I know what advice to give them to get professional help"). The mean score for the latent factor of mental health stigma was 1.59 (*SD* = 0.75). There were no significant relationships found between demographic variables and mental health stigma in the regression analysis. Therefore, hypotheses one, two, and three were not supported.

Table 5. Demographic statistics of the study sample

Variable		Number (%)	Mean	Standard deviation (*SD*)
Received services from the social enterprise in the past				
	Yes	55 (59.1)		
	No	38 (40.9)		
	Missing	2		
Highest education achieved				
	High school	4 (4.3)		
	College/undergraduate	56 (60.9)		
	Graduate	32 (34.8)		
	Missing	3		
Experienced mental health issue in past				
	Yes	87 (93.5)		
	No	6 (6.5)		
	Missing	2		
Family/friend experienced mental health issue in past				
	Yes	90 (96.8)		
	No	3 (3.2)		
	Missing	2		
Gender				
	Female	72 (80.0)		
	Male	13 (14.4)		
	Non-binary	5 (5.6)		
	Missing	5		
Age			30.85	9.30
Number of times visiting the social enterprise			6.7	6.4

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Table 6. Descriptive statistics of MAKS variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	Response range
MAKS_1	1.34	0.65	1–5
MAKS_2	2.07	1.11	1–5
MAKS_3	1.73	0.81	1–5
MAKS_4	1.21	0.43	1–5
Mental health stigma	1.59	0.75	

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While research has endeavoured to understand and measure mental health accessibility (Elliott & Hunsley, 2015), it also continues to grapple with the complexity of the concept itself (Grant, Simmons, & Davey, 2018; Knight & Winterbotham, 2019). One way researchers and practitioners alike can begin to disentangle this concept is by applying it directly to a service setting (Ganann et al., 2019). In the current study, researchers chose to examine how a novel social enterprise's approach to mental health service provision affects service access for recipients while challenging stigma. While previous studies have identified these outcomes as important aspects in the provision of health services under a social enterprise model, many remain purely conceptual and generally lack analytical approaches that adopt a rigourous mixed-methods analysis (Suchowerska et al., 2020). Further, research has neglected to focus on how social enterprises may accomplish related outcomes, including processes, characteristics, and factors adopted by social enterprise programs that contribute to positive change in the lives of service users and society generally. Lastly, community members are often left out of the research process, neglecting an important stakeholder group within the social enterprise model. These gaps are addressed in the current study, which adopted a case study mixed-methods approach in order to examine the aspects of organizational functioning that lead to social impact by comparing data from counsellors, service users, and community member groups.

Qualitative findings provided a description of barriers to service access while identifying the characteristics of the social enterprise that contribute to outcomes. Figure 1 represents these findings by sample group, revealing themes that were shared between groups as well as those that were identified by one specific sample. The "barriers" column shows how all groups in this study cited the high costs associated with mental health services as a primary barrier; service users explained it as the increased cost of living due to requiring support for mental health, unaffordable rates for talk therapy, living in a precarious financial situation (which is perpetuated by unaddressed mental health needs), and receiving financial support from family and/or friends. Similar barriers to access are cited in related research (Anderson, Howarth, Vainre, Jones, & Humphrey, 2017; Mojtabai, Chen, Kaufmann, & Crum, 2014); however, the social enterprise offered a novel solution to this problem by offering low-cost, short-term counselling services to economically disadvantaged service users. This was supported in qualitative findings, as the sliding-scale counselling rate was cited as the most common way in which the social enterprise addressed barriers to mental health service accessibility. Accessibility was also explained as including far more than service affordability. For example, service users and counsellors discussed issues such as cultural appropriateness, service intervention options, language, geographic location, and service environment to also fit within the definition of accessibility. These are important considerations to add to the expanding conceptualization of mental health service accessibility in research and practice.

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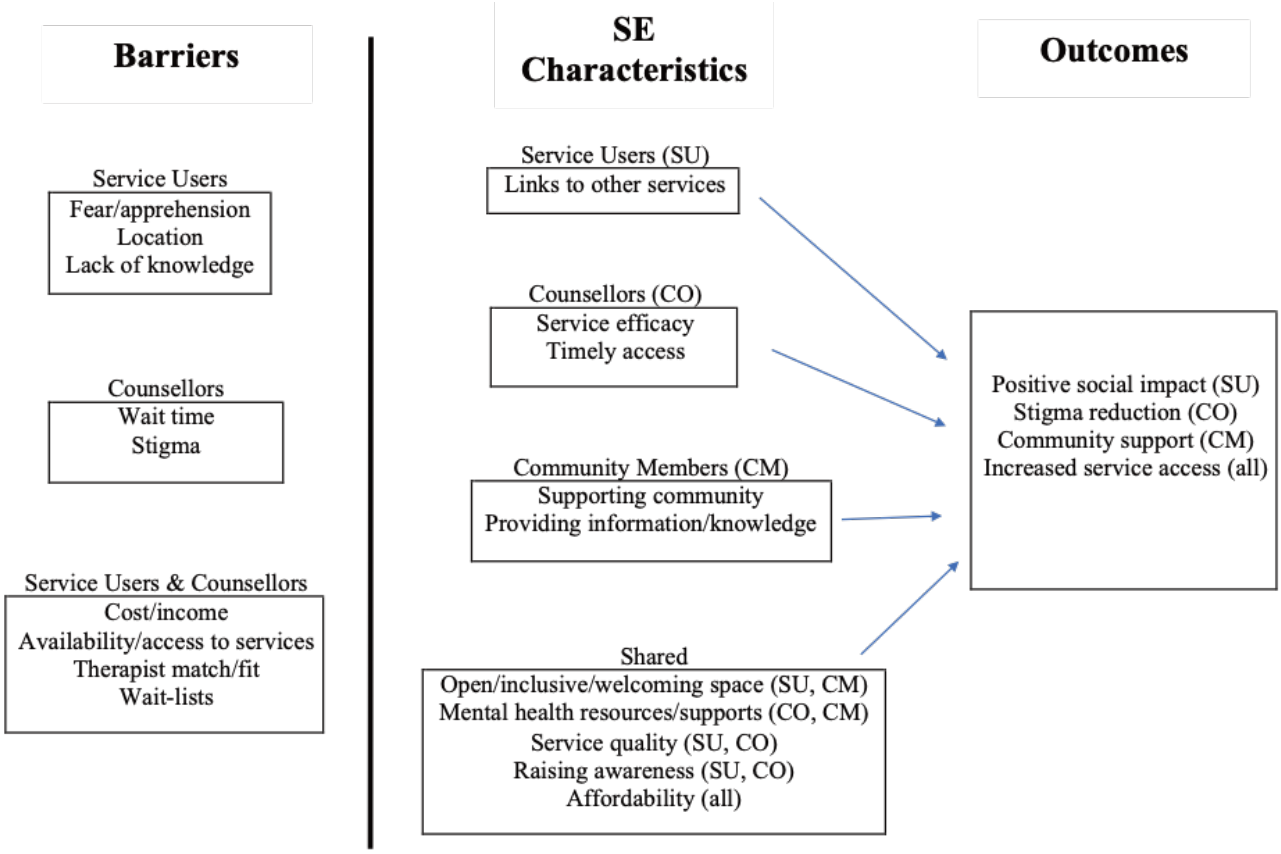
Figure 1. Diagram representing qualitative findings by sample group



Respondents also broadly defined a related concept: mental health stigma. Service users explained that stigma can contribute to fear and apprehension when considering seeking support. They described feeling judged and/or feeling as though their mental health challenges were not "bad enough" to warrant service intervention. These findings represent examples of commonly held misconceptions of mental health services, in that respondents may not have understood the wide variety of service options available to address different needs. Further, respondents may not have acknowledged certain symptomology as being problematic or requiring support. This finding aligns with research identifying discrepancies between self-rated symptoms and more objective accounts of mental health issues, such as depression (Cuijpers, Li, Hofmann, & Andersson, 2010; Pepin et al., 2009) and anxiety (Hoerger, Quirk, Chapman, & Duberstein, 2012). Regardless, even when the need for mental health support was acknowledged, respondents still felt oppressed by the broadly held negative stigma associated with mental health services.

A novel approach to mixed-methods case study methodology allowed for comparison between respondent groups, and some discrepancies are worth noting. First, service users identified a lack of knowledge regarding mental health services (including suitability and match with therapists, and a poor understanding of different interventions) as a barrier, while counsellors did not. This barrier prevented service users from taking early steps to address mental health concerns, which often exacerbated symptomology. However, counsellors in this study failed to acknowledge how a lack in service user knowledge may reduce mental health service accessibility. This finding alludes to a general need for mental health system navigation support (Godoy, Hodgkin, Robertson, Sham, Druskin, Wambach, Beers, & Long, 2019; Happell, Wilson, Platania-Phung, & Stanton, 2016), which is often neglected in primary care settings (Reed, Broussard, Moore, Smith, & Compton, 2014; Robards et al., 2019). In response to this problem, the social enterprise may choose to address this

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barrier by engaging in more public-facing educational activities that aim to inform individuals about service options. Related activities may encourage people with unaddressed mental health issues to connect with appropriate services. Beyond a general lack of knowledge, this study also found that counsellors cited wait times as a barrier far more than service users did. Interestingly, counsellors were apt to identify this barrier as problematic, explaining that it can cause unaddressed mental health concerns to worsen, while service users did not acknowledge wait times as a primary concern. It may be that service users tolerate longer wait times if the service is a good match, as was the case with the social enterprise. Furthermore, long wait times may be so common that service users normalize them as an expected aspect of mental health services. In other words, long wait times may be common enough that service users have begun to accept them as a "normal" part of accessing services. Therefore, service users would not cite wait times as a barrier because they no longer perceive them as unusual. Researchers did not find any studies seeking to examine this possible link, and any related hypotheses require further empirical analysis before being substantiated.

A final discrepancy was found in data pertaining to the overall social impact of the interventions provided at the social enterprise. Specifically, service users tended to focus on the broader social effects of services, including providing a sense of hopefulness, the development of healthy relationships, and the impact on overall health, while counsellors concentrated on meeting service needs and the impact of the program on service accessibility. Many of the aforementioned outcomes have been identified in previous research as important aspects of the social impact in health-focus social enterprises (Calò et al., 2018, 2019; Macaulay et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2014, 2017). However, the way different stakeholder groups perceive these outcomes has not been adequately examined. The discrepancy witnessed between service users and counsellors in this study offers an important insight. It may follow that service users are more apt to discuss social impact as they reflect on positive changes they associate with their participation in a specific service. However, recognizing these outcomes within the social enterprise is equally important, especially as the organization seeks to identify and measure the ways in which it promotes well-being and addresses social inequities. An outcomes-focused approach is also important as the social enterprise contemplates the scaling of services, which was identified as a primary concern for all respondent groups. Examples of scaling may include providing more counselling sessions, recruiting more practitioners, opening additional locations, and providing more group and/or aftercare therapy services. Findings from this study can be used to identify the social enterprise's most salient outcomes, which can then be leveraged when seeking additional resources for scaling.

Another characteristic of the social enterprise that can be leveraged for scaling pertains to the pro-social aspects largely attached to the organization's brand and public image. Qualitative findings highlight how the image of the social enterprise had a significant effect on a consumer's choice to shop at the storefront. Many community members strongly endorsed supporting local and "ethical" businesses, which the social enterprise was likened to. By shopping at the social enterprise storefront, community members felt as though they were contributing to a social good and aligned their own values with the organization's social mission. Similarly, the social enterprise tapped into altruistic aspects of the community by offering a unique consumer experience. This model has shown early success in supporting the sustainability of the programs offered at the social enterprise and may be replicated in other neighbourhoods or cities. Similar external sources of support are not readily identified in research on social enterprise, possibly because studies often neglect to include community stakeholders as respondents. However, leveraging social support and a deeply imbued sense of social justice altruism within the community may have transformative potential.

Contrary to the hypotheses, no significant relationships were found between demographic characteristics and mental health stigma. There are two possible explanations for these findings. First, it may be that the social enterprise primarily attracts individuals with low mental health stigma. Conceivably, individuals who openly support mental health services and believe in seeking mental health help are more apt to behave on those beliefs by shopping at the social enterprise storefront. Ergo, mean scores on the MAKS scale are relatively low for all items and the latent factor measuring mental

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health stigma, indicating the absence of stigma in the sample. However, variability on these items is also quite low, which may have limited the sensitivity of the scale in identifying significant relationships. It follows that the second explanation for these results is due to limitations in data collection. Demographic statistics reveal how the sample was saturated by previous service users, as well as individuals with experiences of mental health issues (either personally, through a close family member or friend, or both). Research has shown that individuals with first-hand experience of mental health are less likely to hold stigmatizing beliefs about services (Chung, Tse, Lee, & Chan, 2019; Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010). Based on related findings, it would be logical to hypothesize that an analysis with a more diverse sample may have resulted in different findings. Researchers in this study hold that both explanations are equally culpable in accounting for the findings in the multivariate analysis and that further research is needed to ascertain a suitable result.

Other limitations of this study include the methodology itself—that is, case study design. Due to the limited scope of case studies, findings can lack generalizability, depending on the sample and structure of the study. However, according to Yin (2014), generalizability is not the primary purpose of case study research. Conversely, robust mixed-methods approaches (such as the one utilized in this study) can lend deep insight into one specific example of a phenomenon, providing details on its complexity in a manner not usually witnessed in large-sample research. Some limitations in data collection must also be noted. Despite the development of a valid and reliable measure of mental health service stigma, non-significant relationships occurred in the multivariate analysis, which may be attributed to the sample demographics, as discussed above. Missing from this analysis are other empirically validated measures (such as social capital or self-efficacy), which could have been included in a more complex model that better captures mental health service accessibility and the experiences of the respondents. However, limitations are to be expected when implementing a novel methodology in an equally unique service environment. The social enterprise examined in this research is not intended to be representative of all nonprofit organizations; researchers have provided an account of a novel approach to mental health services that can be considered when planning to implement similar models. Researchers welcome replication and improvement on the current study and hope to see future case study research adopting analogous frameworks. Results from this study can be assessed and applied to similar service contexts to support the implementation of socially entrepreneurial programs while reducing barriers to mental health service access.

This study provides a useful framework to be applied when assessing the social impact of social enterprise efforts, highlighting the need to assess social impact from the perspectives of a broad range of key stakeholders tied to the social purpose mission of the organization. It also highlights the need to recognize that social impact assessment is complex—the perspectives of organizations and key stakeholder groups may not be fully aligned—and it may not be easy to assess the broader social or societal impact of the enterprise effort. While in this case the mission of the organization aimed to support service accessibility, it also aimed to support transformative social change related to the general population's perspectives on mental health and well-being. It is clear that the social enterprise storefront is catering to a consumer market that is already aligned with this broader social mission. As a result, social enterprises engaging in efforts that aim to create broader systemic change also need to consider finding ways to access their non-consumer markets, possibly through marketing efforts, thereby increasing their social impact.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS / L'AUTEURS

Aaron Turpin is a PhD Candidate at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. Email: aaron.turpin@mail.utoronto.ca

Micheal Shier is Associate Professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. Email: m.shier@utoronto.ca

Kate Scowen is Executive Director at Hard Feelings Mental Health. Email: kate@hardfeelings.org

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Revue officielle de
l'Association de recherche sur les organismes sans but lucratif et l'économie sociale (ARES)

ISSN: 1920-9355