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CJNSER / ReCROES
Vol. 16, No. 2, 2025

Table of Contents / Table des matières

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

CJNSER / ReCROES
Vol. 16, No. 2, 2025
pp. 3 – 6

EDITORIAL / ÉDITORIAL

Laurie Mook, Arizona State University
Marco Alberio, Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna

Welcome to volume *16*, issue 2 of the *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*. In this issue, we present four research articles, one research note, three contributions to our "Perspectives from the Field" section, and one book review.

The first article, "A Sustainability Framework for Social Entrepreneurship Through an Indigenous Peoples' Cooperative: The Case of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon Tribe," by **Loreta Sol Dinlayan, Helen Garcia,** and **Annie Leah Roxann L. Emata**, proposes a five-pillar sustainability framework for Indigenous Peoples' cooperatives. Developed through an ethnographic study with stakeholders of the Bukidnon Tagoloanon Mulahay Ha Kabukalagan Agricultural Cooperative (BUKTAMACO) in the Philippines, the framework builds on four conventional pillars of sustainability—human, economic, social, and environmental—while adding a fifth pillar grounded in customary practices. These include Indigenous leadership, observance of community values, communal property and profit sharing, and a strong concern for community well-being.

The second article, "Policy on the Frontlines: Community Nonprofit Organizations Work-

Bienvenue au volume *16*, numéro 2 de la *Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale*. Ce numéro comprend quatre articles de recherche, une note de recherche, trois contributions à la section « Perspectives sur le terrain » ainsi qu'une critique de livre.

Le premier article, intitulé « Un cadre de durabilité pour l'entrepreneuriat social à travers une coopérative autochtone : le cas de la tribu Bukidnon-Tagoloanon » et signé par **Loreta Sol Dinlayan, Helen Garcia** et **Annie Leah Roxann L. Emata**, propose un cadre de durabilité à cinq piliers pour les coopératives de peuples autochtones. Élaboré à partir d'une étude ethnographique auprès des parties prenantes de la coopérative agricole Bukidnon Tagoloanon Mulahay Ha Kabukalagan (BUKTAMACO) aux Philippines, ce cadre s'appuie sur les quatre piliers traditionnels de la durabilité—humain, économique, social et environnemental—tout en y ajoutant un cinquième ancré dans les pratiques coutumières. Il inclut notamment le leadership autochtone, le respect des valeurs communautaires, la propriété collective, le partage des profits et une attention particulière au bien-être de la communauté.

Le deuxième article, « Les politiques en première ligne : le rôle des organisations communautaires à

ing with Older Adults During COVID-19 in Montréal," by **Meghan Joy, Laurie Fournier, Kate Marr-Laing,** and **Shannon Hebblethwaite**, explores the vital role of community nonprofit organizations (CNPOs) in supporting older adults to age in place. Through policy analysis, surveys, and interviews with CNPO staff, local policy actors, and older adults, the authors highlight the substantial challenges faced by CNPOs and argue for stronger inclusion and support of these organizations in policies on aging.

In the third article, "Open Spaces and Collaboration in the Social Economy in Québec: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Three Organizations," **Tawfiq Alla, Stéphane F. Roume,** and **Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay** examine the impacts of open-plan office spaces and remote work on social economy organizations. They find that workers in this sector tend to value collaborative open spaces more than their counterparts do in the public and private sectors.

The final research article, "Social Validation as a Key Process to Participatory and Engaged Research: Learning from a Brazilian Academic Program," by **Teresa Harari, Marlei Pozzebon, Ana Clara Souza, André Luiz Freitas Dias,** and **Armindo dos Santos de Sousa Teodósio**, introduces the concept of *social validation* as a mechanism for recognizing collaborative, participatory research between academia and communities. Grounded in literature and tested through a transdisciplinary program of teaching, applied research, and community service, this article provides a practical guide for researchers and practitioners seeking to implement social validation in their work.

but non lucratif auprès des aînés pendant la COVID-19 à Montréal », de **Meghan Joy, Laurie Fournier, Kate Marr-Laing** et **Shannon Hebblethwaite**, explore le rôle essentiel joué par les organisations à but non lucratif issues du secteur communautaire dans l'accompagnement des aînés souhaitant vieillir chez eux. À partir d'une analyse de politiques, de questionnaires et d'entretiens menés auprès de membres du personnel des organisations communautaires, d'acteurs locaux et d'aînés, les auteures mettent en lumière les défis importants auxquels ces organisations sont confrontées et plaident pour une meilleure reconnaissance et un soutien accru des politiques publiques sur le vieillissement.

Dans le troisième article, « Espaces ouverts et collaboration dans l'économie sociale au Québec : une analyse interdisciplinaire de trois organisations », **Tawfiq Alla, Stéphane F. Roume** et **Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay** examinent les effets du télétravail et des espaces ouverts de travail sur les organisations de l'économie sociale. Ils constatent que les travailleuses et travailleurs de ce secteur semblent apprécier davantage les espaces collaboratifs que le font celles et ceux des secteurs public et privé.

Le quatrième et dernier article de recherche, intitulé « La validation sociale comme processus clé dans la recherche participative et engagée : leçons tirées d'un programme universitaire brésilien », de **Teresa Harari, Marlei Pozzebon, Ana Clara Souza, André Luiz Freitas Dias** et **Armindo dos Santos de Sousa Teodósio**, introduit le concept de *validation sociale* comme outil de reconnaissance de la recherche collaborative entre l'université et la communauté. Ce concept, issu de la littérature scientifique, est évalué dans le cadre d'un programme transdisciplinaire d'enseignement, de recherche appliquée et de service communautaire. L'article propose un guide pratique pour la mise en œuvre de la validation sociale à l'intention des chercheurs et chercheuses et des praticiens et praticiennes.

Next we have a research note, "*Proyecto Utopía*: Colombian Initiative for Peace and the Defense of Rurality in Times of Post-Agreement." In this note, **Marco Alberio, Adriana Otálora-Buitrago, Jaime Alberto Rendón Acevedo,** and **Rubén Vergara** examine a rural development and peacebuilding initiative created by Universidad de La Salle to empower rural youth. The project highlights the role of universities as key actors in the social economy, fostering trust, civic participation, and long-term resilience in rural post-conflict communities.

In the "Perspectives from the Field" section, we feature three contributions:

- **Aleksander Bern** and **Deniz Akin**, in "Building Social Enterprises from the Ground Up," discuss the emergence of social enterprises in Norway, where a legal framework for such organizations has yet to be established;
- **Atle Hauge, Giuseppe Calignano,** and **Elisabeth Winsents**, in "Spaces of Belonging: Community Engagement and Social Inclusion in Rural Communities," argue for the importance of carefully designed public spaces—working in synergy with nonprofit engagement—in fostering resilience and well-being in smaller communities;
- **Svein Erik Nordhagen**, in "Exploring the Relationship Between Volunteerism, Inclusivity, and Democracy in Norwegian Sports," emphasizes the key role of voluntary organizations in Norwegian sports and their contribution to democratic learning and social inclusion within a social democratic context.

Finally, **Aaron Turpin** reviews *Non-Profit Governance: Twelve Frameworks for Organisations and Research* (2025), edited by Guillaume Plaisance and Anne Goujon Belghit,

Ensuite, nous présentons une note de recherche intitulée « *Proyecto Utopía* : initiative colombienne pour la paix et la défense de la ruralité en période de post-accord ». **Marco Alberio, Adriana Otálora-Buitrago, Jaime Alberto Rendón Acevedo** et **Rubén Vergara** y examinent une initiative de développement rural et de consolidation de la paix créée par l'Universidad de La Salle afin d'autonomiser les jeunes ruraux. Le projet met en lumière le rôle des universités en tant qu'acteurs clés de l'économie sociale, favorisant la confiance, la participation civique et la résilience à long terme dans les communautés rurales post-conflit.

Dans la section « Perspectives sur le terrain », nous présentons trois contributions :

- **Aleksander Bern** et **Deniz Akin**, dans « Créer des entreprises sociales à partir de zéro », analysent le développement des entreprises sociales en Norvège, dans un contexte où aucun cadre juridique spécifique n'est encore en place pour celles-ci;
- **Atle Hauge, Giuseppe Calignano** et **Elisabeth Winsents**, dans « Espaces d'appartenance : engagement communautaire et inclusion sociale dans les communautés rurales », plaident pour une attention accrue à la manière dont des espaces publics bien conçus, en synergie avec l'implication des *OBNL*, peuvent renforcer la résilience et le bien-être des résidents de communautés plus petites;
- **Svein Erik Nordhagen**, dans « Explorer la relation entre le bénévolat, l'inclusivité et la démocratie dans le sport norvégien », met en évidence la contribution majeure des organisations bénévoles au sport en Norvège, ainsi que leur rôle dans l'apprentissage démocratique au sein d'un modèle social-démocrate.

Enfin, **Aaron Turpin** signe un compte rendu de l'ouvrage *Non-Profit Governance: Twelve Frameworks for Organisations and Research* (2025) dirigé par Guillaume Plaisance et Anne Goujon

offering insights into governance approaches in the nonprofit sector.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and we encourage you to consider submitting your work for future publication.

Belghit, lesquels proposent une approche multidimensionnelle de la gouvernance dans le secteur sans but lucratif.

Nous espérons que vous apprécierez ce numéro et nous vous invitons à soumettre vos articles pour les prochains numéros de la *Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale.*

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

CJNSER / ReCROES
Vol. 16, No. 2, 2025
pp. 7 – 26

A Sustainability Framework for Social Entrepreneurship through an Indigenous Peoples' Cooperative: The Case of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon Tribe

Loreta Sol Dinlayan, Helen Garcia, Annie Leah Roxann L. Emata
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ABSTRACT

Through this study, the authors developed a framework for Indigenous Peoples' cooperatives using the experiences of the Bukidnon Tagoloanon Mulahay Ha Kabukalagan Agricultural Cooperative (BUKTAMACO). The Tagoloanon tribe is one of the seven indigenous tribes in Bukidnon, Philippines. The researchers used a case study and ethnographic designs to which the internal and external stakeholders of BUKTAMACO contributed. The results revealed that, to manage its affairs, the tribe followed customary practices like Indigenous leadership, the observance of community values, the concepts of communal property and profit sharing, and concern for the community. Using their experiences, the authors developed a five-pillar sustainability framework that highlighted customary practices as the foundation of this framework. In addition, the role of the Council of Elders was evident in ensuring strength in leadership through consensus building.

RÉSUMÉ

Au moyen de cette étude, les auteures ont développé un cadre pour les coopératives des peuples autochtones en se fondant sur les expériences de la coopérative agricole Bukidnon Tagoloanon Mulahay Ha Kabukalagan (BUKTAMACO). La tribu Tagoloanon est l'une des sept tribus autochtones de Bukidnon, aux Philippines. Les chercheuses ont utilisé une étude de cas et des modèles ethnographiques auxquels ont contribué les parties prenantes internes et externes de la BUKTAMACO. Les résultats montrent que, pour gérer ses affaires, la tribu suit une approche traditionnelle fondée sur le leadership autochtone, le respect des valeurs communautaires, les concepts de propriété communale et de partage des bénéfices, et le souci de la communauté. À partir de leurs expériences, les auteures ont élaboré un cadre de durabilité à cinq piliers qui met en évidence les pratiques traditionnelles en tant que fondements de ce cadre. D'autre part, le rôle du Conseil des anciens était évident pour assurer l'efficacité du leadership par la formation de consensus.

Keywords / Mots clés : social entrepreneurship, Indigenous Peoples' cooperative, framework, customary practices / entreprenariat social, coopérative des peuples autochtones, cadre, pratiques traditionnelles

Dinlayan, L.S., Garcia, H., & Emata, A.L.R.L. A Sustainability Framework for Social Entrepreneurship through an Indigenous Peoples' Cooperative: The Case of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon Tribe ©2025 *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research* *16*(2),7–26. doi:10.29173/cjnser686

INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship is viewed as an innovation to address social development (Hosseini & Ziaaldini, 2019; Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009). The phenomenon can be described as a group solution to poverty that involves creating networks among government and non-government agencies (Siwale & Ritchie, 2011), identifying and seizing opportunities (Shane, 2003), innovating and taking risks (Drucker, 1985), and conducting business for profit while creating social values (Hosseini & Ziaaldini, 2019). Social entrepreneurship is defined as a process of respecting traditional cultural elements while throwing off the old economic ways of conducting business, disrupting the economic status quo, and, through creative processes, developing new combinations of resources that allow for social, economic, and environmental innovation, change, and evolution. There is a link among social entrepreneurship, governance structures, economic undertaking, and community development in some Indigenous communities (Curry, Donker, & Michel, 2016). Social entrepreneurship is considered a driver in achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030 (Diaz-Sarachaga & Ariza-Montes, 2022).

In the Philippines, approximately 9.4 million Indigenous Peoples (8.7% of the population) live in geographically advantaged areas. The majority of Indigenous Peoples rely on the land to form their identity, culture, and subsistence. Increasing access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities is a key to improving the welfare of Indigenous Peoples (World Bank, 2024). Indigenous Peoples face historic struggles in terms of policymaking, self-determination, and governance in managing natural resources; to succeed in natural resource management, Indigenous Peoples should have an interest in the wellbeing of their resources (Capistrano, 2010). In one study, Capistrano and Charles (2012) demonstrated the importance of legally recognized rights as a key tool both in resource management and securing equitable livelihoods among Indigenous Peoples. However, government policies did not reflect the livelihood needs of Indigenous Peoples. Further, the authors illustrate how Indigenous communities have protected their rights in a developed country—Canada—through an organizational structure established by a community, in comparison with Indigenous communities in a developing country—the Philippines.

The Philippine government acknowledged the struggles of Indigenous Peoples and gave them the full right to their ancestral domains, which was embedded in the *Republic Act No. 8371*. The *Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA)* recognizes ownership of the traditional territories embodying land, bodies of water, and natural resources. The law provides a certificate of ancestral domain or land title to the concerned Indigenous clan or community. Of note, the Act specifically set out the rights of Indigenous cultural communities (ICCs)/Indigenous Peoples ensuring economic, social, and cultural wellbeing. The state further recognizes the applicability of customary laws governing the property rights or relations in the determination of the ownership and extent of the ancestral domain (Indigenous Peoples Rights' Act, 1997). To support the economic and social development of Indigenous Peoples, the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) created a joint memorandum circular on the guidelines governing promotion, organization, development, and regulation of the cooperatives to be established by Indigenous cultural communities. The memorandum recognizes the self-governance of Indigenous Peoples, and acknowledges their unique cultures, traditions, customary laws, and practices. It also

establishes that a cooperative shall be formed within the ancestral domain with 100 percent Indigenous cooperators (Cooperative Development Authority & National Commission on IPs, 2018).

Bukidnon is one of the provinces in the Philippines with the highest population of Indigenous Peoples and is home to seven tribes. The poverty rate in the province was 59.3 percent in 2015 and 37.9 percent in 2018; although the rate decreased significantly, it is still considered one of the highest in the country (Sablad, 2020). The implementation of the IPRA of 1997 allowed Indigenous communities to actively participate economically through the formation of associations or cooperatives. However, despite owning a vast territory in Bukidnon, the Indigenous Peoples remained poor due to unequal opportunities to engage in economic activities within their domain and limited/lack of access to capital for commercialization (Estrada & Llesis, n.d.).

Malaybalay is the home of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe, which took shelter on the banks of the Tagoloan River. "Sabangan ha Tagoloan," or the headwaters of Tagoloan River, is one of, if not the most sacred grounds in the province, not just for the Bukidnon-Tagoloanons but also for the other tribes of Bukidnon as well. Through oral tradition, it is said that this place is the bedrock of the civilization of Bukidnon and the source of governance culture and law or the "Batasan." From the time the first settlers of Malaybalay and the greater part of Bukidnon arrived from the Coast of Kalambaguhan (now known as Misamis Oriental), the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon People have continuously returned to the area at least once a year to perform a ritual called "panalawahig" to give thanks to the deity of water. The Indigenous Peoples who inhabited Malaybalay were referred to as "Taga-ulohan," which means those from the head or the headwaters. This is believed to be the reason for the naming of the river as Tagoloan River. The descendants of the original inhabitants of the area are now known as Bukidnon-Tagoloanon/Tagolwanen.

The tribe established the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon Mamulahay Ha Kabukalagan Agricultural Cooperative (BUKTAMACO) with the help of external experts in 2017 after they received the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT). The cooperative aims to develop an ancestral domain through sustainable programs that uplift the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe's economic conditions without disrupting the people's customary ways and traditions, to enable them to continue living as an Indigenous community and pass their culture on to the next generation (Estrada & Llesis, n.d)..

Bukidnon State University (BukSU) has an existing partnership with BUKTAMACO and actively contributes to the preservation of Bukidnon culture through the Bukidnon Studies Center (BSC), a museum of the seven tribes. Through a Memorandum of Understanding between BukSU and the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe, a weekly radio program entitled *Kaglambaga* was aired on DXBU 104.5 FM to promote the community-wide undertakings of the tribe, particularly its entrepreneurial endeavours covering BUKTAMACO. To better understand entrepreneurship as social innovation, Hosseini and Ziaaldini (2019) recommend conducting in-depth interviews with participants to add context to cultural and social issues. At the time of writing this article, Bukidnon has no literature to document the management of an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative. Thus, the purpose of this article is to gain an understanding of traditional ecological knowledge in running a social enterprise and contribute to the body of knowledge on the social enterprise management of Indigenous Peoples, using BUKTAMACO as a case study. Furthermore, the study sought a framework that

would help the sustainability of the cooperative. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the social entrepreneurship practices observed by an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative?
2. How does the Indigenous Peoples community obtain the entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes to establish social entrepreneurship?
3. What challenges did the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon encounter in practicing social entrepreneurship?
4. From the responses of the participants, what framework can be developed to sustain the social entrepreneurship of the tribe?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the theory of social entrepreneurship, which the world believes to be one of the fastest solutions for sustainable development (United Nations, 2020). Social entrepreneurs invest in social capital creating a non-profit organization or social enterprise, typically a cooperative or an association. Social entrepreneurship can help attain the goals of sustainable development (Bansal, Garg, & Sharma, 2019).

Social entrepreneurship has the potential to promote locale economic development and enhance community resilience among low-income communities (Sauermann, 2023). Social entrepreneurship utilizes core business functions in the production of goods and services for the market, and at the same time creates social change with the involvement of the community in the business process. In the Philippines, although the social and cultural environment is conducive to a framework of social entrepreneurship, the current policy environment is not responsive to its growth. The views on social entrepreneurship remain focused on traditional micro, small, and medium enterprises (Ballesteros & Llanto, 2017).

The sustainable framework for social enterprises revolves around business conduct in the community. The social entrepreneur converts the input into outcomes creating both economic and social values. In this study, the social entrepreneurs are the members and officers of BUKTAMACO. The researchers considered inputs such as land and agricultural products, human resources, knowledge and skills, machinery and other equipment, and financial resources used to produce goods and services. The unique entrepreneurial experience of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe guided the researchers in making the framework for sustainability, which can also be applied by other associations or cooperatives established by Indigenous communities.

The study is also anchored in the self-determination theory (SDT), which is empirically derived from research on human motivation and personality in social contexts (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe dwells within an ancestral domain with corresponding rights to manage and develop such a domain. The presence of natural resources within the domain motivates the community to utilize them by organizing and equipping themselves to form a cooperative. For the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe, having direct authority to manage an ancestral domain as enacted by law (IPRA); this autonomy motivates and uplifts the community. The effects of extrinsic rewards and intrinsic

motivation of engaging with entrepreneurial activities make the community self-determined. Moreover, the community has grown to be inherently active and motivated, and oriented to develop naturally.

Bukidnon Tagoloanon Mulahay Ha Kabukalagan Agricultural Cooperative is a CDA-registered cooperative, established on November 20, 2017. It is an agricultural cooperative formed by the Salagia clan of the Bukidnon-Tagolwanon tribe located in Can-ayan, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines. The cooperative was formed with the help of a grant from the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) No. R10-MLY-1115-193. The title recognizes the rights of the Bukidnon-Tagolwanon to possession and ownership of the Katutubong ancestral domain, an area of 909 hectares covering Barangay 1, Sumpong, and Can-ayan Malaybalay City. The land title was awarded through NCIP EN BANC Resolution no. 190.2015 in 2015. The ownership of the vast land became the subject of several meetings of the tribe's Council of Elders, which formed the basis for the cooperative. The tribe wanted to form a cooperative, but they lacked technical expertise. They asked external experts for help and successfully registered the cooperative in 2017. A year later, the cooperative received funding from the Department of Agriculture and was subsequently awarded funding from Cagayan de Oro Chamber of Commerce which implemented the project "inclusive growth through inclusive business" supported by Gerry Roxas Foundation, a local implementing partner of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to develop the land.

The land owned by the members of BUKTAMACO is planted with abaca, cacao, bamboo, and banana. The cooperative received funding from the United States and Australia, among other agencies that were concerned with the livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples. The cooperative is guided by the tribe's value system, which includes "*Pag-bulig-buliga, Pabatonbatona, Pauyag-uyaga and Patawil-tawila*" (help, lift, provide, and support one another).

In partnership with the Bamboo Ecologic Corporation, BUKTAMACO raised and planted 20,000 giant bamboo seedlings. The project gives the tribe a sustainable income from the bamboo poles, maintenance fees, and production of bamboo-based products. Other sources of income of the cooperative include sales of rice, adlai (gluten-free grain), root crops, cacao, abaca, and banana. The coop also gains income from dairy farming and vermicast production. Furthermore, the cooperative established a series of partnerships with different stakeholders to help operate and manage the cooperative. The cooperative is supported by the Provincial Government of Bukidnon, Bukidnon State University, and Landbank of the Philippines, among others.

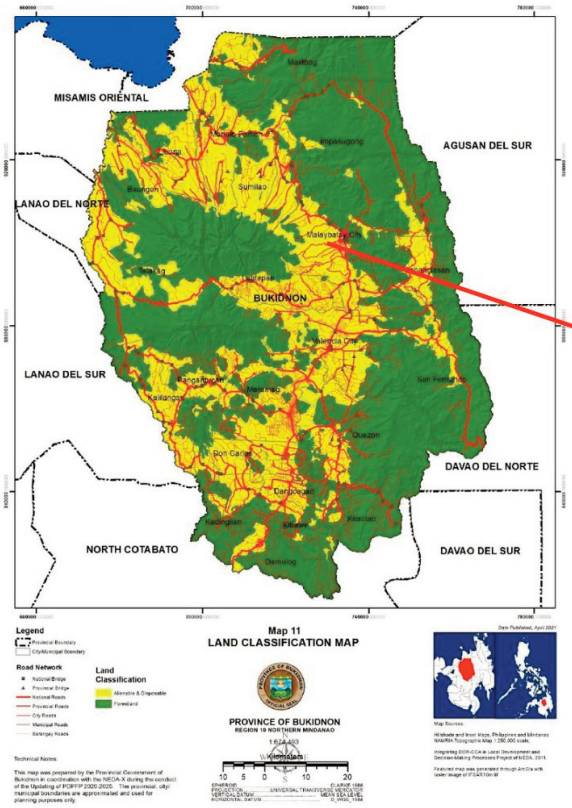
METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative method, specifically case and ethnographic studies, for data gathering and analysis. A case study is a versatile form of qualitative inquiry most suitable for a comprehensive, holistic, and in-depth investigation of a phenomenon like social entrepreneurship. With careful preparation and planning, a case study can generate a framework using the bounded system over time and cultivate trustworthiness in the research findings (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). Recognizing the Indigenous background of the participants, the researchers included an ethnographic perspective to access the unique cultural practices of the tribe through cultural mapping. By mapping or identifying the cultural assets of the tribe such as human skills, natural resources,

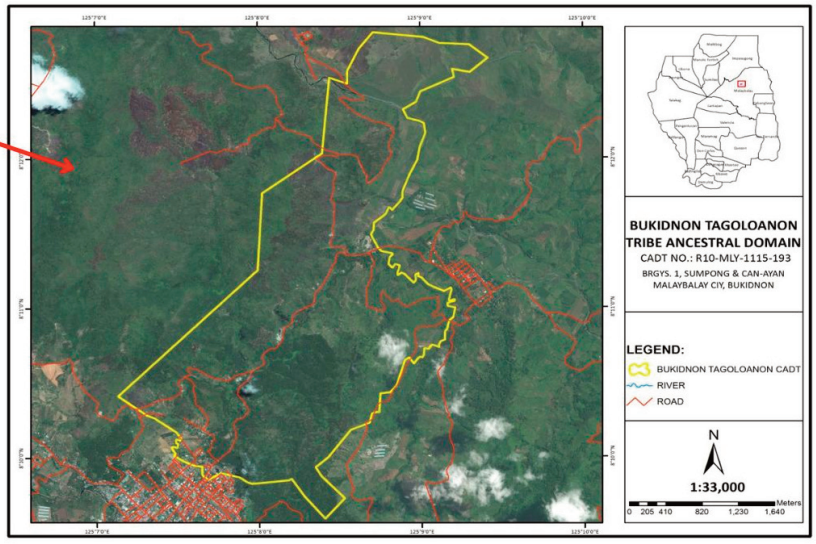
value system, or indigenous knowledge, the researchers are guided to understand the cultural significance of social entrepreneurship. Ethnography allowed for an exploration of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe's cultural and historical contexts, which are integral to understanding its approach to social entrepreneurship.

The study was conducted in Can-ayan Malaybalay City, the home of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe. Figure 1 shows maps of the Province of Bukidnon and Malaybalay City to determine the exact location of the tribe. The cooperative, BUKTAMACO, is CDA registered and run by five members of the Board of Directors and officers. The cooperative's members live in their ancestral domain, participating in the planting, processing, and selling of agricultural produce including abaca, banana, and cacao, among others. The cooperative receives support from government and non-government organizations. The artisans in the community showcase their crafts that bear their indigenous culture, especially during cultural events.

Figure 1: Msp of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon Ancestral Domain



Note: Map A. Official Provincial Map of Bukidnon.
Source: Provincial Framework Plan 2020-2025



Note: Map B. Ancenstral Domain of BUKTAMACO; *Source:* BUKTAMACO official report

The study participants were chosen by the researchers based on their involvement in the endeavours of the cooperative. The researchers grouped the participants as follows:

1. Community or cooperative members
2. Government (local and national agencies) that had greatly contributed to the organization and operation of the cooperative

3. Higher education institutions
4. Non-government organizations (funding institution) and partner communities
5. The governing body of the cooperative (officers and Board of Directors)

Data were gathered primarily through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews. Two focus group discussions were conducted with the Board of Directors and cooperative members, along with four semi-structured interviews involving management, government representatives, academic partners, and business affiliates, to obtain data saturation. The researchers did not conduct interviews with a non-governmental organization representing funding institutions. Instead, details regarding financial support were verified through document analysis and confirmed by cooperative management and government representatives. The document review encompassed the cooperative's financial statements, business plans, and development strategies.

Data saturation was reached when two consecutive focus group discussions and four interviews provided no new themes or insights, allowing the researchers to conclude that the data sufficiently represented the perspectives of participants. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation is achieved when redundancy occurs, and no additional data provide new insights into the research questions.

The researchers used an interview guide for the focus group discussion and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Content and language experts validated the interview guides to ensure the quality of the data. Content experts came from academia and industry, while the language expert was a sociologist who can speak the native language of the tribe. Researchers prolonged engagement with the community and exercised peer debriefing after the focus group discussions and interviews. A journal was kept throughout the research process to document the entire data-gathering period. The results were communicated to the BUKTAMACO for validation before conclusions and recommendations were drawn.

The framework developed was drawn from the practices, challenges, and suggestions for sustainability obtained from the participants, and was also validated by the participants. The analysis of the data followed the five phases introduced by Yin (2009) for qualitative research. These are compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. After the interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews, researchers sorted the data from source documents. The ordered data was broken down into smaller fragments and assigned new labels, which is known as data-coding. The researchers used intercoder reliability in which at least two researchers agreed on how the same content would be coded. Once the codes were obtained, researchers grouped the codes and presented them in tables and lists. The presented information was interpreted and from the summarized information, conclusions were drawn.

This study was conducted in accordance with the Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) principles, reinforcing the community's right to self-determination over the research data. The conduct of the free, prior, and informed consent to the community through a ritual signaled the community's ownership of the research. Participants retained ownership and control of their data, with the opportunity to review and modify their contributions as needed. This methodology pro-

moted transparency throughout the research process and ensured that the community received meaningful benefits, aligning the findings with the community's objectives. The results were shared with BUKTAMACO for validation before drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations.

Ethics statement

The researchers strictly followed the protocol on ethics prescribed by the university. The approved research proposal and consent form, together with a guide questionnaire, were forwarded to the university's ethics committee for review. The researchers secured certification from the ethics committee to conduct data gathering before formal communication was sent to the NCIP, BUKTAMACO officers, and members of the cooperative's Board of Directors for the conduct of the study. Then, the NCIP Provincial Officer of Bukidnon cleared the study with the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe after a series of meetings.

To honour cultural protocols, interviews with the Council of Elders began with a ceremonial ritual (pamuhat) to seek blessings. Researchers held a dialogue with the elders to foster open communication and scheduled interviews collaboratively. The council, comprising eight predominantly female elders, plays a central role in the tribe's governance and cultural preservation. Interviewing the elders in a group setting fostered a collective exchange of ideas central to the tribe's values. This approach allowed participants to build on each other's insights, providing researchers with a deeper understanding of the community decision-making process based on cultural knowledge. The researchers encouraged balanced participation and asked clarifying questions, ensuring a nuanced understanding of the tribe's views on social entrepreneurship and sustainability. Elders' responses were coded to maintain confidentiality, and one of the researchers, proficient in the language and culture, ensured accuracy in capturing their narratives.

The duration of in-person data gathering ranged from 30 minutes to two hours. All data collected in this study were kept confidential. Participant names were coded, and interview transcripts were securely stored in a safe place by the researchers. To help participants feel comfortable during interviews and group discussions, two of the researchers identified themselves as Indigenous Peoples and the participants were encouraged to use their native dialect, Binukid.

The focus groups ranged in size from six to eight participants and were conducted at the BUKTAMACO office. The participants were provided with snacks, customized notebooks, and ballpens. Raw data gathered were stored on the researchers' computers secured with passwords; once this article is published, all the stored data, including the notes, will be deleted to protect the privacy of participants. Data will not be shared, unless requested directly by the Bukidnon-Tagoloanon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social entrepreneurial practices of the tribe are described in the following themes:

Indigenous leadership

To pursue economic opportunity, The Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe ensured the strength of its leadership through the direct participation of the Council of Elders. Based on its Indigenous political structure, the Council of Elders is the governing body of the tribe's ancestral domain and is responsible

for overseeing the undertakings of the community in relation to socio-economic development and cultural-environmental preservation. Each member of the council has a corresponding skill and area of responsibility to cover the needs of the community.

Mendoza (2016) emphasizes the pivotal role of elders and the infusion of cultural perspectives within the cooperative business model. Incorporating traditional leadership structures and cultural perspectives into the cooperative frameworks, and engaging the Council of Elders' knowledge, expertise, and cultural insights, are crucial when navigating the complexities of politics, government, and community development.

The Council of Elders acts as the *Ininay*, a concept that is associated with a mother's responsibility to look after the welfare of the children. In the case of Bukidnon-Tagoloanen, the Council of Elders is accountable for economically augmenting the people by looking for ways to acquire social services. This practice of *Ininay* is more visible when the community faces challenges. When the community realized that their products, like bamboo and abaca, had no specific or a big-enough market, the Council of Elders considered organizing themselves, in which eventually led to the establishment of the cooperative.

Consensus building is one of the characteristics of Indigenous leadership wherein each member is given space to express an idea concerning an occurring issue. This practice is anchored in the importance of collective decision-making, regardless of how long leaders take to reach a consensus. It is normal for the elders to sit down together for a long period and often, exchanging ideas until common interests for the community emerge. This point was confirmed by Participant 1, who stated, "The concept of consensus building is crucial. Our guiding principle is the rule of the majority, but we still adhere to our customary practices. In our project, the Council of Elders, as the governing body of the ancestral domain, will discuss it, and they'll authorize the cooperative." This statement was agreed upon by all participants of the study.

Observance of community values

The Bukidnon-Tagoloanen community is knitted together by the concept of *Bungkatel ha Bulawan*, which is understood as the "golden character" or foundation of all observed values and norms within the community. *Pa-uyag-uyaga* (supporting one another) and *Kagpandaya* (taking care of one another) propelled the idea of forming a cooperative. A community need became a community responsibility, and this obliged the leaders to look for a means to attend to the economic needs of the people. Upon seeing that people started producing coffee, cacao, vegetables, and bamboo, the leaders of the community ensured the consumption of these products by buyers outside the community. This act of support is an expression of the values observed by the community.

Indigenous entrepreneurship recognizes a holistic approach to enterprise, acknowledging the interplay between individual economic motives and broader communal wellbeing. Dana (2015) aligns with Indigenous community values, illustrating that despite mainstream economic assumptions prioritizing profit maximization, Indigenous perspectives emphasize the community's needs and objectives. This was expressed by Participant 1, who mentioned that "cooperative will cater to everyone regardless. It is not so much *sa* individual, as a community *gyud ni*. Service provider *gyud ang*

cooperative. *Dili gyud ni sya* profit-making entity. (This is for the community. The cooperative is a service-provider and not for profit-making)".

Concept of communal property and profit-sharing

With an ancestral domain, the Bukidnon-Tagoloanen tribe shares its land and all its natural resources. This occupation of an ancestral domain signifies that the land is not owned by an individual or a family. As communal property, all forms of benefits extracted from the land are owned by everybody. This communal property is governed by profit-sharing. Profit-sharing is not only an entrepreneurial practice but also preserves unity and connectivity among the people.

The leaders are responsible for reminding the people of the values of *Handuga* (sharing) and *Kalalagan* (generosity) in times of harvest, for instance. This view aligns with Dana's (2015) findings, indicating that certain communities, such as the Maori in New Zealand and the First Nations in Canada, have a unique perspective on land ownership and Indigenous rights. These communities maintain a collective ownership model in which the community owns the rights to the land and its resources, including hunting and fishing, as opposed to individual owners.

The concept of communal property is anchored on the belief that everything is created by one Creator (*Manlilimbag*) and is for everybody. The fruits of the land are for everybody as well as the harvests from the rivers. Profit-sharing is characterized by sharing goods and by practicing generosity.

Concern for community

The members of the Council of Elders shared a common concern for the entire community as stipulated in their responsibilities as community leaders. With all the natural resources within the perimeter of the ancestral domain of Bukidnon-Tagoloanon tribe, they practiced *sayuda* (conducted a community meeting) to hear each other's issues and concerns. This meeting is usually held in a *Tulugan* or a meeting place where anyone who has a concern is free to speak. The leaders are obliged to reciprocate people's concerns with a suggestion or a solution for the sake of the community's welfare.

Entrepreneurial competencies of the tribe

The results of the study revealed two major aspects regarding the entrepreneurial competencies of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanen tribe: first, the skills of the community members, and second, the tribe's communal livelihood. These findings are elaborated in the following sections.

Skilled community members

Members of the community have skills and competencies that are essential for social entrepreneurship, namely skills as artisans, farmers, and workers, which are deeply rooted in the tribe's cultural heritage. These skills, inherited from past generations, form an integral part of the tribe's identity, serve as a primary source of income, and are profoundly connected to the natural environment.

The community's farming practices are a reflection of the people's respect for the natural environment. Rather than viewing the land solely as a means of generating income, they see it as a partner in their journey toward sustainability. By nurturing the soil and caring for the crops, they honour

the natural world's contribution to their wellbeing. This was expressed by a participant: "Nobody owns the land. You belong to the land. The land is enough to sustain. if you will just take care, it's more than enough to sustain you. You don't have to own the land itself, it can already be a source of livelihood."

Farming, in this context, is not merely a livelihood practice. Traditional farming embodies a spiritual and cultural practice. Farming symbolizes the Bukidnon-Tagoloanen's deep understanding of the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, where the land is not just a provider of sustenance but a sacred entity that demands reverence and care. Similarly, Mika (2020) writes that Indigenous entrepreneurship is rooted in the belief that humans and the natural environment have a shared origin and are deeply interconnected, with each relying on the other for survival and well-being. As such, entrepreneurs protect the environment, utilize its resources, and highlight the indigenous cultural legacy (Molina-Ramírez & Barba-Sánchez, 2021). They integrate environmental stewardship and cultural preservation into their projects, which is in line with a larger vision of sustainable entrepreneurship.

Communal livelihood

Communal livelihood practice within the Bukidnon-Tagoloanen tribe is an advantage that facilitates establishing and operating cooperatives. Unlike many other communities where the concept of shared ownership and decision-making can be unfamiliar or met with resistance, Indigenous Peoples's communal values align seamlessly with cooperative business models. Thus, cooperative initiatives are more acceptable and readily embraced by the community.

The uniqueness of Indigenous entrepreneurship lies in its distinctive characteristics, setting it apart from conventional entrepreneurial practices. Molina-Ramírez and Barba-Sánchez (2021) highlight that Indigenous groups operate within a collectivist culture, prioritizing communal gains over individual economic profits. The members of the Bukidnon-Tagoloanen tribe's entrepreneurial pursuits are deeply rooted in seeking collective benefits, intertwining economic endeavours with embeddedness in their identity and culture. Rather than solely pursuing economic gains, these Indigenous groups emphasize the interconnectedness between their economic activities and their cultural identity as fundamental to achieving their objectives. The collective approach to entrepreneurship signifies a contrast from the typical individualistic pursuit of economic income, reflecting a more holistic and community-centric perspective.

Challenges encountered in practicing social entrepreneurship land conflict

The IPRA respects, protects, and promotes Indigenous Peoples' way of life in the Philippines, including the right to own ancestral areas and all its domains. The law enables Indigenous Peoples to make plans for natural and human development within their area of responsibility. However, these rights can be temporary or continuous, depending on the content of the development plan of a particular ancestral domain, which is associated with the municipal or city or provincial development plan.

The Bukidnon-Tagoloanen tribe faces significant challenges in practicing social entrepreneurship, notably concerning land conflicts. Conflicts arise because of competing interests in land. Just like any other ancestral domains, Bukidnon-Tagoloanen has prepared a development plan in which land

utilization is prescribed, and different *gaup* (family or clan) are assigned a particular parcel of land. This system of land distribution and land-assigning causes varied property rights that overlap and compete among the members of the tribe. But when it comes to resolving such disputes, the tribe follows its customs and values in conflict resolutions rather than using force or eviction. They employ the Indigenous justice system, based on the *Bungkatel ha Bulawan*, when dealing with conflicts.

Practices of the principles of the cooperative

The *Philippine Cooperative Code* outlines the seven principles of cooperatives: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for the community. For BUKTAMACO, benefit sharing occurs through the services offered by the cooperative to the community. At the time of writing, the cooperative has not yet accumulated sufficient funding for statutory funds, and most of its growth in assets are donated from both local and international partners in the forms of biological assets and farm inputs, management support, and payment of salaries of office employees.

The return on the investment of the members is expressed in the social services they receive and not in the form of cash/property dividends. The cooperative is five years old, operating mostly in partnership with other tribes and local and international agencies. Furthermore, the cooperative is not yet a member of a secondary cooperative. In terms of membership payment, the founding members personally financed the membership fees. Although the cooperative is promoted by the government, its members, due to income constraints, cannot pay the membership fees.

Lack of entrepreneurial skills training

The areas where the cooperative members are in need of skills training are management, production, and financial literacy. The primary challenge faced by the Bukidnon-Tagoloanen tribe in their social entrepreneurship endeavours is the absence of adequate technical skills.

Effective management is a cornerstone of any successful entrepreneurial venture. Without proper training, the tribe may struggle with organizational and administrative aspects, which are essential for planning, decision-making, and overall governance of their cooperative initiatives. The absence of management skills can hinder the sustainability of their social entrepreneurship efforts.

Unfortunately, the lack of training in production can impede their ability to create high-quality products. This study points to the potential for creating by-products from the cacao. As one participant described, "[They have the] capability to make chocolate, or even cacao wine, cacao vinegar. But without appropriate training, this opportunity remains untapped, limiting their economic potential."

The lack of financial literacy exposes community members to various financial risks. Without an understanding of basic financial concepts, individuals may not be able to manage their finances effectively. This vulnerability can lead to financial difficulties, particularly for those who are already marginalized within the community. Providing comprehensive financial literacy training within the

community is a fundamental step. This education should cover basic financial concepts, budgeting, savings, and prudent financial decisions.

Existing regulatory requirements is not inclusive to customary practices

The Cooperatives are governed by the *Republic Act 9520*, otherwise known as the *Philippine Cooperative Code of 2008*. The law specifies the formation, registration, management, and mandatory requirements of cooperatives in the Philippines, including the powers and functions of the general assembly, Board of Directors, and other officers of the cooperative. In the data gathered, the participants clearly articulated how decisions are derived and the role of the Council of Elders in the decision-making process. The council's recommendation to any matters concerning management decisions is carried out by the Board of Directors as a customary practice to the leadership of the Council of Elders. In one instance, there was internal conflict regarding the illegal sale of the land inside the BUKTAMACO—the buyers commercialized the area by constructing rest houses. The council resolved the issue by the rule of majority, resulting in a division of the profit with shares allocated to the BUKTAMACO. This decision was respected by all members and the management board.

In governance and management, for example, the cooperative practices the *pag batun-batuna* principle: "*kung wala pa kabayad, kanus a ka kabayad* … we always resolved conflict based on *tribuhanong pamaagi*. But after so many sessions, we give it to NCIP *(*if the member has not yet paid his/her obligations when to pay, we always solve conflict based on customary practices)." The consensus-building concept is defined in Philippine law as the rule of the majority of all members. In the Bukidnon-Tagoloanen tribe, consensus building means respecting and obeying the decisions of the *datu* or Council of Elders. The unique value system distinguishes the tribal cooperative from a regular cooperative. The datus always consider the welfare of the general members and will not do anything harmful.

> For example, there are projects that need to be decided, BUKTAMACO will not consult the entire body but the Council of Elders, which already has pre-agreed decisions, and the body will follow. The Council of Elders has the resolution to authorize the cooperative to enter into a partnership. (Study Participant)

The tribe also has a unique concept of ownership of land. The tribe believes that "nobody owns the land; the tribe belongs to the land." The obligatory provision of livelihood to the community by the cooperative changes the point of view from land dispute to life dispute. The leadership of the cooperative, through the data, will provide the land, the seedlings, and all materials to help grow the identified biological assets (such as bamboo) until they become productive. Furthermore, in the conduct of meetings, the Council of Elders will meet first, and the Board of Directors will convene after. Although meeting schedules are set by the management, the Board of Directors and the Council of Elders conduct meetings as the need arises.

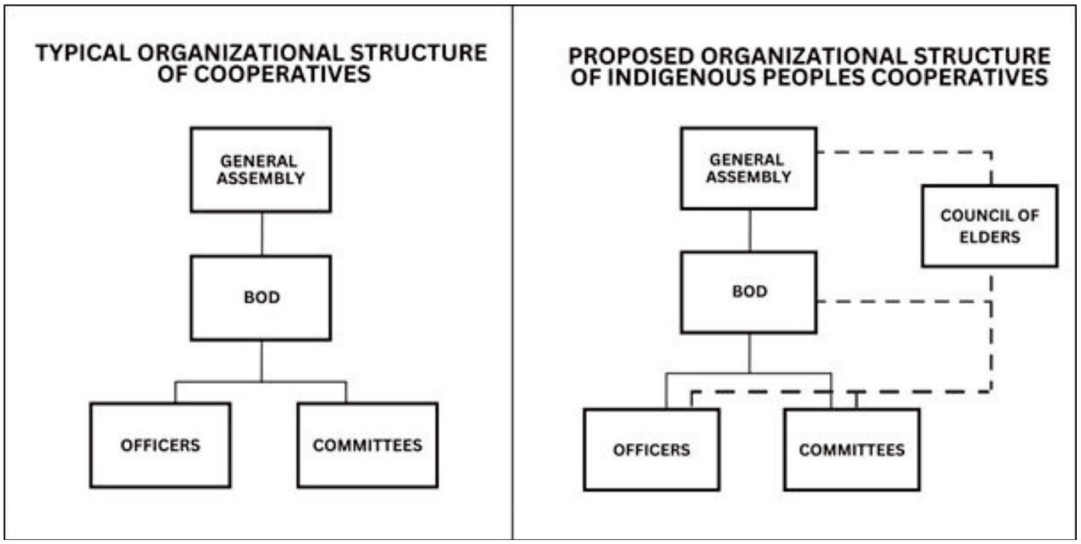
The management and governance of the tribal cooperative differs from all other types of cooperatives in the country due to the uniqueness of the functions of the Council of Elders as the decision-making body of the tribe. Thus, although the cooperative complies with all mandatory requirements set forth by RA 9520, there remains a challenge in harmonizing the customary practice and compliance with the law itself.

FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' COOPERATIVE

The identity of an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative is defined by its values system, land, expertise of the people, and unique governance. The Indigenous Peoples' cooperative manifests community embeddedness as an element of core business. Their communal way of life and worldview contribute positively to entrepreneurship (Molina-Ramírez & Barba-Sánchez, 2021). An Indigenous Peoples' cooperative has a unique organizational structure with the Council of Elders as consultants of the general assembly, the Board of Directors, and the officers. In a structured cooperative defined in Republic Act 9520, the highest governing body is the general assembly, which comprises the members who can vote and approve the developmental plans of the cooperative.

The general assembly elects the Board of Directors, who are responsible for strategic planning, direction setting, and policy formulation activities. The board of directors shall not be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the cooperative and shall elect its officers and committees to manage the affairs of the cooperatives. Figure 2 shows the differences in the organizational structure of the typical cooperative as mandated by the Cooperative Development Authority. The General Assembly, composed of members of the cooperative, is the highest decision-making body but unique to an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative in which the General Assembly adheres to the decisions of the Elders. The Council of Elders also plays a crucial role in development planning, decision-making, and operations of the cooperative.

Figure 2: Differences in the organizational structure between a typical cooperative as outlines by the Cooperative Development Authority and proposed Indigenous Peoples (IP) Cooperatives



Note: This figure compares the organizational structures of a typical cooperative as defined by the Cooperative Development Authority with the proposed structure for Indigenous Peoples (IP) cooperatives. Created by the researchers.

Along with the uniqueness of the organizational structure of the cooperative, the researchers, through the responses of the participants, formulated a validated framework for any Indigenous Peoples' cooperative in the country. Figure 3 presents a sustainability framework for an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative. The establishment of cooperatives among Indigenous Peoples is part of the national development plan for designing sustainable futures for Indigenous communities. Development,

in which the cooperatives become its channel, should address the needs of Indigenous communities through the terms of their value system. Thus, exploring a suitable cooperative framework that conforms to Indigenous Peoples' worldviews is significant to achieving the local development agenda.

Figure 3: Sustainability framework for an Indigenous Peoples (IP) Cooperative based on the experiences of BUKTAMACO.

Note: This figure presents a sustainability framework for an IP cooperative, modelled after the experiences and practices of BUKTAMACO. Created by the researchers.

The framework uses the same four pillars of a sustainability framework—human, economic, social, and environmental—with added pillars on customary practices. The customary practices of the Indigenous Peoples are the bedrock of doing business. These practices are highly governed by the Council of Elders, who are guided by the value system of a specific tribe. The dialogue consensus and responsibility to the earth and spirits, as prescribed in their beliefs, have important implications for entrepreneurial qualities (Molina-Ramírez & Barba-Sánchez, 2021).

The Indigenous Peoples' cooperative relies on partnerships to achieve sustainability. In the Philippines, the government supports the creation of Indigenous Peoples' cooperatives; however, in its formation, there are monetary constraints that might also be addressed by the government itself, for instance, monetary support for the membership fees. Upon successful registration, a partnership between the cooperative and the government, in the form of free training from CDA-registered training providers and other national and local agencies for all officers and members, is essential not only to address annual mandatory training requirements but also to prepare the cooperative for financial stability, resiliency, and sustainability. The government's partnership in the provision of financial assistance, biological assets, farm inputs, and training can develop more human, economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

An Indigenous Peoples' cooperative can also develop sustainability when it forges partnerships with other national international institutions for funding, training, provision of innovative machinery

and equipment for value-adding products, and supply chain management. The fiscal space for the government may be tight already and only allows minimal flexibility in terms of the financial operation of the cooperative; thus, there is a need to secure more funding from other agencies or instrumentalities to address the pressing needs of developing livelihood programs that would ensure environmental, social, economic, and human sustainability. In an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative, ownership of vast hectares of land is already an advantage. Hence, it would not be difficult to partner with agencies advocating green practices from production to commercialization of locally produced products. The role of funding, training, monitoring institutions, and other institutions are essential to help the cooperative grow.

When products are already very tangible, the cooperative needs to forge another partnership with suppliers and marketing channels for distribution. This is to ensure continuous sales and mass production of the innovative products introduced by the community. It needs to have a good platform for selling and distributing finished products while the intellectual property rights of the tribe are equally protected. When the cooperative grows, it requires protection on the products, biological assets, and royalties on the intellectual properties developed from the skills of the members.

The social services of the cooperative extend to the other Indigenous communities. Although the decisions of the elders of each tribe are respected and obeyed by the members of the tribes, a legal partnership still needs to be established between and among Indigenous communities to avoid future problems on claims of ownership and benefits. Hence, it would be proper to execute a Memorandum of Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding among the elders of the tribes. During the various partnerships, human, economic, social, and environmental sustainability can be achieved.

The human sustainability pillar of the cooperative focuses on the human resource, the Indigenous Peoples themselves, and the community as a whole. The human pillar focuses on expertise and Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is a product of Indigenous Peoples' engagement with nature. In an instance where the tribe lives on the bank of the river, their Indigenous knowledge includes fishing and farming; likewise, if they live in valleys and forests, their Indigenous knowledge is hunting. The expertise of the tribe is needed to utilize the available raw materials in the community, which can be a source of innovation leading to sustainability in operation.

Expertise of the members of the community can lead to forging partnerships with funders and other institutions for materials provisions and training. These, however, need much visibility and transparency, necessitating management to undergo upskilling in financial management and reporting. Furthermore, the qualities of the leaders in the organization are crucial. Leaders need to be taught the principles of cooperation while they preserve their interconnectedness to the communal way of life.

The economic pillar of sustainability for the cooperatives refers to the financial management competencies, economic benefits of the members and employees of the cooperative, and the profits generated, which will be shared with the members and the community of the tribe. Self-sustainability will be achieved when the investment in the biological asset produces fruits through viable production and stable productivity. The entrepreneurial aspects of the members of the tribe are not

so visible; hence, the cooperative should do business for the tribe to improve the economic benefits and productivity. The entrepreneurial skills must be developed by the cooperative to create a market for the products and to manage the value chain.

Financial management skills are also seen as one of the factors for economic sustainability. When most of the decision-making lies in the hands of the Council of Elders, the council also needs to be capacitated on the financial management to ensure sound financial decisions. In the case of BUKTAMACO, some of the members of the Council of Elders have financial acumen, but they still hire financial consultants to provide them with the necessary data and interpretation to come up with a sound financial decision. However, having professional members in the Council of Elders is an advantage to the cooperative especially when they volunteer to run the operation.

The cooperative promotes equality among other Indigenous communities. The employment opportunity extends to all members of the tribe and to the other tribes in the neighbouring communities. The social pillar of sustainability of the cooperatives includes promoting wellbeing through social services such as access to education, government services, and economic participation. Cooperatives are also social innovations for the promotion of the common good. It was emphasized that the Indigenous Peoples cooperative members should be more concerned about the social returns than the monetary return they can get from their membership in the cooperative; BUKTAMACO is concerned more about how to elevate the way of life of its members. It focuses on livelihood creation while it accesses basic services for members including funding, training, free farm inputs, and more economic opportunities for the members and the community. Social justice among members of the tribe is also very dominant, preserving customary practices while creating more opportunities for its people so that younger generations will stay serving the community rather than migrating to other cities and countries for better opportunities. Challenges exist in the right to self-determination. The dynamics of working together as a community need to be founded in the values system. The relationship with the Council of Elders and the community must be grounded in the tribe's core values.

Indigenous Peoples show their profound respect for the land as the source of life. For Indigenous Peoples, the earth is considered the mother, and all lives therein are interdependent and complementary. The ownership of the land is what defines Indigenous Peoples; however, inside the ancestral land, Indigenous Peoples needs to be productive. The productivity has to be aligned with sustainable practices such as organic farming of biological assets. For instance, BUKTAMACO produced organic fertilizers for farm inputs of the sectoral plantation such as bamboo, cacao, coffee, abaca, and other indigenous products. Products from the biological assets have to be maximized using innovations in machinery and equipment. Along with proper training, the core values of the community, and the leadership of the elders, environmental sustainability can be achieved.

The developed framework will serve as a useful guide for formulating policies concerning Indigenous Peoples' cooperatives, represented by the Office of the Provincial Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives within the legislative body. Additionally, the CDA may explore comprehensive guidelines for Indigenous Peoples' cooperatives in the Philippines, inclusive of their customary practices.

For the time being, the cooperative is patiently waiting to harvest the funder-supported crops, which will ensure sustainability of the land, income, and employment of the cooperative and its members. Management, with the help of the local government of Malaybalay and Department of Agriculture, is now investing in machineries and equipment for bamboo-based products. They continually educate members to plant only sustainable products in the ancestral domain.

CONCLUSION

Cooperatives designed for Indigenous communities are formulated uniquely to cater to the community's communal ownership of a vast area of land. However, there exists a challenge on how to improve the quality of life of these communities using these areas of lands. Another challenge for the government is how to let cooperatives take the role as agent of change for these communities. Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines have limited entrepreneurial skills, although they possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and competence to run a business as a group. In addition, the principles of cooperatives are already practiced by the tribe, but some principles are applied differently due to customary practices, including, for example, the role of the Council of Elders in decision-making. In conclusion, the theory on self-determination has been practiced by BUKTAMACO in terms of decision making. Such customary practice is not embedded in the *Republic Act 9520*. The current cooperative legislation, particularly *Republic Act 9520*, imposes management models that do not fully recognize or integrate traditional governance structures, such as the role of the Council of Elders.

A framework for the sustainability of an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative is developed emphasizing the fifth pillar of customary practices being the foundation of human, economic, social, and environmental pillars. Alongside the framework, a proposed organizational structure is also presented to address the gap between the governance of an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative and a typical cooperative. In conclusion, to help an Indigenous Peoples' cooperative sustain its operation, the law may not be aligned with the practices of Indigenous communities; hence, concerned agencies may revisit and harmonize the Indigenous customary practices and the content of *Republic Act 9520*.

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Policy on the Frontlines: Community Nonprofit Organizations Working with Older Adults During COVID-19 in Montréal

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ABSTRACT

Community nonprofit organizations (CNPOs) are a vital component of the social infrastructure that addresses the needs of older adults aging in place. Despite this, CNPOs are overlooked in political research and relevant policies, such as the age-friendly cities program. This article examines CNPO work during the COVID-19 pandemic in Montréal, Québec. Policy analysis, surveys, and interviews with CNPO staff, local policy actors, and older adults reveal that CNPOs became increasingly essential frontline social service providers during the pandemic. While CNPOs fill gaps in public and private social infrastructures, they are facing considerable service, labour, administrative, and financial challenges due to inadequate policy support. Policy on aging must incorporate CNPO work in different sectors and communities, facilitate partnerships that respect CNPO autonomy, and improve CNPO funding.

RÉSUMÉ

Les organismes sans but lucratif (OSBL) communautaires sont une composante essentielle de l'infrastructure sociale qui répond aux besoins des aînés vieillissant chez eux. Pourtant, malgré leur importance, les OSBL communautaires sont négligés dans la recherche politique et dans la mise en œuvre de politiques, comme on le voit dans le programme des villes « amies des aînés ». Cet article examine le travail des OSBL durant la pandémie de la COVID-19 à Montréal, au Québec. L'analyse des politiques—ainsi que celle de sondages et d'entrevues effectués auprès du personnel des OSBL, de responsables locaux et d'aînés—montre que, pendant la pandémie, les OSBL sont devenus des fournisseurs de services sociaux de première ligne de plus en plus essentiels. Cependant, même si les OSBL communautaires comblent les lacunes des infrastructures sociales publiques et privées, ils font face à des défis considérables en matière de services, de main-d'œu-

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vre, d'administration et de finances en raison d'un soutien politique inadéquat. Les politiques sur le vieillissement doivent tenir compte du travail des OSBL dans différents secteurs et communautés, faciliter les partenariats qui respectent l'autonomie des OSBL, et augmenter le financement des OSBL.

Keywords / Mots clés : community nonprofit organizations, social infrastructure, age-friendly cities, aging in place, COVID-19 pandemic / organismes sans but lucratif communautaires, infrastructure sociale, villes adaptées aux aînés, vieillir chez soi, pandémie de la COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the important role of community nonprofit organizations (CNPOs) in the field of policy on aging, in a context where aging in place is a public policy goal and age-friendly cities (AFCs) are a popular policy solution. There is an expectation that CNPOs will inform the design and be involved in actioning local AFC initiatives to enable older adults to live in their existing residences and neighbourhoods for as long as possible. Yet, there is little research that directly explores the unique role of the community nonprofit sector in AFC policy and practice. The research suggests that there are overwhelming expectations being placed on the nonprofit sector in a neoliberal context of social welfare cuts, policy devolution, individual and family responsibilization, and marketized contractual partnerships between the state and nonprofit organizations (Joy, 2020). The nonprofit sector was struggling with these expectations prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a major public health crisis that was particularly marginalizing for older adults and those offering them care. While the pandemic brought to light longstanding systemic problems in the formal healthcare sector, the topic of older adults aging in place and the role of CNPOs remains largely under-researched. This article argues that a study of local CNPOs in the pandemic is vital for understanding how our polity cares for older adults, and thus the extent to which we have supported aging in place by fostering AFCs.

This article highlights the results of a project that examined how CNPOs supported older adults in Montréal during the COVID-19 pandemic through policy analysis, an environmental scan, descriptive data from surveys of CNPOs, and interviews with CNPO staff, local policy actors, and older adults. As elsewhere, the pandemic exposed major policy failures in Québec, such as precarious housing and inequalities in the social support and healthcare system, that contribute to the marginalization of older people (Hebblethwaite, Young, & Martin Rubio, 2021). Yet, Québec is considered a world leader in AFCs and supports an autonomous community nonprofit sector. This research offers insight into how well these strategies and supports prepared CNPOs for a major health crisis that was particularly challenging for older adults.

COMMUNITY NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AS POLITICAL AGENTS

Community nonprofit organizations are mission-based organizations that provide services, programs, opportunities for connection and identity formation, mutual support, knowledge-building, and policy advocacy for their communities, be they geographic or identity-based (Richmond & Shields, 2024). They operate on the frontlines of policy, meeting human needs for resources and

connection directly and through policy advocacy, and are thus political agents. Moreover, there has always been a relationship between the state and nonprofit sector, the character of which has gone through many iterations depending on the existing sociopolitical economy (Joy & Shields, 2020). The pre-World War II era of classical liberalism in English speaking Canada was characterized by the preponderance of local religious charities, philanthropic donations, and ad hoc local government support, whereas in Québec, the Catholic Church was predominant. The postwar social liberalism context of welfare-state building led to the formation of "junior partnerships" between some nonprofits and the central state. In Québec, this occurred with the provincial government, where the nonprofit sector has fought to establish political autonomy and institutionalize a partnership model rooted in the principles of social democracy (White, 2001; Caillouette, 2004). During this time, favoured equity-seeking agencies received core funding to fulfill their missions to bring marginalized groups into the status quo, sometimes actively pushing against systems of inequity. The neoliberal political project of the 1980s onward sought to put an end to these winds of systemic change. The partnership relationship between the state and the nonprofit sector was reoriented through new public management (NPM) to a private market model of nonprofit alternative service delivery through contracts (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005). Research on the political economy of the nonprofit sector has illustrated systemic challenges with NPM: a contract culture that creates competition and inequity between agencies; a shift from core mission and program funding to project-based funding that is short-term and requires incessant reporting and reapplication/rebranding; increased reliance on private funding and own source revenue; pressure to prove value for money; and chronic labour challenges such as limited salaries, benefits, and job security that incites staff burnout and turnover (Evans & Shields, 2018; Richmond & Shields, 2024; Salamon, 2015; Cunningham, Baines, Shields, & Lewchuk, 2016). Community nonprofit organizations in Québec have organized against this neoliberal onslaught to retain their autonomy, social justice and transformative missions, as well as institutional support and core public funding (Caillouette, 2004, Laforest, 2011b).

Despite the important political role of CNPOs, they remain underexamined in the fields of political science and policy studies in Canada (Joy & Shields, 2020). When the nonprofit sector is examined in these disciplines, the focus has been on larger organizations and central government policymaking, be that federal or provincial (Laforest, 2011a, 2011b). Research on community-based agencies situated locally and providing various forms of care and advocacy for populations that have been marginalized is still limited in political science (Smith, 2005), and even in nonprofit sector studies (Phillips & Wyatt, 2021). The neoliberal period seems to have marked a shift in nonprofit studies to a more managerial and positivistic orientation, moving away from a tradition of sociopolitical analyses of power through rich case study and comparative research (Laforest, 2011b; Coule, Dodge, & Eikenberry, 2022). Together, these research gaps result in a major lacuna in our understanding of the practice and effects of policy in everyday life. An analysis of local CNPOs offers an important vantage point to study how and whether the sociopolitical and potentially transformative roles of the nonprofit sector around identity expression, mutual care, social engagement, and political activism are understood, valued, and supported.

The COVID-19 crisis illustrates an important moment for the nonprofit sector which has the potential to change its relationship with government, perhaps away from neoliberal NPM. In some cases,

core funding and human resource support, long advocated for by the nonprofit sector, flooded in from governments at all levels as emergency assistance (Shields & Abu Alrob 2020; Lasby & Barr 2021). This suggests that there was a reinforced recognition that governments needed nonprofits, and that public support enabled the sector's capacity to reach and assist people (Shields, Joy, & Cheng, 2024). There is thus the potential to lay the foundations for a mutual relationship between the state and the nonprofit sector that expands on and transforms social liberalism. This article examines this relationship in the context of older adult community care.

THE COMMUNITY NONPROFIT SECTOR AND POLICY ON AGING

Research suggests that CNPOs form a vital component of the social infrastructure, or "the places and organizations that facilitate social interactions and connections," that enables aging in place in urban environments (Buffel & Phillipson, 2024, p. 95; Joy, 2020). Aging in place tends to refer to aging in one's existing neighbourhood residence (be it rental or ownership) rather than in public long-term care institutions. Aging in place is preferred by both older adults and governments, particularly provinces, as they govern and fund public healthcare. Aging in place has thus become a major policy goal, and it is the work of CNPOs that enables this for many older adults. The age-friendly cities (AFC) program is a popular policy approach intended to support older adults to age in place. The AFC concept was developed by the World Health Organization and includes a comprehensive checklist of policy actions in the areas of affordable and accessible housing and transportation, health and social care, planning and urban design, and accessible communication, as well as efforts to combat ageism and encourage social participation and civic engagement (2007).

While in Canada, some provinces (such as Québec) administer and offer limited funding support for AFCs, the bulk of the responsibility to design, fund, and implement AFC strategies and projects is left to local government and CNPOs. Despite this, there is little research that explores the unique role of CNPOs in AFC policy and practice. Buffel and Phillipson (2024) argue that local social infrastructure is an undervalued and underexamined component of aging in place and age-friendly city practice and research, which tends to focus on physical infrastructure change. The authors highlight the importance of CNPOs as a component of social infrastructure, noting challenges presented to this sector in a context of neoliberal policy devolution and funding cuts, though their analysis is more provoking than empirical (Buffel & Phillipson, 2024). We reviewed studies and papers on AFC policy and implementation, as well as nonprofit activity regarding AFC services and supports between 2007 and 2023; notably, many did not distinguish between the role of the public sector and CNPOs in advancing age-friendly initiatives. The focus of most studies was on local government action, and while this often comprised of work that would be carried out by nonprofit agencies, an understanding of the nonprofit sector and its relationship with the state with respect to resource support, organizational dynamics, and power relations was rarely addressed. Four studies addressed the important role of the nonprofit sector, recognizing that AFC projects rely on community-based, often volunteer-run programming (Buffel, Phillipson, & Rémillard-Boilard, 2021; Menec, 2017; Russell, Skinner, & Fowler, 2022; Joy, 2020). Much of this programming received government funding, which is often short-term, challenging its sustainability. The purpose of this article is to understand the nature of the CNPO policy role in AFCs, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic,

and to offer policy insights to ensure that nonprofit autonomy is respected and that they are celebrated, supported, and integrated into a fulsome age-friendly policy and research agenda.

METHODOLOGY

The project methodology consists of an instrumental case study of the role and importance of CNPOs in supporting older adults to age in place and to realize an AFC in Montréal in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The island of Montréal is a particularly fascinating case because it is fragmented into the City of Montréal and its 19 boroughs and 16 de-amalgamated municipalities, each with distinct community characteristics and governance. The City of Montréal has an age-friendly city strategy, and some boroughs and de-amalgamated municipalities also have their own strategies and action plans. Québec is considered a leader in policymaking on aging in place and in supporting AFC programs (Joy, Marier, & Séguin, 2018). Moreover, the province is known for its policies and administrative support for the community sector, which includes a core funding program funneled to eligible autonomous community action organizations through Québec ministries (Caillouette, 2004). As such, we would expect CNPOs to be supported in their work to enable aging in place and AFCs.

Methods for this project included a literature review on the role of the nonprofit sector in supporting older adults and the realization of an AFC, as well as a policy analysis on aging in place and AFCs in Québec and Montréal, particularly looking at how CNPOs are included, understood, and supported in these policies. The authors also conducted an environmental scan of CNPOs in Montréal offering support to older adults in key areas of the age-friendly checklist (transportation, housing, social care, social participation, communication/technology). In November 2021, surveys in both French and English were sent to 60 CNPOs identified in the environmental scan and 20 were completed by representatives from unique organizations (15 French, five English). The survey response rate of 33 percent is within acceptable parameters for quantitative measures. Low response rates are not unexpected in this sector given the limited number of staff employed in these CNPOs, particularly since the survey was distributed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic when these CNPO staff were working considerable overtime hours to support older adults. The survey data were gathered to provide a preliminary understanding of the landscape of the work of the CNPOs. Statistical analysis was not conducted with the survey data. Rather, the survey data helped us to construct the qualitative interview guide and recruit interview participants. Survey questions explored the services CNPOs provided, the needs of older adults, pandemic adaptations and challenges, and partnership relations. Finally, 32 online and in-person in-depth interviews were conducted in English and French with 15 CNPO staff, 12 older adults who participated in the programs and services provided by those CNPOs, and five local policymakers who worked with and funded this sector. Community nonprofit organization participants and policymakers represented different-sized organizations (from 75 members to over 1000) and boroughs (represented 13 of Montréal's 19 boroughs) and had been working in the field for between five and 30 years. Participants were primarily involved in CNPOs in the health and social service sectors. Interviews were conducted in the winter of 2022 and were used to explore the nature of CNPOs, the needs of older adults in Montréal during the pandemic, and an assessment of Montréal as an age-friendly city. Given the breadth of ages of people targeted by these CNPOs, the authors did not set an age

limit for participation. Instead, participants could self-identify as older adults, so as not to exclude anyone participating in relevant services.

The interview data contributes to a deeper understanding of the lived experience of local AFC policies, programs, and services from the perspective of policymakers, CNPO staff, and older people themselves. As the core focus of this article is on the role of the CNPO sector, the bulk of the data from the interviews is from them and serves to elaborate on survey data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, with French interviews translated to English, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which facilitated an exploration of the "sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable individual accounts" (p. 85) and shape the social realities of participants. The transcripts were coded by the research team using Atlas.ti software. As the purpose of this article is to understand the political nature of the CNPO policy role in AFCs during the COVID-19 pandemic in Montréal in a broader sociopolitical context of welfare-state restructuring, three broad questions served to organize the data: 1) What is the role of CNPOs in supporting AFCs? 2) What challenges and opportunities did CNPOs face in supporting AFCs during the pandemic? 3) How are CNPOs supported, or not, by governments to realize AFCs? The authors reviewed each code and grouped them into larger themes that corresponded to each of the three questions. The following section outlines the core findings of this analysis.

FINDINGS

The findings highlight that CNPOs form a local age-friendly social infrastructure for older adults, providing a mix of social participation activities that foster local democracy, social services, and policy advocacy that maintains the welfare state. The innovative sociopolitical work of these agencies is challenged by the ways in which the CNPO sector is filling growing gaps in health and social services, as well as physical infrastructure. These agencies are becoming increasingly essential public service providers and were a lifeline for many older adults during the pandemic. Despite this, these CNPOs are vaguely incorporated into AFC policy and are precariously financed.

What is the role of community nonprofit organizations in supporting age-friendly cities?

Social participation as political participation

Community nonprofit organizations working with older adults provide a variety of sociocultural and educational activities crucial for the social participation component of AFCs. In effect, 85 percent (17 out of 20) of survey respondents identified social participation as part of their work. These include free or low-cost gatherings around food and special events; opportunities to engage in creative endeavours such as watching films and art making, game nights, outings to museums and cafés; walks in neighbourhoods and parks; workshops on various topics; and discussion groups for caregivers or to establish intergenerational learning and connection. Community nonprofit organization activities provide opportunities for the creation of social networks and bonds that foster inclusion and community belonging. These activities help members navigate the social isolation that can occur through life transitions that often come with aging, such as changes in physical appearance and health, the illness and death of loved ones, and changes in employment, housing, and mobility.

The situatedness of CNPOs in neighbourhoods is crucial as they become place-based institutional anchors of care that are present for people on a regular basis, making them an essential social infrastructure for AFCs, as was highlighted by Buffel and Phillipson (2024). An older adult participant identified the importance of the public nature of nonprofit spaces that foster mutuality:

> Because we need to have spaces that aren't just commercial. We need to have spaces where people can go, you know, no matter what their finances—whether they're wealthy, they're poor, they're in between—we need meeting places for people that share the same interest, or places where you can get to know your neighbour, … And, you know, help interact and inter-help with each other, it's very important. And you know, to share skills and different things. (OAEN05)

Free social participation activities thus serve and expand a public purpose, especially in urban contexts where so many services and infrastructures that are needed to survive and thrive have been privatized (Hamel & Autin, 2017). The interviews highlight that these CNPOs act as a hub that is vital not only for the wellbeing of older adults living in the community but also for the community.

> Our centre is not a place for recreation; it's really a place to maintain the community. So, we offer tools that will help people learn, get computer skills, food skills, at all levels, so that they can remain as independent as possible in the community. And to be able to participate in the community as well, not just in the organization, but in the whole neighbourhood. (CNPOFR07)

Social participation programming acts as a venue for relationship-building and "active listening" (CNPOFR04) between older adults and CNPO staff. A staff member highlights how social activities offer the opportunity for a wrap-up discussion that can serve as a check-in on the mental health of participants as well as an opportunity to "offer them another service or … talk to them about a resource or … just chat and talk about our passions" (CNPOFR04). The multipronged role of these agencies serves to create a local "safety net" (CNPOFR03). An older adult participant explained this enthusiastically:

> Social contact, personal growth, self-affirmation, learning to say … learning … you know, to understand each other better … That's what it is, a social net, a life balance, you know it makes us better citizens. (OAFR03)

The social participation work of these CNPOs is vital for older adult civic engagement, a central component of the AFC program, but also for democracy broadly as it expands local belonging, mutuality, and social redistribution.

Social services as public services

Community nonprofit organizations also provide social services for older adults. These services can include medical accompaniment, mental health support individually and in small groups, telephone check-ins, transportation, and training programs in the health and social care system. Participants emphasized the important role of CNPOs to provide human services that are immediate, personalized, and preventative. Community nonprofit organization staff are often the first to observe or be told that there is a health and social service need from a member. This is due to CNPOs' "human

scale" (CNPOFR06) and role in the everyday lives of older adults, which can facilitate bonds of trust and understanding between staff and older adults. Policymakers acknowledge CNPO expertise, identifying that they "rely a lot on the community sector" (POLFR02) and that "it's the community that takes charge" (POLFR04).

Community nonprofit organizations also know how government policies, programs, plans, and infrastructures (and lack thereof) affect older adults in their everyday lives and intersecting identities to support or limit their rights. These organizations are thus policy experts who can and do contribute to policy change.

> So how I see it is that our mandate is really to bring up the chain, the famous hierarchical chain of command, you could say, the realities on the ground, what we observe on a daily basis. What are the needs that we have observed and that are tangible, that have not been distorted by figures, by tables, by statistics or anything else, really what we have been able to observe with our own eyes, to bring them up the chain so that they reach the right places. (CNPOFR05)

While this unique form of social service provision supports AFCs, several older adults remarked that CNPOs are taking on more and more public work:

> … the nonprofit sector is kind of taking over the work that the like religious communities in Québec used to do and the government used to do. They've kind of let go of the reins a bit for that, and now it's all community organizations. (OAEN05)

As is the case in other Canadian provinces and cities (Marier, 2021; Joy, 2020), the community sector is being relied upon more and more to fill gaps in, or even replace, public services in the context of a dwindling welfare state in Québec (Hebblethwaite et al., 2021; Hamel & Autin, 2017). A nonprofit participant highlighted this predicament:

> I would say that, theoretically, it is a complementary role to the institutional services of a neighbourhood. That's in theory, but in reality, sometimes we are more. … At the moment, there's a lack of … of resources in the public service, which means that sometimes it's these institutions that come to us and not the other way around. So, sometimes it's worrying because we say to ourselves, "Oh boy, there's a real lack of services," but for me, … we're there to complete the offer made by the public service. (CNPOFR08)

The interviews suggest that the public system would not be able to function without these CNPOs, highlighting the essential role that these agencies play in AFCs. This has professionalized the sector in ways that have been inadequately acknowledged by governments and the public.

> … we often still have this old image of the community sector being all "hippies," the "kumbaya" attitude. But not all, we're super professionals. (CNPOFR02)

> So now it's time for the government to sort of recognize, okay, this is not just some sort of … You know, the 60s are over. It's not some fringe movement or counterculture. That this is a big part of how we support society. (CNPOEN02)

The crucial role of CNPOs in supporting society was put to the test during the pandemic.

What challenges and opportunities did community nonprofit organizations face in supporting age-friendly cities during the pandemic?

Service adaptation

The COVID-19 pandemic was a challenging time for older adults engaged with CNPOs. Several participants talked about how the mental health of older adults suffered as a result of forced isolation coupled with inadequate mental health investments in society, which in some cases led to suicidal ideation, depression and anxiety, addictions, and agoraphobia. Older adults lost loved ones to COVID-19, witnessed media portrayals of the horrendous deaths of older adults in long-term "care," and lost precious time with friends and family. For some, periods of lengthy isolation exacerbated or caused physical health challenges such as reduced mobility and incontinence. According to the survey, 75 percent (15 out of 20) of CNPO staff identified new needs of older adults as a service challenge, with social participation (80%; 16 out of 20), housing (25%; 5 out of 20), transportation (45%; 9 out of 20), food security (75%; 15 out of 20), technology (75%; 15 out of 20), and other (70%; 14 out of 20) as the major categories of need. The high number of "other" refers, in part, to the various forms of personal care needs staff were observing and meeting, as discussed below.

Given the role and character of CNPOs to act as anchors in their communities and the close relationships they have with older adults, they were quick to adapt to meet needs during the pandemic. Indeed, shutting down was not an option for these agencies, as staff knew the essential nature of their role as a local safety net. Some organizations adapted outreach via telephone check-ins and house calls, which was a difficult task for staff.

> … hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of phone calls all the time. And it was very difficult because many people quickly … went into despair. There were people who coped, but then other people went into severe despair and became suicidal. And my team had to deal with this on a regular basis. (CNPOEN02)

> At the beginning, we said: "We'll make 20–30-minute calls, we'll try to keep it short," but it didn't work, you know, it was 50 minutes, one hour, one hour and a quarter, you know. So, it was very heavy for the work team. (CNPOFR04)

Community nonprofit organizations faced increasing demands for food services and various forms of personal care, such as going to the pharmacy for people isolating, fixing and purchasing personal items such as showers, televisions, mattresses, and air conditioners, and tending to needs around hygiene such as incontinence and dental care. One CNPO staff member admitted that given this need for personal care, they "used a lot, a chunk of our emergency money to pay for things like this" (CNPOEN02). An older adult participant advised that the pandemic illustrated that the CNPO sector cares for the emotional and psychological needs of its membership and that these agencies served as an "oasis … to get through the desert" (OAFR02). Several agency staff spoke about how it has been difficult to balance addressing these new personal and emergency-oriented needs and how they were brought to the last resort measure of initiating waitlists because demands exceeded their capacity. It is also a challenge to balance emergency-oriented needs with CNPO social infrastructure missions to promote the social participation that helps maintain quality of life.

> … the more time we spend on individual follow-ups and emergency situations, well, the less time we have to do what I consider to be the heart of community organizations, you know, really the solidarity of being together, all that. (CNPOFR04)

The CNPOs interviewed shifted many of their activities online, and staff devoted time and energy to ensuring access to technology for older adults. The pandemic funding context offered opportunities for some agencies to develop innovative programming to meet new or pre-existing needs and expand expertise. According to the survey, 65 percent (13 out of 20) of organizations expanded services and 80 percent (16 out of 20) initiated new services during the pandemic, particularly in the areas of social outreach, food security, and technology. The pandemic changed the program of work for some agencies and led to popular programs and supports that are now expected by their members, leading one staff to claim that "we literally have been a victim of our success" (CNPOEN02). According to the survey, 100 percent (20 out of 20) of organizations experienced challenges related to their service levels, a finding confirmed in recent research on the Canadian nonprofit sector during the pandemic (Shields et al., 2024). New programming has led to new administrative problems, with 100 percent (20 out of 20) of CNPO respondents experiencing logistical challenges, with the costs of digital devices (60%; 12 out of 20), technology platforms (45%; 9 out of 20), and internet services (25%; 5 out of 20) being major logistical issues.

Community nonprofit organizations were also relied upon by the healthcare sector to transport and accompany people to get vaccines, which was a complex task, as illustrated in the following quote by a CNPO staff member:

> So, we got 100 appointments, and we had to slot in these people, who were so deteriorated at this point. All they knew was that they were going to get the shot that would save, potentially, their life. But everything else, it was in winter and they were so deteriorated. And the weather and everything. So, we managed to get, hire extra drivers. We got my entire board to be on the site … we had to bring these people, wheelchairs lined up. Staying with them, driving them back home. Trying to keep track of everybody. Everybody had to be accompanied through the whole thing. We couldn't just drop them off. They didn't know where they were. It was completely awful. And actually, we were given the appointments and then they changed them. They changed the slot, I have to add this in. So, then we had to reschedule about 70 appointments with people who were already confused. (CNPOEN02)

Once again, the interviews highlight that the work of CNPOs is not just essential for older adults but for the Québec welfare state, which has undergone waves of centralization and austerity (Hamel & Autin, 2017).

> I would say that our role became even more essential during the pandemic, because we acted as a transmission belt between the public health authorities and the more isolated populations to transmit messages, to raise awareness, to help people get vaccinated, to distribute personal protective equipment, and to detect cases of psychological distress that might otherwise have passed under the radar of the public health authorities, who, perhaps because of the waves of centralization they have experienced, have a micro-so-

> ciological vision of the reality of older people, which is less refined than it might have been before. (CNPOFR05)

Staff burnout

The interviews suggest that while CNPO staff were extraordinarily resilient during the pandemic, this has come at a personal cost. Many staff were working from home, some offering difficult telephone calls at all hours of the day, making personal house calls, and retrieving needed items to support the mental health of community members.

> … everyone I know, myself personally, I mean, my workload exploded. It was all day. It was in the evenings. It was the weekend and weekdays, and I'm sure that's the case with so many executive directors. It's just one big blur. (CNPOEN03)

Eighty percent (16 out of 20) of survey respondents identified staff burnout as an organizational challenge, which dovetails with trends in the Canadian nonprofit sector (Shields et al., 2024). Our interviews suggest that staff have experienced considerable vicarious trauma in the context of the pandemic as well as distress related to their working conditions.

> I don't know, now that I think about it, I'm getting palpitations. Just the pressure that we were under, and I don't know how my staff did it. I really don't know how they all just didn't quit. But it was just sheer dedication and empathy with the suffering that they were hearing every day. And I think that's what it was, because I'm sure they would've been much better off, personally, if they had all just left. Because, you know, I thought about it every day. I'm like, "Am I crazy? What am I doing? What am I doing?" So, we survived that. (CNPOEN02)

Related to staff challenges is the loss of volunteers over the pandemic, due to burnout, health concerns, changing priorities, and shifts to virtual work, which limits engagement. According to the survey, 100 percent (20 out of 20) of organizations are experiencing challenges related to volunteers, which is again a sector-wide issue (Shields et al., 2024). Survey respondents indicated these challenges were a shortage of volunteers (70%; 14 out of 20), volunteer turnover (40%; 8 out of 20), adapting skills among volunteers (35%; 7 out of 20), and volunteer burnout (30%; 6 out of 20). What is particularly important to note is that for many of these organizations, the volunteers were also older adults who were forced to confine. They were thus not allowed to volunteer when CNPOs needed them most, and perhaps when their social participation as volunteers was most important.

How are community nonprofit organizations supported, or not, by governments to realize age-friendly cities?

Inadequate policy partnerships

Despite the findings that CNPOs are a core component of an age-friendly social infrastructure, they are not particularly well integrated into AFC policy. When we asked CNPO staff about age-friendly city strategies in Montréal, many first struggled to situate themselves into this program, which they understood as being predominantly about municipal physical infrastructure. This reflects Buffel and Phillipson's (2024) argument that local social infrastructure is both undervalued and underexamined

in the concept, policy, and practice of AFCs. There is also a problematic false separation between social and physical infrastructure, as CNPOs offer a keen perspective on everyday challenges relating to inaccessible public transit, insufficient adapted transit, and underfunding in affordable housing.

> When we talk about adapted transport, it's complicated because it's never on time, and … You know, there are people who come to activities, they arrive an hour and a half before the activity and then they leave an hour after it ends … we compensate a little bit … there are some of my colleagues who have cars, but sometimes we'll … pick the person up on the way … To make their life easier, but it's still on a voluntary basis … You know, we're not rendering a taxi service either. (CNPOFR04)

As highlighted by the limited research that exists on the nonprofit role in AFCs (Joy, 2020), CNPOs and staff are making up for inadequacies in public services by taking on additional work on a volunteer basis.

Social and physical infrastructure is also inseparable because CNPOs often operate in physical spaces. Local governments play a particular role in the realm of space and can allow agencies to operate out of public facilities such as community centres and libraries at low cost or for free.

> So, basically, they occupy our main hall here Monday to Thursday during the day … I haven't really sat down to crunch the numbers. But normally, using this hall is $900.00 for a day … You know, if we look at the value, economic value of the free space is huge. (POLEN01)

This provision of space was not offered systematically by all boroughs and municipalities across the island. According to the survey, 55 percent (11 out of 20) of staff identified appropriate space as an organizational challenge. In-kind resource provision is a considerable support, as rent in the city is expensive and can pose a challenge to small organizations. However, these spaces are not always physically accessible to their members:

> I'm in a building of the city, and no, we don't even have universal accessibility here. You know, the fact that they know that it's a seniors' organization that's been here for like 30 years in their building. We could be a priority on the list. (CNPOFR03)

Furthermore, relying on city space was a challenge for some agencies that were forced to close their space during the pandemic lockdown. These agencies were not considered essential, and this was problematic for staff who were indeed providing essential check-in and service work. Again, we see inconsistencies in the local response due to fragmented governance in Montréal:

> We were lucky, for example, that the borough let us work. I have partner organizations; it was more difficult because even their borough forbade them to access the building. We were lucky in that respect. (CNPOFR03)

Furthermore, some city workers volunteered for CNPOs during the first wave of the pandemic when municipal services were suspended, but this was not the case everywhere. Relationships between the city and CNPOs appeared to be strengthened by the existence of local networks and formal concertation tables in some neighbourhoods. These were vital points of emergency response, in-

formation sharing, and referral during the pandemic. The survey identifies that the most significant partnerships CNPOs developed and fostered during the pandemic were with other CNPOs (60%; 12 out of 20) and local concertation tables (55%; 11 out of 20). Community nonprofit organizations also partnered with federal (20%; 4 out of 20), provincial (30%; 6 out of 20), municipal (20%; 4 out of 20), and borough (30%; 6 out of 20) governments. Thus, government partnerships were important, but more essential for these CNPOs was the existence of networked groups of local actors who formed a social infrastructure that operated as a local social safety net to support older adults during the pandemic.

Our review of policies reiterates the lack of consistent relationship between CNPOs and the provincial and local governments charged with maintaining AFCs. The provincial plans to support local AFC programs consulted over 200 experts and representatives from nonprofit organizations, but there is no indication that this relationship has been systematized (Gouvernement du Québec, 2018). This provincial plan also promises financial support for cities already pursuing AFC initiatives, though this funding is competitive and for one-off projects (50% eligible expenses up to $75,000 over three years). The Montréal AFC plan in place during the time of this project mentions consulting nonprofits, but it is unclear how many agencies were consulted and if and how this relationship has been maintained (Réalisons Montréal, 2018). While the municipal plan promotes cross-sectoral partnerships, it does not mention the extensive role of the nonprofit sector in age-friendly social infrastructure, and no actions are listed to improve community-municipal cooperation. To make it possible for CNPOs to be partners in AFC policy, the constraints of these organizations must be considered, and their involvement accompanied by a clear action plan along with human and financial resource support. A staff member explained this position:

> … there is a lot of listening, a lot of listening, but things don't change quickly, and for a community organization to invest, say, two years on a project to change … three lines in a document from the city, it's … It's a lot of energy, and I think that's not where we … where our strength lies. But it's certain that we act as a counter-power at a certain point. (CNPOFR04)

Thus, while Québec might be considered a world leader in AFCs, it has work to do to fully understand, incorporate, and support the breadth and diversity of age-friendly social infrastructure in its policy.

Inadequate financial support

Consistent with the literature on CNPO-state relations (Richmond & Shields, 2024), CNPO staff raised considerable challenges around financial support from government. While the federal government is perhaps the most far removed from the everyday lives of older adults and has limited jurisdiction over the key elements of the AFC program, it provides competitive project-based funding that several agencies interviewed have received. Furthermore, some CNPOs received core funding through the province's support for autonomous community action organizations. While this level of support for the nonprofit sector is unique in Canada and should be commended, accessing this funding requires that organizations be of a certain size and degree of professionalization, for instance, having charitable status and audit statements. This can exclude smaller CNPOs that support

particularly marginalized populations, rendering them unable to expand to meet community needs. Those CNPOs that did not receive provincial core funding, either because they were small, recently established, and/or lacked charitable status, advised that the province did not provide adequate support for mission and program funding and had to look to the federal and local government instead. Some staff and policymakers talked about small ad hoc funding from local government for specific community projects and to subsidize rents.

Despite growing needs, funding for CNPOs working with older adults continues to be inadequate and precarious, reflecting similar trends in the literature on nonprofits working with older adults (Joy, 2020; Buffel et al., 2021). According to the survey, 80 percent (16 out of 20) of CNPOs were experiencing funding-related challenges, 60 percent (12 out of 20) identified the lack of long-term funding as a challenge, and 30 percent (6 out of 20) identified short deadlines as a problem. Again, reflecting sector-wide complaints with neoliberal contracting (Evans & Shields, 2018), CNPO staff criticized the move away from core and program funding toward project funding that is short-term, competitive, uncertain, and comes with administrative burdens. Forty percent (8 out of 20) of staff surveyed identified cumbersome reporting as a financial challenge.

> … we're always running on one-off grants where sometimes we're asked to reinvent ourselves, to be creative and so on when sometimes we have a specific mission … it's a bit frustrating to have to reinvent the wheel when you have a program that works … That could just be funded on the mission and on a recurring basis. (CNPOFR01)

Staff spend considerable time searching for and applying for project funding from all three levels of government and different departments, boroughs, agencies, and foundations, which have varying eligibility requirements and guidelines. In the survey, identified challenges were unclear guidelines (25%; 5 out of 20) and cumbersome applications (20%; 4 out of 20). This funding environment is thus highly fragmented and chaotic, and the pandemic exacerbated this with small, short-term emergency grants that required constant re-application. There was also confusion around the timing and communication of funding, as some agencies found out they received money three months after their project was supposed to start, leaving them rushed to prove outcomes.

Project-based funding does not support hiring permanent CNPO staff and fails to consider the staff labour required to find funding opportunities, apply for it by coming up with incessant project innovations, and to hire and train new temporary staff. Funding also inadequately pays these staff members, resulting in considerable turnover. According to the survey, organizational challenges were identified as problems related to staffing (100%; 20 out of 20) as well as recruiting and hiring (35%; 7 out of 20). These staffing challenges are sector-wide (Shields et al., 2024) and create precarity for workers:

> And the working conditions, the salaries, we don't have any social benefits, pension plan, dental programs, health programs, etc. You know, it's not normal, and it's not the fault of the boards of directors, you know, we do what we can with the money we have … That's a little bit disappointing because I find that … we recognize that these are essential services, meals on wheels, home support, but we don't give you the means to do them in decent working conditions. (CNPOFR06)

These systemic problems with CNPO funding and the staff precarity that ensues again illustrate a failure on the part of governments in Québec to adequately support age-friendly social infrastructure as a key component of social welfare.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research illustrates that CNPOs form a local care infrastructure that supports aging in place and serves as a social safety net for many older adults on the island of Montréal. Buffel and Phillipson (2024) thus rightly identify nonprofit organizations as an important component of social infrastructure, and this study reveals that CNPOs do not just exist alongside but facilitate access to other forms of public and private social and physical infrastructure. Through a mix of social participation, service, and advocacy work, CNPOs challenge the intersecting social marginalizations and exclusions that can come with aging in the current sociopolitical context. While social participation initiatives tend to be valued instrumentally in public policy on aging to reduce the social isolation that raises health expenditures (Joy, 2020), the interviews highlight that the ultimate value of this work is in fostering community belonging and connection, identity expression, and skill sharing, and it is of mutual benefit to members as well as volunteers and staff. The proximity of CNPOs to the everyday lives of older adults can create trusting relationships between staff and members that can foster active listening as well as keen observations of policy effects and gaps that can inform policy change. The social participation work done by CNPOs is thus not just nice to have but central to the formation of a potentially transformative local politics rooted in civic participation, redistribution, and social solidarity for people of all ages. A political system and academic discipline that undervalues and underexplores social infrastructure and the local community nonprofit sector fails to recognize both how policy actually works and this transformative potentiality (Smith, 2005).

While the potential for transformative politics is present in CNPO work, the study reveals myriad ways in which this is circumvented in the existing sociopolitical context. Community nonprofit organizations are on the frontlines of systemic policy failures in essential services such as healthcare and housing in a polity that has adopted neoliberalism as a dominant political project (Richmond & Shields, 2024). Moreover, aging, which in an ageist and ableist society can result in marginalization, intersects with identities that have been socially oppressed and have led to difficult and unjust life course experiences. The pandemic has magnified pre-existing policy failures, and the nonprofits in this study have experienced ever more urgent and complex needs from the populations that they work with, especially around mental health and personal care (Hebblethwaite et al., 2021). Many agencies created new programming to meet urgent and new needs during the pandemic, essentially filling gaps in public programs. While the interviews highlight incredible stories of human perseverance and care, this positioning means that CNPO workers and volunteers are expected to martyr themselves because they know that if they were not there, some of their members would not survive. These CNPOs are effectively positioned as a social safety net of last resort. As has been observed sector-wide in Canada (Shields et al., 2024), this has led to new service expectations and additional work for staff, yet the funding is temporary and precarious as the so-called pandemic "emergency" ends, inflation and rents increase, and there are serious workforce and volunteer shortages in the CNPO sector.

As local needs become more emergency-oriented, CNPOs' capacity to offer social participation programs, let alone to engage in political change work, is challenged. The current sociopolitical economy and policy system in Québec is failing to respect this local care infrastructure at the same time as it relies on it and extracts from it for broader system functioning (Hamel & Autin, 2017). The pandemic has illustrated that this functionality is hanging on by a thread, and more specifically on the backs of precarious labour and workers who are beginning to say no for the sake of their own physical and mental health. This research confirms existing studies (Joy, 2020) that argue that the local community nonprofit sector cannot act as both a local and global social safety net. A transformative local social infrastructure requires broader forms of public redistribution and provisioning in the areas of income support, healthcare, affordable and accessible housing, transportation, food security, and technological infrastructure. Community nonprofit organizations can and must inform and partner in the policies and plans that govern these areas of social and physical infrastructure but cannot replace them.

The omission of CNPO staff talking about their work in relation to age-friendly policy is interesting given that social and civic participation is a crucial aspect of the World Health Organization's AFC approach (2007). This means that the everyday practice of age-friendly cities is not fully informing policy and is likely the result of CNPOs not having the capacity to systematically participate in policymaking. Provincial and local AFC policies are equally vague on the role of the nonprofit sector. This research suggests that social infrastructure and the CNPO sector is underexamined and inadequately understood by policymakers as a core component of the social welfare system that supports older adults. Moreover, AFC policy in the Québec and Montréal context, as elsewhere, is not particularly systematic (Ball & Lawler, 2014). Age-friendly cities policy is multidimensional, encompassing social and physical infrastructures that are governed interjurisdictionally. Social services and sociocultural policy are the responsibility of the provincial and municipal governments, and much of the provision is undertaken by CNPOs. Physical infrastructure, such as urban planning, transportation, and housing, is also the responsibility of the provincial and municipal governments, with some involvement from the federal government in the form of regulation and funding. Several domains intersect, such as the provision of social housing for older adults. There is no intergovernmental agenda for aging in place and AFCs in Canada that can align these policy areas more systematically, at least identifying who does what and who funds what. Such a large-scale mapping exercise would be helpful. This exercise must identify the nonprofits that support older adults and the kinds of programs they offer. This would also allow for a clear geographic illustration of where there are gaps in provision. Such a database could be maintained and updated regularly, perhaps by a research institute to maintain a political and administrative separation from government.

This multi-scalar policy mapping exercise must be coupled with tangible support for the nonprofit sector that respects its essential nature and its labour as a core component of social welfare. This includes expanded core funding to support agencies with their missions and program funding that is multi-year and has reasonable reporting requirements, that includes envelopes for staff salaries and benefits and that is adjusted for inflation, as well as funding for technology and for volunteer management and training (Richmond & Shields, 2024). Criteria to access funding should be examined for systematic inequities, such as if requirements for CNPO size, age, and professionalization

limit access for marginalized population groups, with any inequities rectified through program change. This funding must support agencies to have an autonomous political voice, and this could be coupled with regular sector-government meetings and local policy tables that respect CNPO expertise and schedules. Local governments need to be much more systematic in their provision of in-kind support to CNPOs regarding funding and the provision of space. Other levels of government can offer support in their own buildings and with funding to purchase buildings, renovate them to ensure universal accessibility, and rent spaces in private facilities. This could all be systematized in AFC and aging-in-place policy action plans.

This article and research project speak to the need for a wider research agenda in the field of aging-in-place and AFCs on the role of CNPOs and their relations with central and local governments. There is much to learn about local models of mutuality and community care from CNPOs. Such an agenda must examine the full diversity of the sector—nonprofits working with different groups of older adults, on different policy issues, with different leadership and administrative models, and of different size and degree of professionalization—comparing and contrasting the ways in which they support the practice of aging in place and AFCs and how they relate to different governments to do so and the power dynamics involved. This agenda would also examine the political geography of nonprofit provision, comparing how different municipalities, provinces, and nations govern the sector. Specific attention must be placed on the experiences and needs of nonprofit staff and volunteers and how they can be supported and sustained collectively through aging in place and AFC policy.

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Aires ouvertes et collaboration en économie sociale au Québec : une analyse interdisciplinaire dans trois organisations

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ABSTRACT
Social economy enterprises are usually seen as organizations characterized by horizontal management, aiming for social objectives rather than profit maximization. Based on semi-structured interviews (*n* = 25) conducted with three social economy organizations in Montreal, our article examines the advantages and disadvantages of opting for an open-plan space. This choice compensates for the reduced workspace through a hybrid work organization and shared premises among different organizations. We observed the adjustments in balancing the passage to the open-plan office with working from home. Findings suggest that this setup allows for cost savings and suits employees, provided there is some flexibility in their working hours, while offering more opportunities for networking and exchanges. The people working for social economy organizations appear to appreciate this context more than those in the public and private sectors. They are more willing to go to work in these open spaces.

RÉSUMÉ
Les entreprises d'économie sociale sont généralement considérées comme des organisations caractérisées par une gestion horizontale, visant des objectifs sociaux et non la maximisation du profit. Après des entrevues semi-dirigées (*n* = 25) menées auprès de trois organisations d'économie sociale à Montréal, notre article traite des avantages et inconvénients du choix d'une aire ouverte, compensant la perte d'espace par une organisation hybride du travail ainsi que le partage de locaux entre différentes organisations. Nous avons observé les adaptations dans l'articulation entre le retour progressif au sein de l'aire ouverte et le télétravail à domicile. Il en ressort que cet arrangement permet d'économiser des fonds, et convient aux salariés, à condition de préserver une certaine flexibilité dans leur temps de travail, tout en permettant davantage d'échanges et de réseautage. Les personnes travaillant dans ce contexte au sein des organisations d'économie sociale semblent l'apprécier davantage que celles des autres organisations étudiées (dans les secteurs public et privé), et elles s'y présentent plus volontairement.

Keywords / Mots clés social economy, hybridization, telework, working from home, open-plan space / économie sociale, hybridation, aires ouvertes, télétravail, mutualisation

INTRODUCTION

Les champs d'études s'intéressant aux « nouvelles façons de travailler » (La Barbera et Ajzen, 2021; Taskin et al., 2017; Taskin et Tremblay, 2010) invitent à comprendre les enjeux de pouvoir et les relations salariales dans les organisations. Les organisations de l'économie sociale développent elles aussi des aires ouvertes (ou *open spaces*) de travail et des espaces de *coworking*. Cette recherche s'intéresse au travail hybride et à la manière dont les organisations d'économie sociale déploient ces aires ouvertes, en particulier dans un même immeuble à Montréal.

Le concept d'*open space* consiste à éliminer les cloisons afin de réunir les équipes au sein d'un seul et même espace (Benedetto-Meyer et Cihuelo, 2016). La configuration des espaces est déclinée en zones de travail (collaboration, concentration, repos, appels, salles de réunion, etc.) avec un grand espace ouvert où les postes de travail ne sont pas attitrés. À la nouvelle forme d'organisation du travail et aux valeurs coopératives de l'économie sociale s'ajoute la question du télétravail. Cette question touche les fondements du travail ainsi que les pratiques traditionnelles de gestion (Taskin et Tremblay, 2010). C'est ainsi que nos recherches s'intéressent à la multiplication des *open spaces* gérés par des organisations de l'économie sociale qui se regroupent dans un seul grand espace de *coworking*.

Après une revue des écrits sur le sujet, nous nous intéressons aux résultats organisationnels du partage—par trois organisations d'économie sociale à Montréal—d'un espace divisé mais commun d'un immeuble. Nous voyons comment l'aire ouverte peut être pertinente pour les organisations en économie sociale et comment cette mutualisation des espaces peut satisfaire certains objectifs organisationnels, y compris le partage des ressources ou le réseautage, tout en se situant dans le nouveau contexte des organisations hybrides du travail. Nous nous intéressons ainsi aux effets du télétravail associé au mode de travail hybride sur le fonctionnement et le mode de gestion de ces organisations, tenant compte de leur mode de gouvernance particulier et de leurs objectifs de travail ou d'intervention sociale.

ÉTAT DES CONNAISSANCES

L'économie sociale désigne en premier lieu des entreprises se distinguant par le statut juridique : association, groupe, coopérative, mutuelle ou organisme sans but lucratif. Ces différents organismes prévoient légalement la présence d'une assemblée générale et d'un conseil d'administration fonctionnant selon le principe « une personne, une voix » (Hiez, 2014). Dans leurs travaux, Demoustier et Malo (2012), Draperi (2002) et Lévesque (2002) montrent que l'économie sociale recouvre un ensemble d'organisations avec des réalités économiques diverses mais qui partagent certaines valeurs sociales communes. Puisqu'il existe différents modèles de société, l'économie sociale peut y assumer des fonctions contrastées. Cependant, la finalité des organisations d'économie sociale est non pas la maximisation des profits des actionnaires mais la poursuite d'une finalité sociale telle que l'innovation sociale et organisationnelle ou l'utilité sociale (Besançon, 2013; Merlin-Brogniart et al., 2009). Une autre manière d'appréhender l'économie sociale est de s'intéresser aux valeurs fondatrices des organisations de l'économie sociale et solidaire (ESS) (Toucas-Truyen et Boned, 2015), lesquelles développent des activités économiques de type associatif fondées sur des valeurs de solidarité, d'autonomie, de citoyenneté, de démocratie, etc. De plus,

les organisations d'économie sociale souhaitent mettre concrètement en œuvre ces valeurs au sein de leurs propres structures par le biais de modes de gestion particuliers, souvent plus participatifs que dans les entreprises traditionnelles. En effet, d'après Defalvard et al. (2023), un intérêt croissant est porté ces dernières années aux modèles de l'économie sociale et solidaire comme sources de réponses innovantes aux crises sociales, environnementales ou encore sanitaires. Par ailleurs, la Loi sur l'économie sociale au Québec (ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, s. d.; ministère de l'Économie, de l'Innovation et de l'Énergie, s. d.) stipule que la gouvernance dans ces organisations doit être assurée, outre les gestionnaires et certains salariés, par les membres du conseil d'administration. Si les évolutions du contexte socioéconomique génèrent de nouvelles difficultés dans ce domaine de gestion (Noguès, 2006), ces caractéristiques intrinsèques et ces valeurs fondamentales des organisations d'économie sociale sont également des facteurs qui engendrent des enjeux particuliers de gestion et de ressources humaines. Comme le montre l'étude de Glémain et Laville (2010) ainsi que plus récemment celle de Lethielleux et Valéau (2023), les gestionnaires de ces organisations tendent à chercher sans cesse des outils de gestion de ressources humaines (GRH) adéquats afin d'assurer la survie ou le développement de leurs projets; ils doivent rendre cohérents leurs projets associatifs ou coopératifs dans un contexte dominé malgré tout par des logiques de marché, des financements fondés sur des projets précis, donc une gestion par projets, ce qui explique que les entreprises non issues de l'économie sociale peuvent parfois s'inspirer de leurs initiatives ou réponses innovantes.

Gestion différenciée et évolution de la proposition de valeur

Les recherches en gestion des ressources humaines ont tendance à s'intéresser à la gouvernance et aux types de management dans les organisations de l'économie sociale qui se basent sur l'importance majeure de valeurs comme la lutte contre les inégalités, la solidarité et la coopération (Demoustier et Malo, 2012; Everaere, 2011; Everaere et Valéau, 2012; Valéau *et al.*, 2012). Toutefois, on observe une certaine évolution des modes de management en ESS comme ailleurs, mais ici celle-ci peut être expliquée par les réalités hétérogènes des pratiques liées au type de marché et aux personnes qui font l'objet de leurs missions sociales, ces réalités pouvant être parfois contradictoires (Sauvage *et al.*, 2021). En ce qui a trait aux enjeux de gestion, ils sont considérables depuis la pandémie, le travail se faisant de plus en plus sur la base d'une articulation du télétravail à domicile et des rotations des équipes au bureau.

Pour ce qui est des enjeux, Everaere et Valéau (2012) montrent un certain nombre de convergences dans les organisations d'économie sociale et solidaire, comme par exemple la place des valeurs dans les décisions prises en matière de gestion des ressources humaines. Ils expliquent en outre que ces valeurs forgent les projets organisationnels et inspirent des « façons de faire » soucieuses des valeurs sociales. Par conséquent, les questions de gestion et de ressources financières demeurent aussi prégnantes dans l'économie sociale que dans une organisation à but lucratif. Dans leur recherche, Defalvard *et al.* (2023) témoignent quant à eux de la capacité des organisations d'économie sociale et solidaire de proposer un modèle économique, social et politique capable de répondre aux besoins socioéconomiques, en replaçant au cœur de l'organisation l'humain et l'expression démocratique, et non le capital et le pouvoir accordés à ses détenteurs.

Ainsi, la multiplication des aires ouvertes ou *open spaces* s'est étendue au secteur de l'économie sociale et pourrait contribuer à une plus grande mutualisation des pratiques innovantes, ce qui serait à l'avantage des organisations. C'est dans cette perspective de réseautage, d'échanges de connaissances et de pratiques, de créativité et d'innovation que les *open spaces* se sont développés ces dernières années dans tous les secteurs (Krauss et Tremblay, 2024). En ce qui concerne l'économie sociale, plusieurs organisations ont procédé au réaménagement de leurs espaces de travail en considérant le type de modèle d'affaires qui consiste à mettre des idéaux à l'épreuve de l'action et réciproquement (Valéau *et al*., 2012). Pour Valéau *et al*. (2012) justement, ce modèle de l'aire ouverte est vu non seulement comme un outil de conception de l'espace de travail (et souvent de réduction des coûts), mais aussi comme un outil de gestion de l'activité et des salariés. L'activité de travail y est déployée en alternance, entre présence sur place quelques jours par semaine et télétravail les autres jours. Évoquant des motivations basées sur la communication fluide, la transversalité des pratiques ou encore l'autonomie, certaines recherches ont souligné l'adéquation de ce modèle avec les valeurs de l'économie sociale et solidaire (Frimousse et Peretti, 2020a). Ainsi, ces organisations se présentent à la fois comme une alternative économique aux entreprises capitalistes et comme une initiative privée plus proche des besoins des citoyens que plusieurs services publics (Lévesque et Mendell, 2005).

LA GESTION DES RESSOURCES HUMAINES, ENJEU FONDAMENTAL POUR LES ORGANISATIONS D'ÉCONOMIE SOCIALE ET SOLIDAIRE

Si les différents domaines du management sont nécessaires pour assurer le bon fonctionnement de toute entreprise, la gestion des ressources humaines représente un enjeu fondamental pour les organisations de l'ESS en particulier car on s'attend à y trouver une GRH humaniste ou plus soutenante pour les employés (Robert-Huot et Cloutier, 2020; Sauvage et al., 2021; Séguin et al., 2024)—du moins la question mérite-t-elle d'être soulevée (Calvez et Dolidon, 2014; Richez-Battesti et al., 2024). En économie sociale, salariés et bénévoles sont au cœur du processus de production (Chauvière, 2025; Hammi, 2025; Sidibé, 2023). En général, le développement de ces personnes est privilégié par les organisations en économie sociale. Par conséquent, celles-ci sont amenées à développer des pratiques de GRH qui traduisent concrètement cette valeur de primauté des personnes dans les activités de travail.

Ainsi, dans un contexte de concurrence en lien avec de meilleures conditions de travail, de nombreuses organisations misent sur une offre où le télétravail est considéré comme un avantage, voire un privilège. Plusieurs études ont insisté sur le fait de reconsidérer les contrats de travail en mettant en avant le télétravail qui ouvre sur la possibilité de réduire les déplacements (Cléach, 2004; Gangloff-Ziegler, 2009) et ceci s'est accentué suite à la pandémie de Covid-19 (Hansez et al., 2021; Sanae, 2024). On y voit de plus en plus des objectifs de qualité de vie et de meilleure organisation du travail personnel ou encore de conciliation emploi-famille (Tremblay et Mathieu, 2023; Mathieu et Tremblay, 2022), des objectifs souvent importants pour compenser les salaires parfois réduits dans l'ESS (Tremblay, 2017). Ainsi, récemment, à la suite de la pandémie, on a vu apparaître des enjeux organisationnels se révélant importants alors que le télétravail a pu s'étendre environ au tiers des salariés au Québec (Gouvernement du Canada, 2021). Pour ce qui est de la pratique en ressources humaines au sens strict, Jaumier et al. (2018) ont réalisé une étude sur les

pratiques de GRH confrontées aux valeurs coopératives, en s'intéressant à la façon dont les coopératives utilisent concrètement, en situation, les dispositifs de GRH. Les résultats de leurs recherches montrent le travail par lequel les coopérateurs réussissent en pratique à détourner, se réapproprier, et renverser certains dispositifs dont le caractère est essentiellement individualisant et hiérarchique pour les mettre, in fine, au service de la culture collectiviste et démocratique de leur organisation. Certes, la question se pose en contexte de développement du travail à domicile où l'on sépare les individus de leur groupe de travail. En effet, le télétravail, le travail hybride et les aires ouvertes se sont développés aussi dans les entreprises de l'économie sociale et c'est ce qui nous a amenés à étudier l'impact de ce mode d'organisation, en particulier celui des aires ouvertes, dans ce milieu.

Afin d'être concurrentielles dans un contexte de rareté de la main-d'œuvre et de pratiques de plus en plus professionnalisantes, il semble que les organisations d'économie sociale soient contraintes de faire évoluer leurs pratiques de GRH en offrant davantage de flexibilité, donc télétravail et aires ouvertes (permettant plus d'échanges entre les personnes présentes tout en économisant l'espace). De même, si l'économie sociale est un mode entrepreneurial de plus en plus reconnu, son manque de visibilité pose encore un défi. Si le rôle des grands acteurs du secteur est bien démontré dans les résultats de recherche de Sibieude (2007), la création de nouvelles entreprises et leur survie apparaissent comme un enjeu stratégique. En ce sens, le gouvernement du Québec incite au recours aux outils numériques, y compris non seulement les médias sociaux mais aussi les outils de collaboration numérique, pour contribuer à la visibilité et à la reconnaissance de l'économie sociale. En effet, pour ces organisations basées sur des processus démocratiques, le numérique peut faciliter la diffusion, les échanges et la consultation, particulièrement auprès de membres délocalisés géographiquement (Valéau et al., 2012). Le télétravail pourrait donc ne pas constituer un problème sur le plan de l'offre de services comme tels, mais tout dépend du type de service, et il reste à voir comment s'articulent les aires ouvertes et le travail à domicile.

Toutefois, sans négliger l'importance de la gestion par le numérique, l'accent est plutôt mis sur la gestion de l'humain et l'adaptation du travail à l'humain. Après tout, les organisations de l'économie sociale et solidaire n'ont pas pour vocation première de développer des systèmes d'information; si elles le font, c'est avant tout pour répondre à des nécessités opérationnelles (Everaere et Valéau, 2012). Par ailleurs, Toucas et Dreyfus (2005) mettent en relief la créativité des acteurs, empreints de solidarité et de fraternité. Ainsi apparaît le lien potentiel entre les valeurs des porteurs de projet et la gestion de leurs structures. En revanche, peu de travaux ont cherché à étudier les modes d'organisation du travail au sein des organisations de l'économie sociale et solidaire (Combes-Joret et Lethielleux, 2018), sujet qui nous intéresse ici.

Gestion des aires ouvertes et gouvernance démocratique

Il convient de rappeler que la gouvernance démocratique et la vie associative qui la sous-tend sont au cœur du mode de fonctionnement des organisations d'économie sociale. Que ce soit à l'échelle de l'administration, de la gestion ou des activités quotidiennes de l'entreprise, cette gestion démocratique représente un enjeu à part entière (Breton, 2009; Demoustier et Malo, 2012; Gand, 2015). Le processus démocratique est fondé sur la participation de tous, mettant ainsi en

avant des procédures transparentes où peut circuler la libre parole des acteurs (Hiez, 2014; Irosoft, s. d.). Aussi, Laville (2012) distingue les entreprises sociales de celles formées par des actionnaires qui attendent un retour sur leur investissement; en se basant sur le registre associatif, il souligne l'importance accordée à un bien commun autour duquel se rassemblent les membres fondateurs, au même titre que ceux-ci valorisent les processus décisionnels basés sur des principes démocratiques de discussion. Cette même étude soutient que l'association doit trouver la possibilité d'étayer la référence à ce bien commun sur des conceptions partagées et des dispositifs susceptibles de conforter l'action collective initiée par les créateurs (Laville, 2012; Glémain et Laville, 2010). Toutefois, si le gouvernement d'entreprise est un courant de recherche à part entière, très peu de travaux traitent des liens entre la gouvernance et l'organisation du travail dans les entreprises, d'autant moins en se centrant sur les structures de l'économie sociale et solidaire. En effet, la gouvernance des organismes sans but lucratif reste relativement sous-théorisée. Aussi, comme les résultats des travaux de Kerléo (2019) le montrent, la gouvernance de ce type d'organisation sous-entend un contact et une diffusion continue des informations dans une perspective de transparence et d'appropriation par les membres.

Il est à préciser que même pour les entreprises sociales, le télétravail est devenu courant depuis les confinements, et le retour au bureau est prévu en fonction de la rotation des équipes. Cette rotation est la base de la gestion de l'activité sur site et elle est corrélée avec la gestion parallèle du télétravail à domicile. Plusieurs recherches ont soutenu que, depuis le début de la pandémie, cette forme d'organisation deviendrait la nouvelle norme au Canada et ailleurs (Autissier, 2022a; Ball et Harvey, 2022; Bardou et Pelenc, 2024; Choinière et Mohamed, 2024; Tremblay, 2022). Une enquête effectuée dans une administration publique provinciale québécoise souligne la complexité des milieux de travail et l'évolution des besoins des membres du personnel (Calvet et al., 2024). Dans une autres étude récente, des employé(e)s et des gestionnaires de différents secteurs expriment le souhait d'une reconception participative du travail hybride dans lequel alterneraient des périodes d'importance équivalente : celle du travail présentiel pour le maintien de la cohésion et de l'efficacité du collectif de travail, et celle du travail distanciel pour l'accomplissement de tâches nécessitant un environnement silencieux et isolé (Cheyrouze et Tremblay, 2024). C'est dans cette perspective que nous nous intéressons aux effets de l'aire ouverte et du télétravail qui y est associé sur les organisations d'économie sociale.

Par ailleurs, certaines études ont souligné que la gestion des aires ouvertes et son association avec le télétravail est le résultat de l'optimisation des espaces pris comme outils de gestion, en tant qu'espaces modulaires (Bardou et Pelenc, 2024; Bationo-Tillon et al., 2020; Delgenes, 2024; Evoluo, 2024; Lambert, 2022). D'autres études ont montré que des stratégies de gestion sont déployées pour faire correspondre l'espace du travail à la structure organisationnelle (Bationo-Tillon et al., 2020; Sicotte, 2023; Déjean et al., 1988). Distant à la fois de l'entreprise et des supérieurs hiérarchiques, le télétravailleur s'inscrit dans cette évolution (Rey et Sitnikoff, 2006). Dans leurs travaux, Autissier (2022b), Baron (2023) et Benedetto-Meyer et Boboc (2021) montrent que les modifications du travail avec ces changements spatiotemporels et les avancées numériques remettent en question la régulation et les enjeux managériaux liés aux équilibres qui s'opèrent entre présence et distance. D'une part, il est souvent avancé que les aménagements spatiaux suivent

des réformes organisationnelles adoptées en fonction de nouveaux paradigmes économiques et managériaux (Demazière, 2016; Frimousse et Peretti, 2024). Et d'autre part, la transition du mode de travail traditionnel en présentiel vers le travail hybride nécessite l'adoption de nouvelles pratiques encadrant ce nouveau mode de fonctionnement (Frimousse et Peretti, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b; Sanae, 2024). Dans le contexte du travail à domicile, l'autodiscipline tient une place majeure, et le contrôle par la présence des chefs semble perdre de son importance (Essaidi et Chaouki, 2024; Lokiec, 2024), bien que de nouvelles modalités de contrôle se développent. Avec ces changements spatiotemporels, les cadres hiérarchiques et contractuels formels du travail se trouvent recomposés (Aloisi et De Stefano, 2022; Benedetto-Meyer et Boboc, 2021).

MÉTHODOLOGIE ET RÉSULTATS

Nous exposerons ici brièvement la méthodologie employée ainsi que les résultats puis les limites de notre recherche.

Méthodologie

Notre recherche repose sur vingt-cinq entrevues semi-dirigées individuelles de plus d'une heure auprès de trois organisations d'économie sociale et solidaire à Montréal, chacune en expansion et partageant un même espace de *coworking*, en aires ouvertes réparties entre elles. Ces entretiens ont été effectués de février à octobre 2023 : huit ont été menées dans l'organisation 1, onze dans l'organisation 2, et six dans l'organisation 3. Les entretiens ont été tenus directement sur le lieu de travail dans un espace fermé, hormis quelques exceptions où les entretiens ont été effectués sur Zoom ou Teams et ont été enregistrés, et parfois au domicile des personnes interrogées. Ils visaient à rassembler des informations détaillées sur l'organisation du travail, les perceptions et les tendances dans les milieux de travail. L'échantillonnage s'est fait selon le volontariat des employés et des gestionnaires des organisations concernées. Nous avions toutefois formulé la requête—acceptée—de pouvoir nous entretenir avec au moins deux gestionnaires dans chaque organisation. Au bout du compte, nous avons pu interroger cinq gestionnaires. (Cependant, le mot « gestionnaire » n'est pas employé comme fonction; on emploie plutôt celui de coordonnateur ou chef de projet.) Les trois organisations sont issues du monde associatif et elles ont toutes un conseil d'administration. Dans deux des organisations, les directeurs ont le titre de coordinateur ou coordinatrice. Les salariés des trois organisations sont chargés de projet ou de mission, responsables de secteurs d'intervention, médiateurs ou médiatrices et responsables de production. Deux organisations ont des directeurs généraux. Quant à la troisième, celui qui fait office de directeur général a le titre de coordinateur général. Il est à noter que sur les 25 personnes interrogées, 20 étaient des femmes (soit environ 80 % du total), à l'image des aires ouvertes étudiées où les salariés mâles étaient minoritaires (tout comme de l'économie sociale au Québec, où les femmes sont plus présentes en général).

Pour entrer en interaction avec les personnes interrogées, nous avons suivi au mieux les règles de sociabilité propres aux divers milieux (Broustau et Le Cam, 2012). Un formulaire de consentement garantissant l'anonymat a été signé par les personnes interrogées, d'où l'utilisation ici de prénoms fictifs et l'anonymisation des organisations, que nous avons numérotées. Nous avons aussi enlevé

ou modifié tous les éléments susceptibles de rendre reconnaissables les organisations, sans pour autant influer sur les résultats présentés. Le cas échéant, nous avons indiqué dans les citations si la personne interrogée faisait section de la section dirigeante de l'organisation en mentionnant son statut de gestionnaire.

La transcription des entretiens a été faite manuellement. Nous avons indiqué dans le présent article toute élision des propos par des points de suspension. Les transcriptions établies, une découpe thématique a été opérée (Paillé, 2017) en fonction des thèmes émergeants, en l'occurrence ici la flexibilité et l'hybridation au travail caractéristiques de l'économie sociale ou encore la relation des salariés avec leurs gestionnaires. Notons qu'en ce qui concerne les trois organisations étudiées, celles-ci étaient toutes très flexibles sur le plan des horaires : hormis pour l'organisation 1 où les salariés pouvaient télétravailler pour autant de jours qu'ils le souhaitaient, dans les organisations 2 et 3, on leur demandait de venir seulement un jour par semaine (alors que c'était plutôt 2 et maintenant 3 dans le secteur public). Au fait, la norme était de 2 jours dans la fonction publique au moment des entretiens, puis de 3 jours à compter de 2025, ce qui correspond à la moyenne observée actuellement au Canada et au Québec en incluant le privé (données de Statistique Canada).

Vu les limites d'espace pour cet article, nous présentons ici uniquement les citations qui nous semblent les plus représentatives de l'ensemble des entrevues et des idées principales qui s'en dégagent.

RÉSULTATS

Trois résultats principaux concernant les pratiques organisationnelles se sont dégagés des entrevues réalisées au sein de ces trois organisations, ce qui permet de mettre en évidence les apports majeurs de cette recherche. D'abord, l'aire ouverte et le travail hybride se prêtent très bien aux missions des organisations étudiées et les entreprises et employés de l'économie sociale se sont bien adaptés aux transformations du travail, y compris au développement du télétravail, depuis la pandémie. Deuxièmement, l'aire ouverte est assez flexible pour accueillir différents types de management, de sorte qu'on observe quelques différences selon le type de service offert par ces entreprises d'ESS. Enfin, troisièmement, le partage des espaces permet aussi des échanges plus fournis que les bureaux fermés, et donc une potentielle cohésion ou synergie au sein de différents projets d'une ESS, mais aussi entre les diverses organisations d'ESS, selon leurs intérêts.

Aire ouverte et travail hybride, un espace propice à l'économie sociale et à la collaboration

Le premier point saillant issu de notre recherche est que tous les salariés ont indiqué apprécier le partage des espaces, qui permet aussi de partager des idées, et ils s'y sont très bien adaptés. L'espace partagé dans l'aire ouverte renforce le collectif au sein des équipes tout en respectant les besoins individuels. Il en ressort que l'espace partagé encourage les interactions informelles. Les employés peuvent échanger des idées et résoudre des problèmes ensemble :

> Ouais, il y a l'idée qu'on partageait l'espace avec [l'organisation 1] puis que l'on ait accès à toutes les salles, qu'il y ait des cercles plus créatifs, pleins de petits coins et que c'est très festif parce que ça ressemble à un espace bouillonnant et, si on a besoin d'espace calme, on utilise les salles de concentration. (Anna, O2)

Cet environnement de travail peut également renforcer la culture organisationnelle et promouvoir les valeurs communes de l'économie sociale. La proximité physique favorise le partage de l'information et la cohésion d'équipe, renforçant ainsi l'engagement des collaborateurs envers la philosophie de l'ESS :

> On a créé le comité social, on a créé un comité de développement durable, on a d'autres directeurs ou directrices des autres organisations. … Donc il y a des questions de l'ordre pratique qui sont discutées plus sur du logistico-logistique. On essaie de trouver en fait des projets conjoints qu'on pourrait mener ensemble. Ça, c'est mon objectif. (Nyx, gestionnaire, O1)

En complément, ils ont aussi vanté les mérites de la possibilité de télétravailler. Que ce soit la possibilité de mener leurs activités sociales sur le terrain, de mieux se concentrer chez soi ou de profiter du confort de pouvoir rester chez soi sans avoir à se déplacer, tout le monde a été unanime quant à la nécessité de préserver cette flexibilité du travail hybride qui est en soi attirante. À ce titre, Tirésias dit :

> On a trente employés dans [l'organisation 1] environ, donc il y a plusieurs cultures d'équipe. … Puis, ben selon les équipes, les gens ont envie de se rencontrer une fois par semaine, les gens ont envie de se rencontrer. Il y a des personnes qui ne veulent pas travailler à la maison, qui veulent travailler uniquement au bureau, il y a des personnes qui comme moi en fait ne peuvent pas perdre autant de temps, donc c'est pas mal ça. (Tirésias, gestionnaire, O1)

Et Circé d'ajouter :

> En fait, ce qui est plus important pour moi, c'est la flexibilité. C'est que si, mettons, j'ai un rendez-vous, ben je vais préférer être chez moi parce que ça va être plus proche de chez moi par exemple. C'est d'avoir la possibilité de le faire … (Circé, O2)

On souligne aussi l'intérêt de voir d'autres personnes, indiquant que ceci peut rendre le travail de bureau plus attrayant pour les jeunes :

> Il faut comprendre que les métiers de bureau, ce n'est pas toujours ça qui attire les jeunes, alors c'est un fait. Dans le fond, ce n'est pas nécessairement le fun des fois d'être dans un bureau pour 34 heures ou 40 heures dans une semaine. (Hélène, O3)

On met aussi en évidence la possibilité d'alimenter l'innovation dans un tel contexte ouvert et flexible :

> Là, il y a un esprit libertaire par l'organisation qui alimente l'innovation, alimente le fait de la transgression, l'exploration. Puis on veut rester là-dedans. On veut que les gens n'aient pas, ne sentent pas qu'ils ont besoin de se justifier s'ils ne sont pas là parce qu'ils sont sur un terrain, parce qu'elle a besoin ce matin-là, ou parce que tu sais, ils vont prendre des heures à un autre moment. (Ulysse, gestionnaire, O3)

Si cette flexibilité horaire à l'image de la flexibilité spatiale est partagée, il est toutefois à souligner que dans chacune des organisations ou équipes, les intéressés se sont concertés pour se réunir régulièrement, la fréquence étant propre à chaque organisation. Ce désir de se rencontrer pour

échanger semble d'ailleurs plus fréquent dans le cas de ces organisations d'ESS que dans d'autres organisations, qu'elles soient publiques ou privées, que nous avons étudiées en sus dans cette recherche sur les aires ouvertes. Il semble que le projet d'économie sociale comme tel incite les gens à venir au bureau plus souvent que dans les organisations publiques ou privées que nous avons étudiées par ailleurs, où le sens de mener à bien un projet collectif semble moins présent que dans l'ESS. À ce titre, Lili dit :

> L'équipe Vénus, c'est vraiment toujours le mercredi, quelques-uns le lundi. Puis la gang [l'équipe], là, de la coalition Saturne ne sont jamais là le lundi, ils sont là toujours les mardis et jeudis. … C'est vraiment en fonction des rencontres d'équipes et tout, mais ça reste qu'on a par exemple les activités qui nécessitent tout le monde … (Lili, O1)

Il y a donc des moments de travail isolé, de concentration à domicile, puis des moments de présence au bureau pour des collaborations, des échanges collectifs et selon les termes d'un gestionnaire, des temps « d'effervescence » :

> Mais donc il y a vraiment une grande liberté, puis une grande flexibilité au niveau du télétravail, ce qui je pense est apprécié des employés. Ce qui vient ou ce qui crée parfois des défis. C'est un enjeu qui peut se poser, mais les mercredis par exemple, presque tout le monde est là, [cela] fait que c'est l'effervescence. (Ulysse, gestionnaire, O3)

Le travail peut aussi se faire dans des endroits plus propices aux échanges qu'un bureau individuel classique, allant même jusqu'à la cafétéria, où l'environnement plus informel peut faciliter les échanges. On choisit généralement les journées de présence afin de rencontrer d'autres collègues :

> Les locaux en aire ouverte étant relativement restreints, notons que les équipes s'adaptent. Si le choix du lieu entre en compte, comme avec la cafétéria citée plus haut, le choix de ces journées peut aussi se faire en fonction des autres équipes afin que tout le monde ne soit pas présent simultanément.
>
> On a nos petites habitudes en fait là, mais moi je viens les mercredis parce que je sais qu'il va y avoir plus de places le mercredi. Puis notre équipe, on s'est dit que ça allait être notre journée; si on voulait venir pour se rencontrer, ça serait ça. Puis ça a été un peu une journée par défaut parce qu'une autre équipe avait choisi le mardi … (Guenièvre, O1)

En fin de compte, l'aire ouverte joue deux rôles : réunir les différents salariés pour qu'ils puissent travailler ensemble et leur permettre de socialiser. Certains employés confirment ces propos :

> Donc c'est sûr qu'il y a possibilité de le faire à distance mais vu que, contrairement à l'endroit où je travaillais au cours des derniers mois, je peux me rendre quelque part parce qu'avant c'était uniquement à distance … Donc si je peux me rendre quelque part pour rencontrer des gens, alors je me suis dit : « Au lieu de faire la rencontre à distance, c'est mieux d'être là face à face. » (Nyx, gestionnaire, O1)
>
> Je suis en binôme en fait avec mon collègue [Pollux], on est tous les deux dans le département des partenariats. Donc on traite les mêmes dossiers en fait, c'est un tout. … Je travaille avec tout le monde et c'est très important aussi que j'aie de l'information en fait. Je

> suis comme dans ce poste-là et si je viens plus au bureau, c'est parce que j'ai besoin d'avoir des infos, de voir ce qui se passe au travail et puis d'avoir les conversations de bureau. (Clytemnestre, O3)
>
> Ben moi, je viens surtout pour le social. J'trouve que ça aide beaucoup la fluidité des projets, les échanges … Ça enrichit beaucoup les projets … (Guenièvre, O1)
>
> Et j'étais en colocation, donc j'avais beaucoup aussi de rapports sociaux au quotidien. Là maintenant j'ai mon propre appartement, que … Ben si je travaille de la maison, ben je peux ne pas parler à qui que ce soit de la journée, ça peut être très long. Et là en fait, je sais qu'en quinze minutes de vélo, vingt minutes à pied, ben en fait, je peux très facilement avoir des échanges, être dans des super locaux. (Hector, O2)

Différents types de management possibles dans l'aire ouverte

Un deuxième point que nous pouvons mettre en avant est que l'aire ouverte permet aussi d'exercer différents types de management. Ainsi, les gestionnaires n'ont pas à modifier leurs pratiques; ils peuvent continuer à exercer leur style de management. C'est d'autant plus important que lorsqu'on fait partie d'une organisation d'économie sociale, tout le monde est porté par un but commun. La taille réduite des organisations va aussi dans ce sens de proximité, de collaboration et d'échanges réguliers, mais parfois sous des formes différentes.

À titre d'illustration, les trois organisations fonctionnent différemment, notamment en raison de leurs missions de natures différentes et de l'activité différenciée des gestionnaires. Dans la première, ce qui importe est le livrable, peu importe la présence au bureau. À titre personnel, le gestionnaire principal peut ne pas venir à l'occasion sur le lieu de travail :

> Je pense que c'est comme tout recrutement en fait : on a la possibilité de notre côté de regarder les livrables. … C'est en fonction des livrables qu'on peut juger de la qualité du travail des gens et puis leur ambition aussi au sein de l'[organisation 1]. (Tirésias, gestionnaire, O1)
>
> Donc le fait d'avoir tous les gens réunis dans le même espace, je pense que pour un gestionnaire, ça a une valeur de contrôle—valeur de contrôle dont je n'ai pas besoin … . Pour moi, je ne contrôle pas les personnes, je contrôle le livrable, le travail. Du moment que le livrable est remis, je peux voir ce qui a été fait. (Nyx, gestionnaire, O1)

Dans la deuxième organisation, le gestionnaire principal est toujours présent et l'équipe a tendance à l'imiter, ne remettant tout de même aucunement en cause la flexibilité susmentionnée :

> Et là par exemple Arthur [le directeur général] a dit : « Ben vous pouvez faire comme moi, vous pouvez parfois vous installer dans la cafétéria, vous pouvez faire comme ça. » Ça je sais qu'il y en a qui ont pris des habitudes aussi par rapport à ça. (Calypso, O2)
>
> Surtout que ce qui est drôle, c'est que c'est souvent Arthur qui dit qu'il n'y a pas de places. … Il n'y a pas de places assignées mais au final, il s'assied tout le temps à la même place. Mais bon, on le fait tous un peu. … T'sais dans le fond, je pense que ça peut s'expliquer mais aussi je pense que c'est comme quand on dit « Faites … Faites ce que je dis, pas ce que je fais. » Mais étant donné que lui bouge pas beaucoup, peut-être que nous aussi … (Nausicaa, O2)

Et dans la troisième organisation, le précédent gestionnaire, désormais membre de l'assemblée générale, a choisi de se retirer justement du fait qu'il ne voulait pas trop influer sur ses employés qui suivaient son exemple en travaillant à son rythme, difficilement soutenable pour la plupart :

> Avec [Andromède] qui est l'autre cofondatrice, au début on était deux et on travaillait 70 heures [par] semaine; on aimait ça, pas de problème. Quand on a accueilli une personne, deux personnes, trois personnes dans l'équipe, on a continué à maintenir ça parce que pour nous, c'était cool, c'était le fun. Ben voilà, rapidement, on s'est rendu compte qu'on était nocifs parce qu'en même temps, on établissait une culture et un rythme de travail qui n'étaient pas supportables. Le plus grand dénominateur commun est qu'à partir de là, on a défini toutes sortes de mesures et de politiques pour réussir le travail dans une optique de bien-être et de collaboration et sur la base de principes. (Nestor, gestionnaire, O3)

Aires ouvertes et *coworking*, des synergies possibles

Évidemment, le lieu de travail peut se révéler crucial pour les organisations. Par la mutualisation des locaux et les coûts qui deviennent moindres, les organisations peuvent se positionner dans des lieux plus spacieux ou mieux situés, tout en pouvant créer des synergies et des échanges entre elles, développer des collaborations ou des échanges d'idées, ou des activités communes, tel que rapporté ci-dessous :

> Et en fait, parmi les choses qui ont fait qu'ils ont déménagé et le fait de venir ici, c'est vraiment l'intérêt de sociabilisation et d'être avec d'autres organismes et pouvoir profiter du fait de croiser d'autres organismes, pas que d'un point de vue professionnel mais vraiment d'un point de vue liens sociaux. (Judith, O2)

> Objectif numéro 1 : de notre côté, offrir un espace inspirant, aéré, beau, dans lequel les employés de l'[organisation 1] puissent se reconnaître et aimer travailler. Ça, c'était la première chose. La deuxième chose, c'était trouver un espace qui soit dans un quartier relativement central dans lequel il y a une qualité de vie, aussi dans lequel les gens puissent se reconnaître. Troisième chose : créer un espace dans lequel on puisse faire venir des partenaires avec lesquels on crée des synergies à travers une multitude de projets et des synergies qui se font à différents niveaux; et la quatrième chose, c'était de réduire les dépenses de [l'organisation 1] en matière de location d'espace. (Tirésias, gestionnaire, O1)

On note toutefois que, bien qu'ils soient un objectif, les échanges entre organisations ne se font pas spontanément, pas plus en ESS que dans des organisations plus classiques. Il semble que cette possibilité exige du temps, de la confiance et aussi la création d'occasions pour se rencontrer, par exemple par l'établissement d'un comité social :

> Le fait de venir ici a pour lui [le directeur général] vraiment l'intérêt de socialisation et d'être avec d'autres organismes et pouvoir profiter du fait de croiser d'autres organismes, pas que d'un point de vue professionnel mais vraiment d'un point de vue liens sociaux et de profiter en fait de juste cette ouverture-là. Et depuis c'était vraiment cet objectif-là et justement, il se rend compte que, bien qu'il y ait des choses qui se sont mises en place, notamment le comité social qu'on a mis en place, avec quelques activités, l'équipe ne s'investit

> pas tant dans ces activités-là et depuis, c'est pas une frustration, mais c'est un petit [peu] une petite déception de sa part, donc on essaie de voir ensemble … Enfin, il me laisse le mandat de comment on peut inciter un peu plus le monde à déjà créer du lien en équipe ici et ensuite à créer aussi avec d'autres organismes. (Thétis, O2)

L'objectif de création de liens et d'échanges avec d'autres organismes est donc important pour les gestionnaires et ils tentent d'animer des échanges et collaborations afin de profiter des aires ouvertes pour créer des synergies, mais ils reconnaissent ne pas toujours pouvoir le faire :

> C'est certain que c'est intéressant de pouvoir avoir des mariages de pleins d'organismes. L'aire ouverte aussi c'est éclairé, je pense qu'il y a quelque chose qui respire plus. Ça crée un lieu qui est agréable, convivial. T'sais, c'est certain que moi, même à l'autre endroit, je me mélange pas trop avec les autres organismes souvent là, t'sais. Pourtant je suis pas de nature fermée … (Nausicaa, O2)

> Je vois comme plein d'autres gens, d'autres organisations, mais j'ai pas eu l'occasion encore de beaucoup les rencontrer. Il y a un club social, des choses qu'ont été mises en branle mais ça a jamais comme adonné que je puisse socialiser. (Hébé, O1)

Il y a donc bien un objectif de profiter des lieux ouverts pour développer des collaborations et des synergies, mais tous reconnaissent que les habitudes de travail isolé ne se transforment pas si facilement et qu'il faudra travailler encore sur ce plan pour véritablement accroître les synergies entre les organisations de l'ESS.

DISCUSSION

En période de restrictions budgétaires, il paraît opportun que les entreprises sociales étudiées se soient regroupées pour mutualiser certains coûts. Toutefois, elles font face à un problème dont la solution pourrait à long terme entraîner de nouveaux problèmes. En effet, l'occasion de créer des synergies et des projets en commun (laquelle est souhaitée, bien qu'elle en soit à ses balbutiements) est difficile à mettre en place en raison du poids des habitudes de travail en isolement, même si elle est désormais possible (Sauvage et al., 2021; Taskin, 2025). Si, grâce à l'ouverture des espaces, certains partages ont été réalisés du point de vue de la gestion, la situation pourrait engendrer des difficultés logistiques si le nombre d'employés augmentait, ce qui semble prévu; il faudrait alors mieux planifier les moments de présence de chaque personne ou équipe, et organiser davantage les présences et le télétravail afin de développer les synergies (Ball et Harvey, 2022; Bouba-Olga et Grossetti, 2008; Burret et Pierre, 2014). Cela pourrait contribuer à créer des moments de partage, ou par exemple des moments de mise en commun des pratiques et initiatives. Si le partage d'aires ouvertes est intéressant, il ne faut pas oublier la dimension logistique : une fois encore, le numérique paraît aujourd'hui porteur de solutions, puisque les personnes peuvent travailler quelques jours chez elles ou ailleurs, ce qui plaît à plusieurs, mais les personnes peuvent aussi venir travailler en équipe ou échanger avec les collègues de leur organisation ou d'une des autres organisations, mettant en commun leurs idées et pratiques dans une perspective d'innovation ou d'amélioration des services ou produits offerts. En permettant aux employés de différentes organisations d'interagir, ces espaces deviennent des lieux d'apprentissage où les individus peuvent découvrir de nouvelles méthodes de travail, des approches ou des outils différents et créer des réseaux professionnels

plus larges, favorisant ainsi l'innovation sociale souvent recherchée par les entreprises d'économie sociale (Bouba-Olga et Grossetti, 2008; Capo-Chichi et al., 2022). En comparaison d'autres aires ouvertes que nous avons étudiées dans les secteurs public et privé, nous avons observé que les personnes passaient plus de temps dans les aires ouvertes en économie sociale, alors qu'elles y étaient moins obligées que dans le public et le privé, où l'obligation de deux jours—et maintenant trois jours—de présence par semaine est imposée. Pourtant, dans les secteurs public et privé étudiés, les employés sont plus négatifs face à cette obligation de travailler sur place.

Même si plusieurs ont évoqué le début d'échanges et de partages entre organisations, il semble qu'il y ait encore beaucoup à faire pour développer ces échanges davantage. Les travaux sur les aires ouvertes et le *coworking* ont montré que le partage d'un espace ne suffit pas toujours, et qu'il faut parfois développer l'animation et les activités pour augmenter les échanges d'idées, les collaborations et d'autres sources possibles d'innovation (Krauss et Tremblay, 2019; Tremblay et Krauss, 2024).

Limites

Comme toute étude, cette recherche présente certaines limites. La première concerne l'échantillon : seulement trois organisations ont été étudiées et on ne peut pas prétendre qu'elles représentent l'ensemble des organisations de l'économie sociale. Ensuite, ces organisations sont relativement petites, ce qui nous empêche de pouvoir généraliser quant à la pertinence d'une aire ouverte au-delà des organisations d'économie sociale à effectifs modérés ou faibles. Des recherches futures pourraient permettre d'agrandir l'échantillon et de le diversifier. Aussi, des comparaisons pourraient se faire avec d'autres recherches à l'échelle provinciale, nationale et internationale.

CONCLUSION

Nous avons vu que les organisations en économie sociale pouvaient trouver des avantages à partager leurs espaces entre elles, puisque cette pratique permet aussi de partager des idées ou des pratiques. Ainsi elles peuvent très bien réaliser leur projet dans des aires ouvertes qui leur permettent par surcroît de réduire certains coûts. Si des réunions d'équipe s'avèrent nécessaires, l'aire ouverte et le bureau deviennent par la même occasion des lieux de socialisation. En même temps, le télétravail et la flexibilité des horaires sont recherchés par les employés de l'économie sociale comme par ceux d'autres secteurs, surtout depuis la pandémie, ces conditions étant devenues un élément clé de la qualité d'un emploi. L'originalité de cette recherche se situe justement dans l'analyse du partage de locaux par différentes entreprises dans le nouveau contexte de travail hybride, ce qui peut faciliter la réalisation des objectifs sociaux des entreprises d'ESS, voire de l'innovation sociale, mais à coûts réduits. Sa nouveauté réside dans ce qu'elle apporte comme connaissances sur le travail hybride, devenu plus populaire à la suite de la pandémie de Covid-19, mais relativement peu étudié à ce jour.

Avec des effectifs réduits, l'aire ouverte permet aux employés d'observer les pratiques des uns et des autres, des gestionnaires comme des employés, tout en laissant une bonne marge de manœuvre à chaque personne, du moins dans ces trois organisations. Partager les locaux avec d'autres organisations est une belle occasion, mais nous avons pu constater que cette collaboration ne se fait pas naturellement, même si l'ESS est considérée comme ayant tendance à développer le col-

lectif et les biens communautaires. Il semble que, là comme ailleurs, il faut du temps pour développer des pratiques, voire une stratégie partagée, qui pourraient porter leurs fruits à moyen ou long terme. Bien que nous n'ayons qu'un nombre de cas limités, et peut-être une situation particulière, nous avons constaté que les personnes des organisations d'économie sociale travaillant dans ce contexte semblent apprécier celui-ci davantage que celles des autres organisations étudiées, et elles se présentent davantage volontairement pour travailler sur place. Cette observation serait à approfondir dans de futures recherches, mais ce serait peut-être parce que le travail collaboratif est davantage apprécié dans ce cas.

Une limite évidente du travail hybride en aire ouverte serait la logistique, à savoir que tant qu'il n'y a pas beaucoup de personnes dans les bureaux, comme c'est le cas depuis la pandémie et la généralisation du télétravail, la flexibilité dans l'occupation des espaces ne pose aucun problème. S'il devait y avoir plus de personnes se présentant régulièrement au bureau ou davantage d'embauches d'employés, la situation pourrait devenir plus complexe, mais pas du tout insoluble, car il existe aujourd'hui une multitude de logiciels permettant de réserver les places, et ainsi de planifier les présences à tout moment. Il est aussi possible de prévoir des moments de rencontres et de socialisation, surtout si l'on veut chercher à profiter des espaces ouverts pour accroître la socialisation mais aussi l'échange de bonnes pratiques et initiatives, ce qui pourrait mener à davantage d'innovation sociale dans ces entreprises d'ESS.

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Social Validation as a Key Process to Participatory and Engaged Research: Learning from a Brazilian Academic Program

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ABSTRACT

Participatory and engaged research is an approach in which the traditional boundaries between subject (the one who investigates) and object (the one being investigated) are intentionally blurred and both construct purpose and knowledge. In this type of inquiry, the researcher—alongside research participants—not only analyzes or interprets social reality but actively seeks to transform it. While this approach poses significant challenges, particularly as direct engagement with the field is often seen as a threat to research validity, this article advocates for its value as a powerful methodological strategy for scholars committed to social change. It introduces the concept of social validation, which supports the legitimate recognition of collaborative research not only within academia but also by the communities involved.

RÉSUMÉ

La recherche participative et engagée est une approche où les frontières traditionnelles entre le sujet (celui qui enquête) et l'objet (celui qu'on enquête) sont intentionnellement brouillées, les deux collaborant à développer autant l'objectif que le savoir. Dans ce type d'enquête, le chercheur, aux côtés des participants à la recherche, ne se contente pas d'analyser ou d'interpréter la réalité sociale, il cherche à la transformer. Bien que cette approche pose des défis importants, notamment parce qu'un tel engagement sur le terrain est souvent considéré comme une entrave pour la validité de la recherche, cet article défend sa valeur en tant que stratégie méthodologique puissante pour tout chercheur engagé dans le changement social. L'article introduit le concept de validation sociale, qui appuie la reconnaissance légitime de la recherche collaborative non seulement par le monde universitaire, mais aussi par les communautés concernées.

Keywords / Mots clés : social validation, participatory research, engaged research, South America, Brazil / validation sociale, recherche participative, recherche engagée, Amérique du Sud, Brésil

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INTRODUCTION

In a global context of increasing social inequalities, economic precariousness and climate disasters, more and more academic communities have been concerned with the concrete social impact of their research. The so-called "relevance gap" has led numerous researchers to rescue principes of different forms of participatory inquiry, arguing for the value of a more engaged posture (Pozzebon, 2018). The "participatory turn" is one of the answers of scholars concerned with the social impact of their research and their connection to the investigated field (Alperstedt & Andion, 2017; Wittmayer & Schäpke, 2014). Our first goal in this article is to place participatory and engaged research as a privileged methodological strategy for scholars seeking to promote social change (Pozzebon, Tello-Rozas, & Heck, 2021; Saldanha, Pozzebon & Delgado, 2022). Among the several streams of participatory or collaborative inquiry, we found our main inspiration in the Latin American thinkers Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire, who radically and critically subvert the separation researcher/researched or subject/object. This approach, nonetheless, faces many challenges since, from a more traditional "scientific" perspective, the researcher's direct involvement is often considered to undermine the validity of the entire research process. Additionally, it demands legitimate acceptance from not only the academy but also the community (Pozzebon, 2018).

The recurrent challenges that the direct engagement of researchers with their field and the consequent tenuous separation between researchers and researched bring to the legitimacy of participatory modes of research lead to the authors' second goal: a search for appropriate validity criteria and process for engaged research. We propose a conceptualization of research's social validation that promotes a comprehensive understanding of the activities and roles of engaged researchers, thus taking an important step towards the development of a set of sensitizing principles to guide and evaluate research of collaborative nature. Therefore, the research question guiding this work is: *How to conceptualize and operationalize social validation to increase the legitimacy of participatory and engaged modes of research?*

The empirical inspiration for this article comes from a fieldwork with Polos de Cidadania (hereafter Polos), an academic and practice-oriented program headquartered at a Brazilian Federal University. Polos is a transdisciplinary program of teaching, applied social research, and community service that, for the last 27 years, has been practicing engaged research, with social validation as one of its key operating principles in complex social and environmental conflicts.

Our study seeks to contribute to both management and third sector fields, particularly in studies on non-profit and social economy, by the articulation of engaged research and social validation from a perspective that has been under-explored in those literatures. The results show a set of practices and principles to guide practitioners and researchers involved with social change, clearly supporting Canadian and international researchers and collaborators in the development and dissemination of insights that can enhance the impact of nonprofit and social economy sectors. This article begins by positioning the authors' understanding of engaged research and then moves on to the conceptualization of social validation. It then presents a methodological design, and describes an instrumental case study, the Polos program. Finally, the authors systematize practical examples for the application of social validation, with a brief discussion of the implications for research, and conclude with some final remarks.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This work focuses on two central topics: 1) participatory and engaged research, and 2) social validation. The aim of this literature review is to summarize the main ideas and authors and to identify principles and practices that might be organized in a frame to inspire scholars and practitioners seeking to address the concept.

PARTICIPATORY MODES OF RESEARCH

> I am talking about a research standpoint where the separation between the researcher and other social actors (citizens, militants, users, beneficiaries, or otherwise) become meaningless. The division between the subject (one that investigates) and the object (one that is investigated) somehow disappears. Both subject and object construct purpose and knowledge. The researcher's positioning and values are not just activated to analyze or interpret social reality, but to transform it. Again, and not by chance, this kind of qualitative inquiry is not easily justified as valid in the view of numerous academic communities. The engagement and direct involvement of the researcher is often seen as a barrier to the construction of a legitimate knowledge. (Pozzebon, 2018, p. 2)

Criticisms around the lack of direct and practical relevance of the academic work has led several authors to defend the valorization of a more active and engaged academic researcher (Alperstedt & Andion, 2017), seeking to place the needs and voices of communities at the centre of the research process and to position researchers as participants who actively collaborate on the transformative goals of social action (Tripp, 2005). Based on the premise that research and political engagement can be mutually enriching, activist scholarship is known by many names, including participatory inquiry, action research, feminist participatory research, participatory action research, participatory rural appraisal, clinical research, praxis research, experiential learning, and cooperative inquiry, to name a few (Pozzebon, 2018; Collins & Bilgem 2020).

Despite all the existing terms, *action research* is often considered an umbrella concept that encompasses a wide variety of approaches as well as diverse theoretical influences, including pragmatism, critical theory, liberal humanism, phenomenology, and social constructivism (Reason & Bardbury, 2008). Although there is no consensus on who first presented the concept of action research, its roots are attributed to the German psychologist Kurt Lewin, who in the late 1940s published the article "Action Research and Minority Problems" (Lewin, 1946). In the countries of the Global North, Lewin-inspired approaches have focused on organizational reform and industrial democracy, proposing social changes to improve working conditions (Tripp, 2005).

Approaches from the Global South propose emancipatory methods as a means of overcoming dual relationships, such as oppressors/oppressed and colonizers/colonized (Park, 1999). In this context, Freire and Fals Borda stand out. The latter is known for the methodology labeled "*investigación acción participativa*" (IAP) or, in English, participatory action research (PAR) (Cichoski & Alves, 2019). A central conception of Fals Borda deserves attention: *sentirpensar* and *sentirpensante* (Dulci & Malheiros, 2021). The term was retrieved from riverine peoples on the Colombian Atlantic coast and refers to subjects who combine reason and feeling in the production of knowledge (Fals Borda, 2015). In practice, *feeling/thinking* means challenging traditional dichotomous reasoning/feelings

in academic research. This means that researchers do not conduct the research process in a purely rational manner but rather act and decide by listening to their feelings and emotions together with those of community members (Bringel & Maldonado, 2016).

For Freire (2001), dialog is the essence of a humanizing education and emerges from acting and reflecting. Community members, who in traditional research are limited to being passive objects, instead actively participate in the process, providing their opinions and making decisions together with the academic researcher who, in turn, acts as a facilitator to help local actors identify their problems and turn them into a well-defined topic for investigation. This posture encourages genuine and complete involvement, in addition to mutual learning, on both sides (Pozzebon, 2018). Dialog, therefore, plays a fundamental role in the practice of engaged research, allowing different views of the world to be heard and debated and promoting critical thinking. This posture might also promote the exercise of empathy, love, humility, and tolerance (Mota Neto & Streck, 2019).

Freire and Fals Borda propose that the production of knowledge is not a process of "discovering" reality but rather a strategy for critically reading and transforming the world (Mota Neto & Streck, 2019). In this posture, a change in the distribution of power and resources toward a more horizontal relation is essential to eliminate poverty and oppression, and this happens only when people use their knowledge to participate systematically and critically in overcoming their problems (Pozzebon, 2018). Therefore, a key practice of engaged research is the co-construction of knowledge: each participant contributes his or her expertise—local or academic knowledge—in a dialogical and reflexive process (Mota Neto & Streck, 2019).

In this article, although the authors acknowledge that *participatory research* is a term widely accepted and conveys the vision of research-building we adhere to, on several occasion this article also uses the term *engaged* research, to reinforce an action-inquiry that combines a constructivist epistemology with a critical orientation along the lines of Freire and Fals Borda. The main objective of participatory and engaged research is to transform social realities, assuming knowledge to be not only cognition but also practice. The purpose is to identify sensitizing principles and actionable practices that can contribute to researchers interested in participatory methods, especially in the management and third sector fields. This article's main argument is that one way to achieve this purpose is through social validation.

A SOCIAL VALIDATION LENS TO PARTICIPATORY AND ENGAGED RESEARCH

To conceptualize social validation, we began by understanding the history of the concept. The initial term, *social validity,* emerged in the 1970s in the field of applied behavioural analysis. With a positivist root, it proposes ways to assess the acceptability, relevance, and impact of research on the society or group involved in the investigation. Kadzin (1977) summarized two ways to verify the social validity of a research project: normative comparison (comparison of pairs in which one individual has undergone, and one has not undergone the intervention) and subjective evaluation (the evaluations of individuals coexisting in the subject). Wolf (1978) was the first to propose a theoretical framework to assess the social validity of behavioural interventions, according to which society must evaluate a given research intervention at three levels: 1) the social significance of the goals (how much the specific goals are in line with what the society truly wants); 2) the social adequacy

of the procedures (participants, caregivers, and other consumers who find the treatment procedures acceptable); and 3) the social importance of the effects (whether society is satisfied with the results, including those that were not expected). One of the most important principles proposed by Wolf (1978) that remains relevant overtime is reciprocity. Guaranteeing reciprocity through community participation (researched individuals/groups) in all stages of the research is seen as crucial to ensure the social significance of the objectives, the social adequacy of the procedures, and the social importance of the effects (Wolf, 1978).

To face the challenge of dealing with a subjective measurement within an essentially objective approach, several authors propose methodological procedures for social validity, including Finney (1991), Kennedy (1992), and Robotham, King, Canagasabey, Inchley-Mort, and Hassiotis (2011), to cite a few. Although these scholars recognize the importance of the acceptance and satisfaction of the researched society/group, the display a preoccupation with the risks that subjectivity bring to academic rigor. Note that this fear is linked to the epistemic and ontological position of this predominantly positivist field.

Departing from the initial positivistic or functionalist perspective, a second concept emerged—*transformational validity*—based on the view that meanings are social constructions and that different views of a given topic yield multiple meanings (Cho & Trent, 2006). Valid knowledge emerges from a conflict of interpretations and actions that are discussed and negotiated between researchers and members of the researched community (Oliveira & Piccinini, 2009). Richardson (2000) used the metaphor of a crystal to describe the transformational dimension of validity as one that "combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, transmutations, multidimensionality and approximation angles" (p. 552).

Supporters of the transformational approach (i.e., there is no absolute and objective truth in human science) see validity as a path to achieve social justice (Cho & Trent, 2006). They are in line with previous work by Lather (1986), who already opposed the positivist principle of researcher neutrality. The author not only recognized the impact of the research process itself but also proposed consciously channeling this impact so that the participants gain autonomy, thus disrupting hierarchical relationships and looking for horizontal ones, seeking the promotion of empowerment of research subjects (Lather, 1986).

From a methodological point of view, the researchers' actions, their immersion and ethical integrity in data collection, and the possible consequences for the subjects involved in the research are as important as what is produced (Cho & Trent, 2006). Transformational validity requires a reflective and empathic attitude from the researcher in working with the subject, diluting relationships of authority, power, and privilege (Oliveira & Piccinini, 2009). It is not only up to the researcher to assume that he or she is active and aware of his or her role in the production of knowledge, as the participants become co-investigators of the research. For this, promoting researchers' immersion and ethical integrity in data collection is proposed by Cho and Trent (2006) as fundamental for developing mutual trust.

Despite the historical importance of the terms social and transformational validity, in this work we favour a more processual view, adopting the term *social validation*. It is important to mention that the authors are not relating social validation to other uses that might be made of this term, as in

psychology and marketing research. Social validation is applied here as a process for evaluating the social relevance of collaborative research, particularly in the nonprofit and social economy domains. It implies conducting research according to the needs and expectations of the community involved, assuming a dialogical relationship throughout the investigation process.

In fields such as management and the third sector, several authors have proposed strategies that contribute to such a processual view of social validation. Antonacopoulou (2009) proposed "unlearning" as a way of learning for researchers to have a positive impact and for professionals to play the role of co-researchers. This requires the practice of asking different questions, expanding the possibilities for the investigations and the results, i.e., being modest and humble in the learning process (Antonacopoulou, 2009). In a similar vein, Marcos and Denyer (2012) highlight the importance of the practice of imagination, that is, of creating an environment in which there is no "right answer" and thus opening possibilities for new and co-created ideas and models.

Sharma and Bansal (2020) argue that co-creation should be understood not only through specific episodes or events but also through a constant process of interaction between academic and practical knowledge that allows the two types of knowledge to overlap over time. The authors identified two devices that emphasize the co-creation process: temporal connections and recognition of the incompleteness of objects. Temporal connections allow participants to understand the co-creation process more broadly, as part of a gradual process. This ensures the continued participation of everyone in the project, even if they do not always feel that co-creation is taking place. Second, the recognition of the incompleteness of frameworks, hypotheses, and results motivates both parties to build processes collectively. We connect this device to both dialogicity and reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2004).

Summarizing our review up to now, we saw that a positivist view prevailed in the initial conceptualization of validity, seeking to determine the degree to which the knowledge produced by researchers was objective and reliable (Cho & Trent, 2006). In other words, when the objectivity and reliability of the process are valued from a positivist or functionalist perspective, the engagement and direct involvement of the researcher are considered a threat to the validity of the research.

Table 1: Building a provisional set of sensitizing principles for social validation of participatory and engaged research

Principle	Main sources
Empathy, humility, and tolerance	Mota Neto & Streck (2019); Antonacopoulou (2009)
Mutual trust	Cho & Trent (2006)
Temporal connections	Sharma & Bansal (2020)
Dialogicity	Freire (2001); Mota Neto & Streck (2019)
Horizontality	Fals Borda (2015); Lather (1986)
Reflexivity	Freire (2001); Mota Neto & Streck (2019)

Since the 1980s, with the arrival of transformational conceptualizations, a slow but progressive advance has taken place in the debate about criteria for evaluating non-positivist research. This work

aims to advance this debate. Table 1 summarizes the main ideas discussed so far, articulating insights from engaged research, social and transformational validity, and more recent debates that point toward the emergence of social validation as a relevant and missing process. This systematization proposes a set of sensitizing principles to guide and evaluate participatory and engaged research.

Our provisional lens indicates that, in order to conquer legitimacy through social validation of an engaged research alongside a given community, we should consider a set of sensitizing principles. The basis is to cultivate empathy, humility, and tolerance (Mota Neto & Streck, 2019; Antonacopolou, 2009) to build mutual trust (Cho & Trent, 2006). Those basic elements are a corollary to engage from a long-term relationship, guaranteeing temporal connections (Sharma & Bansal, 2020) toward the achievement of certain mutually agreed goals. In this relationship, dialogicity (Freire, 2001; Mota Neto & Streck, 2019) and horizontality (Lather, 1986; Mota Neto & Streck, 2019; Fals Borda, 2015) are foundational principles. Finally, to nourish the constant refinement of the engagement, reflexivity (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Freire, 1979; Mota Neto & Streck, 2019) and imagination (Marcos & Denyer, 2012) appear also as relevant principles. This is not a prescriptive path, but a sensitizing and inspirational one.

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

To empirically illustrate and enrich a provisional social validation lens to participatory and engaged research, the authors opted for an in-depth instrumental case study. Using the terminology proposed by Stake (2005), an instrumental case study allows the production of results that go beyond the case examined, facilitating the understanding of a broader theoretical issue through the investigation of a particular empirical context. The objective is to produce an understanding that can be applied not only to the investigated case, but also to others with similar contexts. The case study selected for this research is Polos de Cidadania, a Brazilian academic program that illustrates in an exemplary way the issues raised by this study, since the work carried out by the program was and is guided by engaged research and social validation. Therefore, Polos was selected for theoretical reasons.

Data collection was organized from a vast number of empirical materials. Many documents were consulted, most of them being available on the web, either from Polos' different communication channels (website, Instagram, and Facebook), or in articles published by newspapers and other vehicles, reports, dissertations, theses, in addition to project materials and institutional presentations provided by the Polos' team. In addition, weekly meetings were held for approximately two months, and three semi-structured and in-depth interviews were held, with an average duration of an hour and a half each. The interview script focused on historical, contextual, and methodological aspects of Polos' transformations, processes, and relationships between the actors. Two interviews were conducted: with one of the coordinators of Polos and one with an academic professor who has worked in collaboration with Polos for many years.

Finally, the analysis method was abductive in nature (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000), i.e., from the authors' framework of practices, they coded the empirical material in search of the emergence of actions that corresponded to the categories already identified, or that would transform them. It was an interactive process between concepts and empirical material. In terms of criteria for bringing

quality and rigor to the methodological path, the four criteria for critic-interpretive standpoints was used: authenticity, plausibility, criticality, and reflexivity (Pozzebon, Rodriguez, & Petrini, 2014).

PRESENTING THE CASE: POLOS DE CIDADANIA

Polos is a transdisciplinary program of teaching, applied research, and community service of a federal university situated in the state of Minas Gerais, in the southeast of Brazil. Between July and December 2020, the authors held weekly meetings and conversations with the coordinators. The goal was to understand the historical, contextual, and methodological aspects of Polos' actions. Their responses are quoted in this section. In addition to those interactions, we also collected numerous documents, master's and doctoral dissertations as well as institutional presentations provided by the Polos team.

Polos was founded in 1995 by Miracy Gustin, a lawyer and professor in the Faculty of Law, who pioneered ways of reconciling academic activities with the concrete promotion of citizenship and human rights.

> We are very proud to say that the program has its matriarchal basis. This is something that feeds us and guides us daily. Our biggest reference in the program is a woman, and her name is Miracy. (Polos Coordinator, 2020)

Since its creation, the program has promoted participatory research through immersion in different territories where the lives of citizens are marked by highly complex social conflicts, whether urban or socioenvironmental (Rubião, 2010). With a team of professors and students who are extremely engaged in their work, Polos activities are marked by several lines of work, including psychosocial and legal assistance for individuals in situations of vulnerability and social exclusion; conducting courses, lectures, seminars, and training; technoscientific production; participatory diagnostic and evaluative research; providing assistance to social and community movements; supporting popular organization and mobilization; and creating networks for the protection and promotion of human rights. According to its creator:

> The actions of this methodology must go beyond the scope of temporary emergency actions. The action mechanisms and the results must occur in a rooted and permanent way in the daily lives of the communities, through the review of social practices, to favor popular mobilization and organization, consolidating citizenship. (Miracy Gustin, public interview, 2005)

The first phase of a Polos project is immersion, the duration of which varies according to the context. Observation, listening, and understanding are fundamental strategies during this phase. Sustained immersion allows the problematization process, in which the Polos interdisciplinary team, composed of students and researchers together with professionals and community members, collectively reflects on the issues experienced, thinking together, and trying to understand the realities and problems while sharing the construction of proposals. Therefore, one of the practices put forward by Polos is the submission of a master or doctoral research proposal, from its very beginning, to the approval of the community members. Respecting the particularities of each project, the purpose of this phase is to deepen the dialog as much as possible, collectivizing the debate and sharing questions between academic and community members. Another often-used strategy is the *roda de con-*

versas, a circle of conversations, preferably involving 12 to 15 people, in which everyone has space to horizontally speak and listen. The researcher simultaneously assumes the roles of researcher and participant in the group (Rubião, 2010).

Influenced by the thought of Paulo Freire, dialog is one of the fundamental points of Polos' work. The program seeks to expand its communication channels, working in a network in which participants think together about issues raised by the communities themselves. One of the guiding principles of Polos is clear: community members, the local actors, should be the protagonists. Contrary to a logic of productivity, rather than carrying out projects that seeks fast results, the program goes at the pace of the dialog, "at the pace of local people" (Polos coordinator, 2020).

In addition to Paulo Freire's perspective, the program's methodology is inspired by the work of Colombian sociologist Fals Borda, reiterating the importance of the researcher being involved in the process he or she studies, transcending mere observation (Cichoski & Alves, 2019; Fals Borda, 2015). One of Fals Borda's central ideas is feeling/thinking, which in terms of the practices of Polos means entering intensely into the daily lives of communities and allowing oneself to be affected by their ways of existing and re-existing. This posture seeks to meet those involved in their speaking places.

Popular street theatre is a fundamental axis of the Polos program. Polos uses the popular street theatre work carried out by the troupe *A Torto e a Direito*, inspired by Augusto Boal's "theater of the oppressed." Polos' initiatives provide awareness and critical education for those in situations of vulnerability and social exclusion (Pereira, 2019; Rubião, 2010), reaffirming the political and pedagogical character of theater.

> We have no doubt that the presence of the theater is essential. But not just for managing teams. At various times, we are faced with such difficult situations that for us it is very clear that a technical intervention or scientific production will not be enough. (Polos Coordinator, 2020)

After the immersion and questioning phases, the troupe can be called to create a play or theatrical sketch on a certain theme. The creation process requires research and dialog between program members and the local community, which is essential for theatrical interventions to be in accordance with the positions defended by Polos and to ensure that the different points of view and places of speech are included. At this stage, the troupe seeks to articulate and combine the so-called local and academic grammars (Pereira, 2019; Rubião, 2010). The main objective of the theatrical pieces is to awaken reflection and reaction of spectators, whether for awareness, mobilization, or problematization of the issues identified in the research/work process. The very same piece is never presented twice: the texts are constantly revised, rewritten, and modified based on audience response.

The theatrical pieces do not have a planned conclusion, instigating the potential of individuals to change the course of the events. In addition, some features of the theater of the oppressed, as conceived by Augusto Boal, such as the notion of *spect-actors* with the aim of increasing public participation (Pereira, 2019; Rubião, 2010).

Finally, but no less importantly, the entire action of Polos is outlined by the so-called ethics of care, a legacy of the founder, Miracy Gustin, which consists of permanent care for others and for oneself. This posture, combined with feeling/thinking, recognizes and values the sensitivity, empathy, and

subjectivity of individuals. Respecting each person's time and process, the ethics of care goes against the logic of efficiency that seeks fast and measurable results.

> We must produce justice, we must produce knowledge, we must produce science. But always guided by an ethics of care. We need to take care of the teams, take care of ourselves, take care of dialog. (Polos Coordinator, interview, 2020)

An example of this positioning is the strategy used by Polos to call everyone in the community and in the research team by their first name, showing sensitivity and attention to the individuality of each participant. Care also takes place within the Polos work structure. There is daily monitoring of researchers, with weekly meetings between the coordinators and the other team members (other professors, researchers, students, and interns). In these meetings, people are invited to share their doubts, experiences, anxieties, and challenges, significantly contributing to the ongoing formation and reformulation of the program.

SOCIAL VALIDATION IN ACTION

We argue that Polos has been consolidating its unique methodology over 26 years of operation. The program reinforces the role of the university in the construction of a fairer and more egalitarian society. The process of identifying the tools and methods in Polos' day-to-day activities, therefore, represents a path in the search for a deeper understanding of the practice of engaged research and the application of social validation.

Table 2: Concrete illustrations for social validation of engaged research

Polos' practices and tools	Principles achieved
Immersion: the first phase of any project in a community is a deep immersion in the context.	Temporal connections; mutual trust
Research approval by the community: the submission of any research proposal (masters, doctoral, or other type of project) to the approval of the community members.	Mutual trust; dialogicity; horizontality
Community protagonism: the demands as well as the definition/diagnosis of the problems and issues come from or are led by the community.	Horizontality, dialogicity
Conversation circles (*roda de conversa*) and dialogical meetings: members of Polos act as facilitators, promoting occasions to exchange experiences with community members, social movements, government, and universities (all the actors involved) in an ongoing dialog, seeking to ensure that everyone has space to speak and to listen.	Horizontality; dialogicity
Mutual learning: the team tries to integrate local and academic knowledge.	Dialogicity; horizontality
Tolerance with time: respect for the time required by people in the project, breaking with the logic of efficiency and quick results.	Temporal connections
Ethics of care: all people involved are addressed by their first name with empathy and respect (members of the community feel considered when this happens) and the research members ask about everyone's wellbeing before discussing aspects of the project.	Empathy, humility, and tolerance; mutual trust; horizontality
Feeling/thinking: the members of Polos try to think, act, and feel together with the community.	Empathy, humility, and tolerance; reflexivity

Table 2 presents the practices and tools of the program and how they connect to the principles of social validation of engaged research previously discussed.

This systematization provides examples of concrete practices and tools actioned in the research process; it constitutes a practical guide for the application of social validation by researchers and practitioners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main objective of this article is to contribute to the North–South dialog on the consolidation of the concept of social validation as a strong tool to increase the legitimacy of participatory and engaged research. The research question guiding this work is: *How to conceptualize and operationalize social validation to increase the legitimacy of participatory modes of research, particularly the engaged ones?* The a) systematization of extant literature, the b) proposal of an actionable and analytical framework, and the c) analysis of the Polos' case study allow us to elaborate some important implications for research and practice. We argue that our study contributes to both management and third sector fields by the articulation of participatory/engaged research and social validation from a perspective that has been underexplored in both literatures. The results show a set of principles, illustrated by practices and tools, to guide practitioners and researchers involved with participatory social innovation, particularly those involved with nonprofit and social economy organizations.

Although the source of inspiration came for engaged research practiced by a Global South nonprofit centre, the authors' social validation lens could be analytical transferable, or using Cunliffe's (2002) words, could "resonate" with researchers and practitioners working with other methods and contexts.

First, this article contributes to the debate on the impact of academic research, answering to the recent call of Lachapelle (2021) for processes that seek a concrete transformation of the causes of inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. We outline the importance of engaged research for the promotion of social transformation. Working as a bridge between theory and practice, engaged research encourages researchers' involvement with the field not as a threat to academic research, but as an emancipatory tool. Through dialog, listening, and other practices inspired by Freire and Fals Borda, researchers can align themselves with key actors and co-build knowledge that advances in discussions about social fissures. The authors articulate the meanings of social validation as a historical process with the perspectives of two thinkers from the Global South: the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire and the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda.

Combining their emancipatory research and educational perspectives, the consideration of people as acknowledgeable and feeling/thinking (sentipensantes) social actors leads to an awareness in which a reflexivity is linked to action in the territory where they live. This process is engendered by aspects that unite solidarity, cooperativism, and an active hope (the verb esperançar defended by Freire). In this way, the emancipatory transformational possibility is consolidated through participation and the construction of social justice (Fals Borda, 1962; Freire, 1979).

Second, this article adds a new layer to the debate about participatory and engaged research: the presentation of the concept of social validation and a framework for operationalizing the process.

After analyzing the Polo's methodology, the authors conclude that community involvement throughout the research process is essential for social transformation since these groups understand the exact dimensions of which actions truly trigger change. The Polos program seeks to interact dialogically with the community throughout the research process—problem formulation, design of a framework theory, data collection and analysis, and presentation of results. Thus, subjectivity does not appear to be a "problem" to be solved but rather is a fundamental potentiating element. The combination of techniques used by Polos shows that it is possible to guarantee the reliability of research data without giving up on explaining the participants' values and worldviews, including and above all political ones. The practices presented offer support of the choice of tools and methods used in data collection and legitimize engaged research in response to the predominantly positivist academy.

In terms of implications for practitioners, the study of the Polos experience allows for a deeper discussion of the practice of engaged research and social validation. The work methodology developed by Polos over 26 years is based on the active involvement of community members and the search for autonomy and social transformation. The three principles of interaction between Polos, communities, and governments are dialog, art, and ethics of care. Based on the work of Paulo Freire (2001), dialog is seen as the essence of a humanizing education that takes place in two dimensions: acting and reflecting on reality (Menezes & Santiago, 2014). The use of dialog as a methodological tool has challenges. It is especially noted in a context of unequal power relations, such as when women are silenced or not listened to in meetings or communities, and their existence becomes invisible in activities that involve the participation of companies or public institutions. In this posture, the community itself, which already exists in a situation of social vulnerability, points out its difficulties and needs, avoiding even more violence and amplifying the ways of existing and resisting in such territories.

In addition to dialog, Polos puts into practice Fals Borda's feeling/thinking. The Colombian sociologist pointed out that the researcher must transcend observation and engage deeply in interaction with the community, allowing him- or herself to be affected by the subjects' way of living and reliving social struggles (Cichoski & Alves, 2019; Fals Borda, 2015). Another fundamental focus of Polos' work is transformation through art. It relies mainly on social theater inspired by Augusto Boal. The process of creating theatrical pieces occurs between the artists, the researchers, and the community, with local and academic grammars mixing to create a transformational performance (Rubião, 2010). Finally, the third fundamental element is the ethics of care. The Polos team starts from the premise that they must permanently take care of others, of themselves and of the consequences of their research. This posture emphasizes the sensitivity, empathy, and subjectivity of individuals with respect for each person's time and difficulties.

Finally, we highlight some challenges (far from being the only ones) that emerged when analyzing the case study of the Polos program. Putting social validation in practice is not simple. The effort involves diverse actors, perspectives, and values and can be planned only to a certain extent. The groups with which the research is carried out frequently find themselves in situations of extreme social vulnerability. For engaged researchers, it is necessary to reinforce reflexivity and humility to ensure that the scenario of violence is not reinforced. Often, the researcher needs to place him or herself in the position of "standing by" the community, reinforcing the autonomy, centrality, and protagonism of these populations rather than providing answers and seeking results.

Among the main limitations of our work, we could consider the limited number of interviews and the fact that a substantial part of the weekly meetings was carried out online due to pandemic restrictions. Although the secondary data were extremely abundant and rich, more interviews with people involved with Polos' activities would be beneficial.

We believe that engaged research, supported by actions consistently and consciously developed to support social validation, represents both a *praxis* field of critical research in management and third sector studies and support for social transformation that deserves further reflection, debate, analysis, and practice. We encourage researchers to explore, challenge, experiment, and further develop these concepts. This agenda has become even more relevant as business schools and law schools have consolidated as academic and university spaces historically marked by difficulties in dealing with methodological pluralism while proposing to train people capable of supporting the most urgent and necessary social transformations of our time.

NOTE

1. Some examples compiled from the literature are criteria for authenticity, including fairness and ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989); critical criteria, including positional, communitarian, voice, reciprocity and sacredness principles (Lincoln, 1995); pragmatic validity (Kvale, 1995); feminist post-structural validity, including ironic, paralogical, rhizomatic and voluptuous forms of validation (Lather, 2001); reciprocity criteria (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001); truth-based criteria, including communicative, pragmatic, and transgressive validity (Sandberg, 2005); responsibility-based criteria, including reductionist and epistemological validity (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010); and authenticity, plausibility, criticality and reflexivity (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Pozzebon, 2018). A recent work was even more disruptive, proposing a "metodologia OTRA" (Harari and Pozzebon, 2023).

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Proyecto Utopía: Colombian Initiative for Peace and the Defense of Rurality in Times of Post-Agreement

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ABSTRACT

Rural Colombia faces persistent challenges stemming from historical neglect, conflict, and institutional fragility. Established in 2010 by Universidad de La Salle, Proyecto Utopía offers a territorially grounded model of social innovation that combines agronomic education with peacebuilding for youth from marginalized regions. In this article, we analyze Utopía's philanthropic governance and cross-sectoral alliances. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study shows philanthropy as a strategic enabler of inclusive development. La Salle's University Philanthropy Office has mobilized diverse actors through transparent, ethical, and participatory mechanisms, securing sustained support from over 736 donors. Utopía thus exemplifies how universities can mediate in post-conflict societies, linking grassroots initiatives with institutional frameworks. It offers a replicable model of socially embedded transformation aligned with sustainable development goals and it is capable of rebuilding trust and fostering long-term rural resilience.

RÉSUMÉ

La Colombie rurale est confrontée à des défis persistants causés par une longue expérience de marginalisation, de conflits et de fragilité institutionnelle. Le Projet Utopía, fondé en 2010 par l'Universidad de La Salle, propose pour les jeunes issus de régions marginalisées un modèle d'innovation sociale ancré territorialement qui combine formation agronomique et établissement de la paix. Dans cet article, nous analysons la gouvernance philanthropique d'Utopía ainsi que ses alliances intersectorielles. En recourant à des méthodes mixtes, l'étude montre comment la philanthropie peut agir comme levier stratégique pour assurer un développement inclusif. Le Bureau universitaire de la philanthropie à La Salle a mobilisé une diversité d'acteurs à travers des mécanismes transparents, éthiques et inclusifs de manière à obtenir un soutien durable de la part de plus de 736 donateurs. Utopía illustre ainsi comment les universités peuvent jouer un rôle de médiation dans les sociétés post-conflit en reliant des initiatives locales à des cadres institutionnels. Il offre un modèle reproductible de transformation engagée socialement qui s'aligne sur des objectifs de développement durable et il est capable de regagner la confiance et de favoriser une résilience rurale à long terme.

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INTRODUCTION

In contexts characterized by historical marginalization, systemic inequality, and the enduring effects of local conflicts—often stemming from struggles over the allocation of natural resources—rural territories consistently emerge as critical sites of social vulnerability and institutional neglect. This is particularly evident in Colombia, where decades of internal violence have disproportionately affected rural populations, generating not only material deprivation but also deep fractures in the country's social fabric and relations. Within this challenging landscape, Proyecto Utopía (Utopia Project)—launched in 2010 by La Salle University (Bogotá)—represents a notable example of an innovative and context-sensitive response to complex social needs. Located in Yopal, in the department of Casanare, Utopía provides a full university education in agricultural engineering to young people from rural areas throughout Colombia, many of whom have been directly impacted by violence, displacement, and poverty, including educational poverty.

Beyond education, the program offers students housing, food, psychosocial support, and a framework of ethical-political formation rooted in the values of peace-building, territorial development, and community leadership. The program brings together young people from different territories, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Upon graduation, students are expected to return to their home regions to initiate agricultural projects and contribute to the social transformation of their local communities.

This article aims to critically analyze the Utopía project as an instance of territorially embedded social innovation, with particular emphasis on its pedagogical model, philanthropic infrastructure and governance, and general socio-political impacts (although the impact on young people and their communities will be more specifically targeted in other articles).

What distinguishes Utopía is its integration within the broader mission of a philanthropic foundation coordinated by La Salle University, which mobilizes both financial and institutional support from a wide range of actors, including private sector enterprises. This cross-sectoral engagement reflects a distinctive mode of action in which social innovation is not only community-driven, but also sustained by hybrid alliances that bridge academia, philanthropy, and economic stakeholders. Academic institutions and the academic community play a crucial role in the development, analysis, and dissemination of social innovation. As argued by Klein (2017), researchers are not merely external observers of social innovation processes, but often active participants in co-producing knowledge and fostering transformative practices.

In this sense, universities can act as mediating institutions that connect grassroots initiatives with broader institutional frameworks, facilitating the circulation of ideas, resources, and legitimacy. Academic actors contribute to the critical understanding of the dynamics of social change by documenting local experiments, theorizing alternative models of development, and evaluating their social impacts. As in the case of Proyecto Utopía, academics can be initiators of socio-territorial initiatives. Moreover, their involvement can help articulate the voices and experiences of marginalized

groups, making visible forms of agency and resistance that are frequently overlooked in policy and mainstream discourse.

This reflexive and engaged approach is particularly important in contexts such as rural Colombia where innovation cannot be the result of a top-down process (mainly due to the institutional fragmentation and also a sort of structural weakness of the state); instead emerges from situated knowledge, lived experience, and complex socio-territorial negotiations. By embracing an interdisciplinary and participatory methodology, the university becomes a key ally in both interpreting and supporting the emergence of socially embedded innovations that seek to construct more just, inclusive, and sustainable territories (Klein, 2017; Andrew & Klein, 2012).

This article approaches social innovation through the lens of philanthropic action, conceived not as mere charity, but as a structural and strategic driver of transformative change (Fontan & Lévesque, 2017). By focusing on the interplay between education, social reintegration, territorial development, and philanthropic collaboration, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how social innovations emerge, function, are governed, and scale in contexts marked by vulnerability and conflict. Specifically, we advance the notion of philanthropic governance, distinguishing between internal governance—the rules, structures, and accountability routines that steer the university's Philanthropy Office—and relational dynamics—the norms, instruments, and co-production practices that shape interactions with donors, partners, and territorial communities (Harvard Philanthropy Lab, 2017). The article is structured in four main sections. First, the methodology adopted in the wider research is explored. This is followed by a discussion of the role of philanthropy in a context marked by systemic violence, as is the case in Colombia, with a focus on the emergence and structuring of the Proyecto Utopia, and the typology of donors and engagement strategies. Finally, a conclusion closes the article.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological design of this research is based on a mixed-method (qualitative- quantitative) and exploratory approach. Since 2022, continuous dialogue with the university's philanthropy team has allowed the authors to refine the research questions and gather a wide range of materials. This process included analysing institutional documents and participating in multiple working meetings. Both primary and secondary sources have been used to reconstruct the historical and organizational evolution of the university's philanthropy structure, identifying how it has progressively responded to territorial needs through socially innovative actions. Viewing social innovation as a dynamic interplay among actors, institutions, and territories, a methodology capable of capturing both structural and experiential dimensions was required. Accordingly, the mixed-method, exploratory approach integrates macro-level institutional analysis with micro-level narratives and meso-level community dynamics.

The conceptual framework of this study—grounded in a multilevel understanding of social innovation as a territorially embedded and multidimensional process—has directly informed the research design and methodological choices. Although it is not the main focus of this specific article, the study also incorporates data from a survey conducted in 2023 with 251 graduates of Proyecto Utopía, aimed at estimating the initiative's impact on the lives and trajectories of its alumni. In ad-

dition, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted. These include current and former students with diverse profiles in terms of gender, age, and geographic origin, as well as key institutional actors, such as the program's leadership team, selections officers, academic directors, faculty members, and social educators involved in student support. To complement these interviews, 20 focus groups were organized—some with students of different grades guaranteeing gender balance for a total participation of 158 students, others with teaching staff—to facilitate collective reflection. Data collection was conducted in two phases: the first in October 2022, and the second in January 2024. Both phases included interviews and focus groups.

The qualitative data collected was systematically processed using NVivo software, enabling a rigorous thematic analysis aligned with the study's conceptual framework. The transcripts were first coded inductively to capture emergent patterns, and then deductively structured according to pre-established categories such as life trajectories, social commitment, knowledge dialogue, rural youth, territorial attachment, and leadership. NVivo facilitated the organization, triangulation, and visualization of data across multiple levels of analysis, ensuring both analytical coherence and traceability. This tool allowed for the identification of recurring narratives and the construction of typologies reflecting the diverse experiences and transformative engagements of Utopía's alumni.

The study's theoretical emphasis on empowerment, civic agency, and hybrid alliances is reflected in its inclusion of ethnographic observation. Between 2022 and 2024, the research team spent approximately 20 days on the Utopía campus. During this time, researchers participated in daily campus life, engaging in informal conversations, shared meals, evening activities, sports, and moments of social interaction. Particular attention was given to observing students during their practical fieldwork and academic activities, enabling a deeper understanding of the lived experience and institutional culture that characterizes Proyecto Utopía.

PHILANTHROPY AS A STRATEGIC CATALYST OF SOCIAL INNOVATION: THE UTOPIA MODEL AND GOVERNANCE

Origin and development of Proyecto Utopía

Philanthropy is typically understood as a private, altruistic endeavor aimed at improving the public's quality of life rather than seeking personal gain (Fontan & Lévesque, 2017; McCully, 2013; Kidd, 1996). Modern philanthropies often operate with a social investment mindset: they identify key social problems, fund experimental solutions, and emphasize measurable impact, adopting a venture-like approach to giving (Harvard Philanthropy Lab, 2017; Dees & Anderson, 2003). Philanthropic funding can absorb the risks associated with early-stage experimentation. As Paul Ylvisaker of the Ford Foundation observes, philanthropy can serve as "society's testing gear" to identify what truly works (Fidelity Charitable, 2018). Through grants and partnerships, philanthropic organizations create enabling environments in which social innovations can emerge, scale, and endure. These ecosystems often bridge non-profit, government, and commercial sectors (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, & Sanders, 2007).

These grants offer rural youth what is often their sole pathway to access university education:

> My dream was to study something related to the countryside—agronomy. Back then I was in high school, and this is what I liked: agronomy, the countryside. But I didn't know which

> university I could attend; it was just a dream for me … So, the idea would spark hope, but it never really crossed my mind to think, 'well, maybe you actually have a chance to get there. (Student interview, 19-year-old male, INT-3, 2022; author's translation)

Philanthropy operates at the intersection of public, private, and civic spheres, enabling collaborative innovation efforts that no single sector could achieve alone. From this perspective, philanthropy functions not merely as a provider of charitable funds but also as a strategic catalyst and enabler of social innovation. By offering financial backing, risk tolerance, experimental infrastructure, and cross-sector collaboration, philanthropic actors help bring new social solutions to life, benefiting communities and the public at large. Within Utopía, this catalytic role is institutionalized through philanthropic governance conceived as a dual architecture: internal stewardship (policy, compliance, audits, and data transparency) and relational arrangements (partnership charters, co-funding compacts, and participatory accountability with territorial stakeholders), jointly aligning resources with mission.

In the context of this case study, Proyecto Utopia actively pursues peace, social inclusion, equity, and development—objectives that significantly shape La Salle University's philanthropic strategy, positioning social innovation as a territorial embedded and transformative process. The mission-oriented goal of philanthropy at La Salle University is closely aligned with this concept, both in terms of resource management and transparency, and in its focus on the following themes and issues: i) peace and conflict resolution; ii) the role of women; iii) rurality and nature from the perspective of sustainability; iv) research, innovation, and technology for agricultural production, and v) the long-term operational and mission-related sustainability of the Proyecto Utopía.

Based on this, philanthropy is understood in two complementary ways: first, as a process, connecting the University's humanistic dimension with strategies that foster engagement with external actors and communities, and promote the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) through an innovative pedagogical model; and second, as an institution. This article recasts these angles under philanthropic governance: the institutional dimension maps onto internal governance (structures, roles, risk management, and gift-acceptance policies), while the processual dimension maps onto relational dynamics (stewardship, co-design, and mutual accountability with donors and communities).

The structure of philanthropy as a process began with an individual dynamic of resource management for infrastructure, alongside the search for resources for scholarships and support. Motivated by the initial aim to strengthen the agricultural sector through the Agronomic Engineering program at the Bogotá campus, and following modest outcomes in the initial call for proposals, the idea emerged to relocate the program to the Topal campus, in alignment with the Lasallian mission to serve territories affected by poverty, inequality, and social conflicts.

Then named the Office of Philanthropy and External Funding, the university's Philanthropy Office, as an institutional entity, promotes not only relationship-building but also the positioning and strengthening of the social, technical, and operational work carried out with its partners to this day. As a result, the Philanthropy Office at La Salle University is rooted in the principle of solidarity in the pursuit of sustainability, aligning itself with international cooperation under new modalities, and being understood as both an institution and a process. Operationally, internal governance is

enacted through standard operating procedures, a gift-acceptance policy, due-diligence protocols, and audit trails; relational dynamics are structured via partner memoranda of understanding, stewardship plans, and joint monitoring with territorial stakeholders.

This marked the beginning of Proyecto Utopía, financed by donations originating from the Philanthropy Office (understood as a process). This process emerged from the trust and international goodwill that, in the form of a network, provided a personal donation that became an opportunity to materialize this initiative. The first donation of U.S.$200,000 was made by the Italian episcopal conference, enabling Utopía to become a reality and laying the initial foundations for the construction of the infrastructure that developed the Yopal campus in Casanare (Castrillón & Molano, 2020; Universidad de La Salle, 2024; Frydman y Asociados, 2021a, 2021b, 2022).

In this regard, from 2010 to 2022, there has been a trend highlighting the importance of the participation of large donors in the total pool of resources. Notable funding sources by sector include services, mining and energy, third-sector entities, the Lasallian community (including students, graduates, faculty, and staff), and the financial, pharmaceutical, agricultural, and construction sectors.

Typology of donors and strategies of implication

Philanthropic contributions to Proyecto Utopia are primally allocated to two critical areas: full scholarships for rural students and the development of the Yopal campus. Access to these funds is initially granted primarily to large donors—both national and international—predominantly from the private sector. These donations are managed through robust organizational models that prioritize sustainability, transparency, and mission-aligned accountability. From a governance standpoint, donor segmentation serves internal functions (reporting, risk management, auditability) and relational functions (tailored stewardship and engagement pathways).

The donor engagement strategy developed by the Philanthropy and External Relations Office relies on strengthening long-term relationships and cultivating trust. This loyalty-based approach fosters the active involvement of philanthropic allies, encouraging not only repeat contributions but also their integration into the community-building processes led by the university. In fact, many founding donors have remained committed to Proyecto Utopía over the years, a testament to the relational ethos underpinning the initiative.

This loyalty is understood as a form of social capital, built through sustained interaction and collaborative engagement. It enables strategic partnerships that are not transactional but transformative, particularly in rural territories historically excluded form development agendas. The strategic objectives of the Philanthropy Office as an organizational structure are primarily supported by resource mobilization to ensure the sustainability of its work, particularly through the development of the Yopal campus and by expanding access to higher education for youth form the peripheral regions.

This occurs in parallel with the optimal and transparent management of scholarships and physical donations to bring this project to reality in the shortest possible time. The Philanthropy Office and Proyecto Utopía are recognized nationally and internationally for their transparent, efficient man-

agement and for the trust they have built around this social project. As of 2023, the university has received at least 23 awards acknowledging its territorial social impact and excellence in philanthropic management (Utopía: Dirección de Filantropía y Relacionamiento Externo, 2021; Dirección de Filantropía y Relacionamiento Externo/Rectoría, 2023).

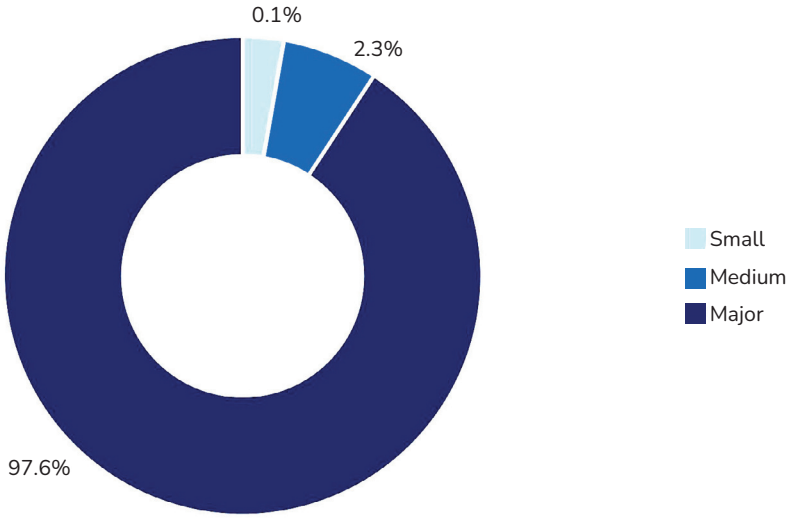
Grounded in reciprocal trust, donor partners place confidence in Proyecto Utopía's mission—education and rural entrepreneurship as levers of national development—while the university, through its Philanthropy Office, reciprocates by engaging with widely recognized donors of established ethical reputation, thereby sustaining transparently governed, mission-aligned collaboration.

Since its creation in 2010, Proyecto Utopía has been supported by 736 partners including individuals, legal entities, international cooperation agencies, public institutions, and hybrid organizations, all of whom have engaged with this project to fulfill the Lasallian-Utopian mission of providing high-quality higher education to rural youth in Colombia.

A distinctive feature of this model is its inclusive entry point; contributions can begin at just U.S.$4.40, allowing individuals of all backgrounds to participate, which is pertinent given the country's economic conditions. Thus, the average annual per capita income is estimated at U.S.$20,000, and the monthly minimum wage in 2024 was U.S.$289. Also, it should be considered that 31 percent of Colombian workers earn less that the minimum wage. Over the years, Proyecto Utopía has received an annual average support of 527 small donations, representing 0.1 percent of the total contributions during the study period, amounting to U.S.$4,387.80.

The 802 medium-sized donations account for 2.3 percent of total contributions, amounting to U.S.$199,888.50. Finally, the 213 major donations, which played a key role at critical moments in making Project Utopía a reality, account for 97.6 percent of donated resources, totaling U.S.$8,453,891.70.

Figure 1. Distribution of donations by size (percentage)



Although small and medium donations represent a minority of the total funds, they are symbolically powerful in democratizing participation and generating a broad base of solidarity. Meanwhile, major

donors have played a decisive role in critical moments of the project's consolidation and scaling. These major donations have been vital in advancing the project's mission; their ongoing involvement has helped ensure the continuity of the project over time. These partners, who have remained engaged with Proyecto Utopía, have witnessed the tangible outcomes of their contributions, fostering strong loyalty to the project.

Although not all donors remain today, the project has a retention rate of approximately 70 percent for individuals who make small donations and around 90 percent for institutions that make large donations. Notably, 83 percent of partners have made recurring donations for four or more years. This has been essential to advancing the project's mission and establishing a solid foundation for Proyecto Utopía's outreach to different communities, territories, and stakeholders, ensuring long-term sustainability (Castrillón & Molano, 2020).

The significant presence of small donors underscores the belief that the collective efforts of even modest contributors can significantly impact the development of capacities in some of Colombia's most remote areas. Proyecto Utopía offers a unique opportunity for small contributors to participate in a large-scale social transformation effort. While medium and large donors are crucial to the project's financial sustainability, the increasing engagement of partners at all levels promotes civic participation among small, medium, and large donors alike (Universidad de La Salle, Bogotá & Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014).

The strength of Proyecto Utopía's funding model lies not only in the volume of resources mobilized but in the quality of relationships it fosters. The philanthropic strategy serves as an engine of institutional trust, enabling rural transformation through long-term investment and shared responsibility. Donor confidence in Utopía reflects a broader belief that education and rural entrepreneurship are vital levers for Colombia's equitable development. Currently, the project focuses on balancing the contributions of small, medium, and large donors to ensure financial sustainability. Donor retention also strengthens the bonds that have been created, enhancing opportunities for dialogue and collaboration on the project's future direction, which is essential for Proyecto Utopía's success.

The dual emphasis of philanthropic governance enables transparent stewardship internally and mission-aligned co-production externally. Accordingly, partnerships must provide resources and align with the ethical and mission-driven principles of institutions committed to social development. La Salle University, through its Philanthropy Office, has developed a relationship-building strategy that complies with the Ministry of National Education guidelines and fosters sustained donor dialogue. It integrates allies into initiatives of peace-building, social cohesion, and territorial equity, ensuring alignment with Proyecto Utopía's foundational values.

The university's commitment to transformative philanthropy entails establishing relationships grounded in ethical coherence, transparency, and shared responsibility. Contributions from partners whose actions reflect shared values become a platform for advancing social innovation, sustainable rural development, and community leadership. To this end, the university has implemented an institutional framework that promotes positive donor engagement and responsible management of contributions. This framework operationalizes philanthropic governance across both internal and relational layers and is articulated around three components:

1. *Ethical and proactive donor engagement:* A comprehensive analysis is undertaken to gain an in-depth understanding of prospective donors and to identify areas of alignment between their interests and Utopía's strategic objectives. This process includes:
   - A review of the public positioning, corporate track record, and social and ethical commitments of potential partner organizations.
   - An assessment of their principles related to social responsibility, sustainability, and respect for human rights.
   - An evaluation of the degree of convergence between donor objectives and Utopía's educational and social mission.
2. *Institutional policy for donation reception:* The university has established clear guidelines that govern the reception of contributions and foster mutual trust. This policy includes:
   - Criteria to ensure coherence between received donations and the institution's educational project.
   - Mechanisms to guarantee transparency regarding donor intent and the public representation of the partnership.
   - Procedures to strengthen trust and ensure the flexible and value-consistent use of financial resources.
3. *Monitoring and strengthening of philanthropic relationships:* Periodic review processes have been established to maintain a dynamic and coherent relationship over time. These processes include:
   - Spaces for mutual feedback, enabling the adjustment of relationship terms in response to changing contexts or shared learning.
   - Annual accountability reports detailing the use, impact, and scope of donations.
   - Agreements that safeguard institutional autonomy and allow for adjustments to the public visibility of partnerships when necessary.

Taken together, these instruments configure Utopía's philanthropic governance as a coherent system in which internal governance (e.g., documented due diligence, audit reports, retention dashboards) anchors legitimacy, while relational dynamics (e.g., co-funded projects, repeat giving, and community feedback loops) sustain mission alignment and territorial relevance (Fontan & Lévesque, 2017; Harvard Philanthropy Lab, 2017).

From this perspective, Proyecto Utopía views philanthropy not merely as a funding mechanism but also as a form of strategic collaboration aimed at the common good. It therefore promotes a philanthropic governance model grounded in relational ethics, transparency, and co-responsibility. By harnessing the contributions of actors genuinely committed to social transformation—while remaining aligned with the University's values—it becomes possible to consolidate an educational project that not only transforms individual lives but also contributes meaningfully to the creation of more just, sustainable, and inclusive territories.

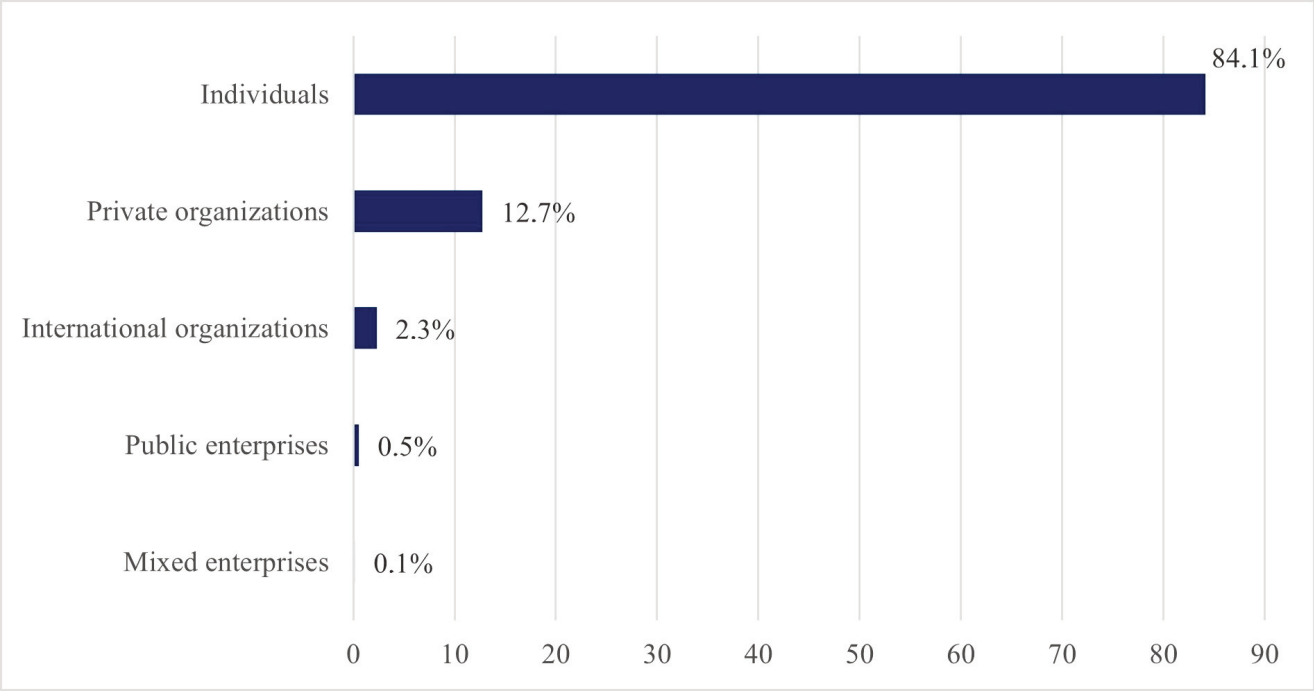
This ethos resonates with students' own sense of duty:

> I intend to return. That is, my plan once I leave here, God willing as an engineer, is to go back to the countryside to support people, because there are those who have a small plot of land but do not know how to sustain their crops. And my idea is not to arrive saying, "I'm an engineer; I'll set up your crop and you must give me 50 percent, or 40 percent, or 20 percent." No, my intention is to offer a helping hand so that people can prosper, move forward, and secure a better future in the countryside. (Student interview, 22-year-old male, INT-08, 2022; author's translation)

In the context of socially driven foundations like Utopía, it is essential to strike a balance: leveraging philanthropic resources to foster innovation and social impact, while safeguarding academic integrity and public trust. Strategic donor vetting, transparent gift policies, continuous oversight, and inclusive governance are practical tools that universities can and should implement to ensure that social foundations remain authentic agents of positive change.

This approach grants the project legitimacy by delivering concrete results and ensuring transparent management, ultimately consolidating a lasting group of donors committed to addressing the needs of diverse communities. In terms of donor composition, individuals constitute the main pillar, accounting for 84.1 percent of participation. Private organizations also play an important role, contributing 12.7 percent to the project at various stages. Finally, international organizations contribute 2.3 percent of the donated resources under the framework of international cooperation.

Figure 2. Distribution of donors by economic sector



Strengthening cross-sector relationships serves as the central axis around which synergies are generated to expand the project's reach and sustainability. Public, private, and international actors contribute to making Proyecto Utopía a continuing reality. An analysis of donors by economic sector reveals that

the largest share of donations comes from the agricultural sector, while the highest number of donors are individuals from the Lasallian community, including students, graduates, and staff.

From the perspective of the Philanthropy Office, the primary objective is to strengthen the focus on rural areas through self-sustainability, the consolidation of transparent internal management that builds donor trust, and the development of forward-looking scenarios involving private international actors and an expanded role for the public sector.

Identifying the ways or moments in which Philanthropy Office emerges as a key actor within Proyecto Utopía requires addressing areas that remain underdeveloped due to the evolving needs and priorities of the project over time. Initially, this scenario identifies private international networks with significant resource leveraging, followed by alumni as active donors with smaller contributions. International cooperation and its various modalities allow for a possible and desirable scenario that articulates both internal and external efforts.

In this regard, a study conducted by the Universidad de los Andes on the impact of Proyecto Utopía in relation to the SDGs (Alzamora, López, & Agudelo, 2022; United Nations Development Programme, 2022) shows, among other elements, that this macro project aligns primarily with global governance mandates, focusing its commitment on the following goals: zero hunger and sustainable agricultural improvement, equal education, gender equality, water availability, sustainable management and sanitation, sustainable economic growth, resilient infrastructure, cities and settlements, climate change, just and inclusive society, and global partnership for the SDGs (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2022). This creates opportunities for action and collaboration in a scenario that requires further exploration to define the pathway that enables the coordination of mission objectives on an international scale. There is significant work to be done in this area.

According to the same study, achieving self-sustainability requires the involvement of international and global actors together with a strengthened role for the public sector. This would help redirect attention toward major donors, in addition to the work already carried out by the private sector and the public sector in some cases. Thus, philanthropy within the framework of the Proyecto Utopía allows the university to gain recognition for its social mission, the creation of inclusive spaces, and the development of trust with both long-standing and new partners. It also provides a space for strategic planning that responds to the university's needs and interests with practical solutions while involving global actors for the future. This allows for a relationship between actors and structure to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of planning scenarios, optimizing available resources, and bringing new actors into the fold for the benefit of all.

CONCLUSION: A PHILANTHROPY AND SOCIAL INNOVATION MODEL EMBEDDED IN A PECULIAR SOCIOECONOMIC AND TERRITORIAL CONTEXT

In Colombia, where deep-rooted inequalities and historical exclusions persist, rural development projects face complex and layered challenges. These types of initiatives must confront structural marginalization, limited funding, and institutional fragility—conditions exacerbated by decades of armed conflict. Rural communities often operate in areas with poor infrastructure, the presence of non-state armed actors, and low levels of public trust.

The Proyecto Utopía addresses these realities by offering agricultural training to rural youth while promoting local leadership, entrepreneurship, and community cooperation. It goes beyond technical skills, empowering participants with civic agency and the capacity for collective action. The aim is for Utopía students to become local changemakers—bridging institutions and communities, fostering grassroots problem-solving, and advancing peace in territories historically fractured by violence. Financing such initiatives remains a central challenge.

While seed capital may serve as a starting point, ensuring the long-term viability of comprehensive educational models—particularly those embedded in rural territories—demands sustained investment and diversified financial strategies (Sánchez-Cañón, Rodríguez, & Otálora-Buitrago, 2023). In response, the Philanthropy Office at Universidad de La Salle has developed an innovative and inclusive funding model mobilizing multiple stakeholders—agricultural cooperatives, private enterprises, public institutions, and international agencies—around a shared commitment to rural transformation. This model provides comprehensive scholarships that go beyond tuition coverage to include housing, food security, and the initial financing of entrepreneurial initiatives (Universidad de La Salle, 2024).

This approach redefines the logic of "giving" in contexts where traditional philanthropic models based on mass micro-donations are unfeasible due to widespread poverty. Instead, it (re)affirms that transparency, reciprocity, and measurable impact are essential pillars for rebuilding trust in territories marked by fragmentation. In doing so, the model empowers not only donors but also communities, to see themselves as co-creators of public value and agents of long-term transformation.

Ultimately, the impact of a non-profit initiative like the Philanthropy Office at Universidad de La Salle transcends financial management. It lies in its capacity to institutionalize transparent, participatory, and solidarity-driven practices that restore what armed conflict has historically undermined in Colombia's rural regions: trust, cooperation, and the ability to imagine shared and dignified futures.

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NOTES

1. Among others, the university has been recognized for: the best peace experience (2013), corporate responsibility (2014), best management practices (2015), social inclusion (2016), solidarity (2017; 2018), human development (2019), transforming rural Colombia (2019), a quality system for meaningful learning (2020), merit in democracy and social value (2022), best educational project presented (2023), and exemplary Colombian award – solidarity (2023).
2. The information included in this research note was actualized up to 2023, the same year the survey was distributed.

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Building Social Enterprises from the Ground Up

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ABSTRACT

The EU-funded Enhancing Social Innovation in Rural Areas (ESIRA) project aims to develop initiatives within the social economy to better include vulnerable groups in rural communities. In Norway, social enterprises are uncommon, and there is no established legal framework for this type of business organization. This situation, combined with high expectations of a traditionally strong welfare state, presents unique challenges for the ESIRA project's goal of establishing and developing social enterprises and the local social economy. This short article will explore this dilemma based on experiences from the ESIRA project with the aim to offer a nuanced perspective on the interplay between social enterprises and the welfare state.

RÉSUMÉ

Le projet Enhancing Social Innovation in Rural Areas (ESIRA), financé par l'UE, vise à développer des initiatives au sein de l'économie sociale afin de mieux inclure les groupes vulnérables dans les communautés rurales. En Norvège, les entreprises sociales sont rares et il n'existe pas de cadre juridique établi pour ce type d'organisation commerciale. Cette situation, combinée aux attentes élevées d'un État-providence traditionnellement fort, présente des défis uniques pour l'objectif du projet ESIRA d'établir et de développer des entreprises sociales et l'économie sociale locale. Ce court article explorera ce dilemme en se basant sur les expériences du projet ESIRA, dans le but d'offrir une perspective nuancée sur l'interaction entre les entreprises sociales et l'État-providence.

Keywords / Mots clés : ESIRA, social innovation, Norway, social enterprise / ESIRA, innovation sociale, Norvège, entreprise sociale

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, rising unemployment and economic decline in Europe led to the emergence of social enterprises, which were established to respond to deficiencies in social service provisions (O'Byrne, Lean, Moizer, Walsh, Dell'Aquila, & Friedrich, 2014). Currently, social enterprises can be considered vehicles of local development and citizen engagement across Europe as they deal with a range of issues such as social exclusion and poverty. Although these types of businesses are common in Europe, their organization and legal formation show diversity across countries, meaning some are registered as private companies limited by guarantee, others are mutuals, and many are nonprofits, such as associations, charities, or foundations (European Commission).

Norway offers an interesting country of study regarding how social enterprises are built and operate as there is no established legal framework for this type of organization. Furthermore, the Norwegian welfare state's large public sector that emphasizes equal income distribution and gender equality (Enjolras, Loga, Kobro, & Hauge, 2021) makes the involvement of commercial actors as welfare service providers confusing. In Norway, voluntarism and nonprofit organizations have broad political support, yet confusion around social enterprises persist given that social enterprises pursue both social and nonprofit objectives, and there is a prevailing uncertainty around these establishments (Kobro, 2019). Furthermore, there are concerns that social economy initiatives might compete with public services or allow the government to step back from duties it should normally carry out.

This short article draws on experiences from the EU-funded ESIRA project, which aims to develop initiatives within the social economy to better include vulnerable groups in rural communities. Based on a case study conducted in the Kongsvinger region, the authors discuss how the Norwegian case offers a nuanced perspective on the interplay between social enterprises and the welfare state.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES: CONCEPTUAL UNCERTAINTY

Despite the widespread use of the term, social enterprises are understood in significantly different ways by national legislations, policy strategies, academics, and social entrepreneurs (Borzaga, Galera, Franchini, Chiomento, Nogales, & Carini, 2020). While in some countries social enterprises are conceived regarding the way they are organized, in other countries their definition is closely connected to their sector-specific activities (Borzaga et al., 2020). In 2022, the European Commission launched the Social Business Initiative (SBI), which generated concrete measures to create a favourable environment for the development of social enterprises. In doing so, the SBI also introduced a definition of social enterprises that encompassed three key dimensions: entrepreneurial, social, and inclusive ownership-governance. Accordingly, the interaction among these three dimensions decides whether an organization may or may not qualify as a social enterprise (see also Borzaga et al., 2020, pp. 28–29).

As mentioned, Norway offers an interesting case to study social enterprises as the rise of social enterprises in Norway has origins in both the voluntary and business sectors (Kobro, 2019). In Norway, social enterprises have grown from strong community traditions and grassroots efforts. Due to the strong welfare tradition, it is argued that social enterprises in Norway are pressured to function as public institutions and expected to conform their standards (see also, Enjolras, Lundgaard, Andersen, & Loga, 2021, p. 312). The following describes and discusses the interplay between social enterprises and the welfare state in Kongsvinger, Norway.

SOCIAL INNOVATION IN KONGSVINGER, NORWAY: NOTES FROM THE ESIRA PROJECT

As part of the ESIRA project, the authors conducted a case study in Kongsvinger. Located in southern Innlandet county, Kongsvinger faces a demographic imbalance, with declining shares of children and working-age adults (20–66) and a growing elderly population (67+). Additionally, household earnings in the region are lower than both the national and Innlandet averages (Statistics Norway, 2023). In this regard, the region has offered us the possibility of exploring the role and potential of social enterprises in promoting local development and social inclusion.

A central element of the ESIRA project is how the work of innovation is carried out using a multi-actor platform including representatives from different organizations for people with different disabilities, academics, private and public sector workers. They all live, and most of them work, in the Kongsvinger region, anchoring their work in the local context. This group of around 20 people is working together brainstorming and developing projects within the social economy aimed at increasing the inclusion of people with disabilities. Currently two concepts are moving toward implementation while a further two are still in the idea phase.

The mix of belonging to a common regional context and the involvement of people from the targeted group has allowed discussions and concept development to include perspectives on local challenges and resources in combination with real-life experience and expertise from people living with disabilities. This gives a solid foundation when it comes to defining the social purpose of social economy initiatives. However, lacking policy framework for supporting social enterprise in Norway, particularly when it comes to initial financing and set-up costs, remains a barrier for their development.

Given the relative novelty of social enterprises in the Norwegian context, it has at times been challenging for members of the multi-actor platform to move away from traditional concepts of advocacy or activism. The importance of advocacy and activist campaigning on behalf of people with disabilities should not be underestimated, therefore the goal of the ESIRA program is to establish initiatives that can be ongoing and self-sustaining, continuously providing its social benefits not creating a moment of change and then disappearing.

Critical voices have raised concerns that social economy initiatives compete with public services, or that they end up freeing the public sector from its responsibilities by providing what the government normally should be responsible for. Either way, social economy becomes something that potentially undermines the welfare state weakening its public and political support. This is then used as an argument for caution when it comes to creating mechanisms that support social enterprises in general. It has also been raised in response to the ESIRA project.

This issue can be mitigated in two ways. First, given the large local variability in services available in rural areas and the ongoing cycle of decline in many rural places, it is difficult to find fault with citizens improving quality of life for themselves and their fellow citizens and creating a more inclusive and potentially more prosperous community. Building on local knowledge and local resources to find ways to meet the ongoing economic and demographic challenges that many rural regions have been facing could also shift focus away from growth as the most important measurement of success and instead focus on quality of life for local populations.

Second, the authors' experience of the ESIRA multi-actor platform has shown that, while discussions often revolve around the types of services and offers typically associated with the traditional welfare state, the actual projects selected for development do not compete with state or municipal services.

In fact, the social economy initiatives currently being developed as part of the ESIRA project in Kongsvinger can be said to have a complementary role to municipal services. Therefore, this article concludes that social enterprises offer a flexible and community-oriented solution by mobilizing social resources and engaging citizens.

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Spaces of Belonging: Community Engagement and Social Inclusion in Rural Communities

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the crucial role of public spaces and the nonprofit sector in fostering social inclusion within rural communities facing increasing centralization. Challenging purely economic development models, it argues for a holistic understanding of regional wellbeing centred on community engagement in "third places." By examining the dynamics of space use and the potential for social isolation, the article highlights the importance of human-scale design and strategic revitalization of community-centred spaces to enhance social capital, quality of life, and resilience in smaller urban contexts. It calls for further research into the lived experiences and wellbeing of residents in these areas, advocating for a shift beyond purely economic indicators of local development.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore le rôle crucial des espaces publics et du secteur à but non lucratif dans la promotion de l'inclusion sociale au sein de communautés rurales confrontées à une centralisation croissante. Tout en remettant en cause les modèles de développement purement économiques, il plaide pour une compréhension holistique d'un bien-être régional centré sur l'engagement communautaire dans les « tiers-lieux ». En examinant la dynamique de l'utilisation de l'espace et le potentiel d'isolement social, l'article souligne l'importance d'une conception à échelle humaine et d'une revitalisation stratégique des espaces centrés sur la communauté pour améliorer le capital social, la qualité de vie et la résilience dans des contextes urbains plus restreints. Il appelle en outre à des recherches plus approfondies sur les expériences et le bien-être des habitants de ces zones, en plaidant pour un changement au-delà des indicateurs purement économiques du développement local.

Keywords / Mots clés : third places, regional development, community engagement, social inclusion / tiers-lieux, développement régional, engagement communautaire, inclusion sociale

INTRODUCTION

Although urban studies often highlight the link between physical space and social cohesion, the dynamics within smaller communities remain somewhat understudied. In the context of increasing centralization, smaller communities face greater risks of social and economic exclusion, which limit their access to opportunities and participation in social life. This article argues for a holistic understanding of regional wellbeing that places the contribution of nonprofit and social economy at its core. We suggest that the nonprofit and social economy sectors are critical in shaping the quality of life. Specifically, we explore the extent to which local populations receive opportunities for meaningful engagement in public spaces, assuming that such interactions manifest community and citizen engagement. Although from an economic geography perspective, Calignano, Nilsen, Jørgensen Nordli, and Hauge (2024) have highlighted how different territorial areas, even in the case of relatively small and seemingly socially and economically homogeneous countries, are different. This is embedded in a new strand of geographical studies that considers local development as a contested issue where change, reproductive, and denied agencies compete to find their own immaterial and tangible spaces (Calignano & Nilsen, 2024; Hauge, Nilsen, & Calignano, 2025), while negotiating their participation and inclusion in public and community life with the aim of triggering processes of transformation (Calignano & Siena, 2025). All the mechanisms illustrated above go beyond mere economic approaches to the study of local development but must necessarily embrace and integrate a clear perspective that looks more deeply at the nonprofit sector and the social economy.

While the concept of quality of life encompasses multiple possible indicators and can be applied to different places, we intend to focus on smaller areas, with particular attention to groups experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability.

Even Eurostat (2024), a department of the European Commission and the official statistical office of the European Union, recognizes the difficulties in using gross domestic profit (GDP) as a measure of quality of life. Although GDP is a useful tool for measuring the financial value of market production, it says nothing about how wealth is distributed in a given population.

DISCUSSION

In recent decades, we have seen a trend toward centralization, creating a dynamic in which large urban centres thrive, while smaller cities and rural areas face increasing challenges. One consequence of this development is that competition for space is significantly intense in larger urban centres, driven by high demand for both residential and commercial real estate. This phenomenon is often fuelled by capital investment, leading to a struggle for space characterized by significant financial and social pressures. In contrast, smaller cities experience a different dynamic in terms of space use. Competition for space is less intense, making these areas more susceptible to developer interests. With potentially fewer stakeholders and lower land values, developers may find it easier to capture and shape the urban environment according to their interests. The relative ease with which developers can influence the physical structure of smaller cities highlights the importance of regulatory frameworks and community involvement in urban planning to ensure balanced and inclusive development. This puts enormous pressure on local policymakers. On the one hand, they are under pressure to accommodate and strengthen investment in their city's development; on the

other hand, the pursuit of profit maximization may clash with the public interest, for example, in the preservation of historic sites, green spaces, and especially so-called "third spaces."

The concept of "third places," as formulated by Oldenburg (1999), envisages social environments distinct from the domestic and working spheres, which serve as crucial places for informal public encounters and community building. Third places "host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 16). In the context of small towns, these spaces assume a particularly relevant role, acting as crucial nodes for social interaction and the promotion of community cohesion. Given the characteristics of smaller urban centres, often characterized by dense social networks, third places facilitate the overcoming of social divisions and promote a deep sense of belonging.

The contribution of nonprofit organizations and the social economy is crucial to making and/or maintaining small towns and rural areas attractive. In addition to purely economic factors, which can be monetized, other aspects of perceived quality of life also come into play. Jan Gehl's human-scale approach seems to fit both smaller rural contexts and large cities. In his 1971 classic, *Livet mellem husene: udeaktiviteter og udemiljøer* [Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space], he argues that people can enjoy a better quality of life when they spend their time in human-scale buildings and carefully designed urban environments (Gehl, 2011). In other words, when buildings and environments are designed to fit the human scale and human perception, people tend to spend more time between buildings, i.e., in public or semi-private spaces.

This shows that the nonprofit and social economy sectors are not simply complementary to the formal economy; they are instrumental in profoundly shaping quality of life. These sectors foster social cohesion, promote civic engagement, and address critical social needs that market-driven solutions often overlook (Klinenberg, 2018). By providing essential services, creating inclusive spaces, and empowering marginalized populations, they improve the overall wellbeing of a region. This is often not considered a priority in the development of smaller areas, where investment is rare.

Studies examine how the creation or revitalization of key third places can counteract the potential for social isolation, often exacerbated by limited resources or infrastructure issues in smaller urban areas. By emphasizing human interaction and inclusiveness, this integrated approach highlights the importance of designing urban spaces that strengthen social capital and contribute to the overall wellbeing of residents of smaller cities. An interesting argument is that life between buildings has the potential to create a self-reinforcing process; when someone starts using a space—in this context, a public space—more and more people are attracted to it, and more activities are created. There is, of course, a negative version of this phenomenon: when fewer and fewer people use those spaces. The dangers of public space collapse and the possible negative consequences are also described by Jane Jacobs (c.f. Jacobs, 1961).

Third places are central to the social fabric of these communities because they contribute substantially to the formation of social capital, a key factor in community wellbeing and resilience (Latham & Layton, 2019). Accessibility, inclusiveness, and intentional design are key to ensuring that these spaces effectively serve the entire community.

In the context of smaller cities, the synergistic application of Ray Oldenburg's (1999) third-place theory and Jan Gehl's (2011) human-centred urban planning principles offers a compelling approach to promoting social vitality. Gehl's emphasis on pedestrian-oriented design directly supports the creation of Oldenburg's third places: informal community centres are vital to community cohesion. However, creating such dynamic environments requires urban planners to strategically consider social and nonprofit activities, recognising their symbiotic relationship with commercial interests. This integrated approach recognizes the interdependent contributions of both sectors to the overall vitality and functionality of urban spaces. Reconciling private property rights with the need to protect shared cultural and environmental resources is an ongoing challenge.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, although small cities face unique challenges in maintaining viable third places due to economic and demographic vulnerabilities, strategic revitalization and the development of community-centred spaces, in synergy with nonprofit involvement, hold significant potential to improve social inclusion and quality of life. This calls for a deeper analysis of the interaction between social, environmental, and economic dimensions within the built environment, particularly to understand how human-scale design, inspired by principles such as those of Jan Gehl (1971), can promote social interaction in these vulnerable contexts. Going beyond purely economic indicators of quality of life, further research is essential to investigate the mechanisms through which engaged local communities and carefully designed public spaces, both internal and external, can contribute to the resilience and wellbeing of smaller cities.

Therefore, in addition to reflecting on small cities from a policy perspective, this article indirectly aims to call for further research that addresses how people live and how happy they are in the places where they live. While there is a large body of geographical research focused on small cities (Hauge, Calignano, Bern, & Lønningdal, 2023; Mayer & Lazzeroni, 2022), future studies addressing the issues we have briefly touched on in this short article seem more necessary than ever. Single case studies or, even better, a comparative perspective (e.g., Nordic countries vs. Central Europe vs. Northern Europe) could help provide more relevant, in-depth, and credible results than often purely economistic approaches to studying local development. Shedding light on how people experience and appreciate places, as well as how much they earn and what they produce, could lead to surprising results that challenge what our eyes and ears—accustomed to certain stories repeated in a myriad of similar ways—tend to see and believe.

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Exploring the Relationship Between Volunteerism, Inclusivity, and Democracy in Norwegian Sports

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ABSTRACT

The Norwegian sport model is widely recognized for its emphasis on inclusivity, democratic governance, and strong tradition of volunteerism. This article examines the sustainability of relying on volunteers in Norwegian sports and whether the high level of volunteerism affects democracy in sport organizations. Drawing on academic literature and national statistics, this article highlights the significant contributions of voluntary work to Norwegian organized sports. However, shifts toward more individualized and short-term volunteering may threaten the sustainability of this model. Moreover, while the structures within Norwegian sport organizations may offer opportunities for democratic learning, there are also some limitations. The article concludes that, while the Norwegian sport model remains a successful example of community-based sports, sport organizations must adapt to a changing societal landscape.

RÉSUMÉ

Le modèle sportif norvégien est largement reconnu pour l'importance qu'il accorde à l'inclusion, à la gouvernance démocratique et à une forte tradition de bénévolat. Cet article examine la durabilité du recours aux bénévoles dans les sports norvégiens et la question de savoir si le niveau élevé de bénévolat exerce une influence sur la démocratie dans les fédérations sportives. Cet article s'appuie sur la littérature académique et des statistiques nationales afin de mettre en lumière les contributions importantes du travail bénévole au sport organisé en Norvège. Il est important de souligner cependant que l'évolution vers un bénévolat plus individualisé et à court terme pourrait menacer la durabilité de ce modèle. En outre, si les structures des fédérations sportives norvégiennes peuvent offrir des possibilités d'apprentissage démocratique, elles présentent également certaines limites. L'article conclut que, même si le modèle sportif norvégien reste un exemple réussi de sports axés sur la communauté, la fédération sportive doit s'adapter à un contexte social en mutation.

Keywords / Mots clés : volunteerism, democracy, sport organizations, sport model / bénévolat, démocratie, fédérations sportives, modèle sportif

INTRODUCTION

The Scandinavian countries, and particularly Norway, have a strong tradition of volunteer work in general and especially within sport. Volunteer work within nonprofit, membership-based organizations contribute substantially to the region's national economies (Stende, Andreasson, & Skjold Frøshaug, 2020). In Norway, the total value of voluntary work in 2023 was more than 2 percent of the national gross domestic product (Norway Statistics, 2024).

Norway has a physically active population with a high participation in organized sport, combined with being one of the most successful nations in international elite sport, especially when it comes to results per capita (Greatest Sporting Nation, 2025). Voluntary sport organizations are the backbone of Norwegian sports, and volunteerism is fundamental for running these organizations (Seippel, 2010).

This article seeks to examine the sustainability of relying on volunteers in Norwegian sport and whether such a high level of volunteerism affects democracy in sports organizations.

CONTEXT

The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) is the largest voluntary organization in Norway with about 1.4 million members, and is an umbrella organization for all organized sport, including elite sport, mass sport, and para sport (NIF, 2024). The 55 national sport organizations are responsible for organizing their respective sports through the 9,045 local sports clubs, while 11 district sport associations have the general responsibility for all sports in each region.

The NIF's vision, "sports joy for all," emphasizes inclusivity in organized sports, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical or intellectual disabilities (NIF, 2023). The NIF has defined four organizational values, which are equality, loyalty, volunteerism, and democracy (NIF, 2024b). Being primarily an organization for children and youth, the statistics show that 92 percent of all children under 12 years old and 75 percent of youth between 13 and 18 years old have been active members of sports clubs during this period (Bakken & Strandbu, 2023).

Sport and physical activity are of public interest and the state provides substantial financial support to the sport sector, as with many other culture and leisure activities. Norwegian sport organizations receive funding from Norsk Tipping, a state-owned gambling operator that funded Norwegian sport with 4,25 billion NOKs (about €370 million) in 2025. While the white paper forms public guidelines for organized sport, the NIF has a high degree of autonomy when it comes to the spending of this public funding. This is based on the idea that the state regards the practical development of sport predominantly to be a task of the citizens themselves via the NIF as a democratic organization (Ibsen & Seippel, 2010). Regardless, the state's sport policies correspond well with the NIF's sport strategy plans.

VOLUNTEERISM AND SUSTAINABILITY

Norway has a strong volunteer tradition that is rooted in pre-modern farming communities, transferred to organizations (including sport organizations) in the first half of the nineteenth century. When Norway grew into an increasingly richer society and people had more time outside work

after World War II, volunteering in culture, sports, and leisure activities increased significantly (Goksøyr, 2022).

While the national and regional sport organizations have an administration of paid staff, most of the local sports clubs are fully run by volunteers serving as board members, administrators, coaches, event organizers, etc. State funding is an important source of income for the sport organizations and for building new sport venues; however, this funding only constitutes a minor contribution compared with the value of voluntary work. The value of voluntary work in the sport sector corresponds to over 19 billion NOKs or more than 35,000 full-time employees, which is significantly higher than in any other sector (Norway Statistics, 2024).

The strong volunteer efforts in Norwegian sport clubs have several benefits. For most young members, this generally means reduced participation costs. Other benefits include the establishment of networks across social, cultural, and economic boundaries. However, there are also some challenges. While membership and sport participation are voluntary, most members feel obliged to contribute and have a certain responsibility toward the aims of the organization and co-members of the organization (Seippel, 2010).

While the amount of voluntary work has not decreased, volunteering has become more fragile in sport organizations. According to Seippel (2010), those volunteering in sport are less committed and feel more social pressure to contribute than the volunteers in other organizations. He further adds that recruiting volunteers is the most important task the organizations face today, which seems to have become a bigger challenge after the pandemic. There has been a gradual transition from collective volunteerism to reflexive volunteerism (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). More specifically, there has been a change of motivation from a sense of duty to the local community or sports club, to more self-realization and personal development (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2010). Volunteering at events fits well with reflexive volunteerism, and we can see that especially younger people choose to volunteer at events, mostly bigger well-known events. To adapt to the changed motivation for volunteer work, sports clubs need to find new ways to recruit members to volunteer; more specifically, to identify different volunteer groups' needs in order to customize some benefits beyond the obligations of the organization. This can include, for example, creating opportunities for new social networks, tangible benefits (e.g,. food, clothes, free tickets), and employability (e.g., skills development, resume development), which is especially important for young people.

VOLUNTEERISM AND THE EFFECT ON DEMOCRACY

Sports are considered an integral part of the social democratic ideology that is the basis of the Scandinavian welfare policy (Skille, 2011). The governance of the NIF can be understood as a representative democracy, which resembles the region's national political systems. More specifically, local, regional, and national sport organizations are responsible for the implementation of the laws and policies approved at the general sport assembly held every two years. All sport organizations at every level of NIF are individual organizational entities with their own general assembly and democratic elected board. In total, 105,000 board members and 25,000 board leaders are elected to Norwegian voluntary sport organizations (NIF, 2024a).

The NIF's laws protect democratic processes, including independent electoral committees and a controlling committee. According to NIF's laws, all members must be heard before important decisions are made and given the opportunity to influence the development and management of the organization. In order to secure a certain representation of women and young people under 26 years old, quota regulations in regional and national boards have been established (NIF, 2024b). The NIF has a variety of courses for club members and board members at different levels, aimed to strengthen the governance of the organizations, such as practical board work, nominating committees, general assemblies, young leaders, etc. (NIF, 2025). Giving participants knowledge and tools to follow the rules of democratic governance are key elements in these courses.

Although the benefits of democratic sport organizations are evident, it is essential to understand the contexts where they fall short. In international sport organizations, such as Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), we have seen examples of failures to address corruption and embezzlement among elected officials (Jennings, 2015). Such cases challenge the assumption that sport is inherently democratic.

While democracy in Norwegian sport organizations scores well in an international good governance evaluation, some weaknesses were identified (Geeraert, 2018). There are no rules for how long a board member can serve (or upper age limit) and the representation of coaches, athletes, and referees are low in democratic bodies.

According to Peterson (2008), sports in Scandinavian countries contribute to the promotion of democratic values. Seippel (2010) identifies three advantages of organizational sport democracy: 1) a realization of autonomy of individuals in the society, 2) an arena for democratic learning, especially for young people, and 3) opportunities for gaining competences otherwise difficult to achieve such as social, organizational, and political learning.

Volunteering in Norwegian sport organizations creates opportunities for democratic learning through courses and practice. However, there are some practical challenges. First, considering the large number of boards in Norwegian sport organizations, there may be a challenge to recruit qualified and motivated board members (Hanstad & Hansen, 2024). Second, the organizations are easily dominated by a minority of the members and the power is often centred around a few people (Enjolras & Waldahl, 2009). Third, the more individualized motives for doing volunteer work (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2011) may lead to less committed volunteers and to weaker democratic engagement in sport organizations. Finally, the high number of operative tasks that board members need to conduct may result in pragmatic decisions on behalf of democratic processes.

CONCLUSION

The Norwegian sport model has been recognized internationally as an ideal model for organized sport, considering its strong volunteer tradition, democratic organizations, "sport for all" values, and close connection with public authorities.

This article has identified both strengths and some weaknesses in the implementation of the sport model. The shift toward more individualized and short-term volunteering challenges the sustain-

ability of the volunteer-based sports organizations. Sports clubs need to adapt to these changes and find new ways to recruit volunteers by identifying different volunteer groups' needs.

The democratic structures within Norwegian sport organizations offer valuable opportunities for democratic learning; however, there are some practical challenges, such as recruiting qualified and motivated board members, concentration of power, more individualized motives for volunteering, and pressure on board members to engage in operative tasks.

To sustain success in both elite and mass sports and to remain an arena for democratic learning, Norwegian sport organizations must effectively tackle the challenges of volunteer recruitment and retention.

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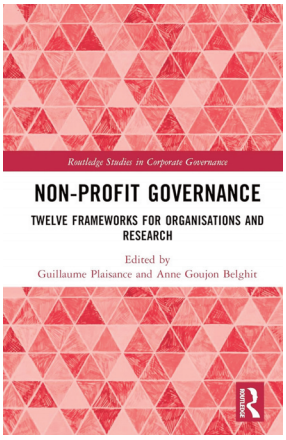
Book Review / Compte-rendu

Aaron Turpin



Non-profit Governance: Twelve Frameworks for Organisations and Research. Plaisance, G., & Belghit, A. G. (Eds.). (2025). 262 pp. Routledge, New York, NY. ISBN 9781032599861

SUMMARY

The book *Non-profit Governance: Twelve Frameworks for Organisations and Research* (2025) addresses key tensions in nonprofit governance as organisations balance the pursuit of a social mission, resource needs, and ongoing pressures to streamline operations. Editors Guillaume Plaisance and Anne Goujon Belghit situate governance using sociological theory focused on reciprocity and relationships, borrowing from several definitions before landing on the International Organization for Standards (ISO) standards for "good governance" (also referred to as "ISO37000"), which focus on "human-based systems" that offer mechanisms to guide organizational activities in pursuit of its "defined purpose" (pp. 2–4). ISO37000 provides a globally adopted set of governance mechanisms for all sectors, which are used to structure the three main sections in the book (which contain three chapters each). Each chapter culminates in a conceptual framework representing a given topic in nonprofit governance that aims to both enhance governance practice and inform future research.

In the section "Governance and Controls," Chapter 1 provides a framework for collaborative governance, specifically within the realm of inter-organisational projects, and proposes a governance system that integrates external, internal, and collaborative mechanisms, which are used to guide partnerships. Chapter 2 touches on a risk management framework using enterprise risk management, and advocates for the decentralization of risk management as an organisational activity adopted at all levels. Chapter 3 then proposes an integrated governance model that manages multiple and sometimes conflicting needs from public funders in a collaborative approach.

The second section, "Governance and Stakeholders," opens with a chapter exploring how public funders exert control over and shape relationships with nonprofit resource recipients. Chapter 4 provides an optimistic definition of state–nonprofit resource relationships that perceives public funding as a source of innovation and transparency and uses funding proposals as a lens from which to view relationships between nonprofits and state funders. Chapter 5 uses strategy theory to localize related governance practices in the case of mergers, highlighting theoretical underpinnings from

strategic planning and neo-institutional approaches, before discussing the role of failure and providing a case study for reference. The section ends with a chapter focusing on outcome measurement and theory of change as drivers for social impact, beginning with an overview of the judicial use of data within nonprofit evaluation. Theory of change is then disassembled to make connections to impact maximization, with a focus on challenges and opportunities associated with outcome measurement, before concluding with several short examples.

The final section, "Governance and Performance," begins with a review on nonprofit finance models and their treatment in previous literature. Chapter 7 provides several practice-friendly financial management strategies, differentiating stability from growth and emphasizing the latter as a necessity for nonprofits. Fallacies associated with reducing overhead costs as sound finance practice are also addressed. Chapter 8 opens with a discussion on social responsibility, which is articulated as not an assumed aspect of nonprofits. The author argues that the rise in nonprofit social responsibility and accountability should be perceived concurrently with similar developments in the private sector, and that nonprofits may behave as morality actors in the development of corporate social responsibility. Finally, Chapter 9 extends this conversation in an effort to provide conceptual clarity by emphasizing social responsibility as extending beyond the regular economic and social obligations of the organisation, highlighting how social responsibility affects relationships with external environmental factors. The chapter ends with theoretical and conceptual distinctions for practitioners.

KEY POINTS

Resource dependencies and external pressures

Throughout the book, authors expertly identify and incorporate highly relevant resource pressures that governance structures are beholden to in nonprofit organisations. A strong resource dependency perspective is woven into broader developments in nonprofit governance, exploring relationships between financing and operations. For example, Chapter 3 borrows directly from resource dependency theory by discussing processes of organisational legitimacy through resource procurement. Resource dependency is situated concurrently with the rise in new public management, where public funders seek to maximize return on investment and incorporate disciplinary models of accountability. Similarly, Chapter 4 provides a thorough summary of welfare state retrenchment and the shift to managerialism in public funding of nonprofit organisations, which is linked to adverse operational outcomes and decreased organisational sustainability. The author also describes a juxtaposition between spurring social innovation in public funding but failing to nurture related efforts long term. A final example of incorporating resource dependency theory can be found in Chapter 7, which includes explication regarding the relationship between resource precarity and mission drift, which is nested in a larger discussion on financing trends in the nonprofit sector.

Future directions for research and practice

Chapters are arranged to meet two key purposes identified in the beginning of the book: foster future research addressing gaps and trends in nonprofit governance, and support governance practice through the development of knowledge and theory. The book seeks to address these aims by presenting a series of figures within each chapter, which are further elaborated on in text. These "frameworks" exist at the conceptual level, and are generated using inductive reasoning, either from

pre-existing theory and research, primary qualitative data, or a combination of both. It is important to note that while none of the proposed frameworks are validated measures, they do provide a helpful cognitive tool to synthesize complex information. Researchers may find these frameworks useful when laying groundwork for scholarly endeavors in nonprofit governance, including identifying areas where theory can be used to further explore organisational dynamics and/or test assumptions regarding governance processes. Several chapters include well synthesized literature reviews and offer practical insights for governance practice, enhancing the frameworks as decision making matrices that may guide work in areas such as strategic planning, evaluation, and partnership development.

DISCUSSION

Framing the role of nonprofits and community

Authors borrow from the European context to situate nonprofits largely as vendors for government and other external contracting. For example, in Chapter 2, authors state that the main purpose of the nonprofit organisation is to collect donor monies to spend on free programs for "beneficiaries", while Chapters 3 and 4 characterize nonprofits as bridges between the government and "users", with the primary purpose of carrying out services that adhere to the perceived needs of communities as held by public funders. This understanding of the sector caters to a large portion of organisations that are challenged with implementing governance practices under the auspice of programming agreements that can be variable and divergent. Authors are straightforward about problematic funding practices that lead to resource precarity, mission drift, and decreased impact, as funding relationships become increasingly stringent. Practitioners will find these discussions refreshingly frank and rooted in current sectoral developments. However, alternatives to this funding model are not adequately explored. While Chapter 7 briefly mentions the marketization of nonprofits through earned revenue financing models, it is dismissive of this approach as a viable resource procurement strategy and negates the growing body of research in this area. A broader perspective of nonprofits (beyond their role as human service contractors) would have introduced organisational agency as a key factor in the resource development discussion.

Relatedly, definitions of nonprofit organisations and governance-related concepts illustrated in the book often underemphasize or ignore the role of community members and groups. Some models are predicated on sociological theories but fail to take the extra leap to include community voices as meaningful stakeholders within governance practice. For example, in Chapter 3, authors outline two justifications for the use of monitoring mechanisms adopted by public funders, but neither have much to do with ensuring community impact or fostering social value. Chapter 6 emphasizes the importance of responding to institutional pressures for organisational learning through evaluation but fails to touch on accountability to community through these same processes. Given ongoing and growing advocacy regarding inclusion and equity, it is surprising to find an overall lack of community group integration within the governance frameworks provided in the book.

Promoting interdisciplinary governance work

Several cross-sectoral models are adopted throughout the book to address research gaps and provide an interdisciplinary lens. Chapter 2 touches on a risk management framework entitled enter-

prise risk management (ERM), which has benefitted from research in the private sector that is summarized by the author. It is suggested that ERM may be used to facilitate risk planning on nonprofit boards, and to promote risk culture development within the organisation. Chapter 3 borrows a similar approach by relying on corporate governance research to identify different logics to creating social value in nonprofits. Likewise, the book tends to incorporate diverse perspectives when defining key terms. For example, Chapter 7 offers some clarity when addressing the amorphous concept of nonprofit performance by relying on financial management literature, while Chapter 9 combines traditional organisational scholarship with sociological and environmental perspectives to define nonprofit sustainability as an organisational outcome. Though practitioners should use caution when adopting approaches that have not been widely tested in the nonprofit sector, it is interesting to learn about governance frameworks that may be effective when adjusted for organisations pursuing a social mission.

CONCLUSION

The book *Non-profit Governance: Twelve Frameworks for Organisations and Research* (2025) largely succeeds at offering conceptual and practical supports for the effective governance of nonprofit organisations. Readers will find the emphasis on resource development to be consistent with challenges and opportunities faced by current leadership as they seek to achieve growth and sustainability within their programs. Several new perspectives on risk management, partnerships, evaluation, and financial management, are offered by weaving together theory and research from across disciplines. Some of these frameworks may be tenuous due to a lack of empirical support within the nonprofit sector but offer new directions for innovative research that directly responds to practical governance needs. Future iterations of the book may be improved by considering the plethora of community-based governance strategies as a method of enhancing local stakeholdership and better integrating community voices. Combined with these diverse perspectives, it is a fine contribution to nonprofit governance research and practice.

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