Fostering Social Inclusion and Empowerment

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Learning from the Social Economy in a Small Island Context

Three case studies show how the small scale and bounded nature of society, and the jurisdictional powers of PEI, affect the structure and function of the local social economy

– Case Study One: Co-op development to Serve the Needs of Rural Working Parents and their Children
– Case Study Two: Promoting Inclusion of Citizens with Learning Disabilities
– Case Study Three: Welcoming Immigrants from the Margins to the Mainstream
As a sub national jurisdiction...

- PEI must support a fully functional government
- local tax revenues are insufficient
- volunteers help to cover the gaps in government services
- private donations help keep community service organizations afloat
- charitable donation is among the highest in Canada on a per capita basis
- even though the island has the lowest disposable income per capita in the country
In a small island society...

- Those who are well connected can get things done with admirable efficiency

- but other individuals are excluded from tightly bonded networks where power is exercised
• Community-based organizations bring the concerns of marginalised people to the attention of entrenched elites

• This is not unique to small islands, but a small island is a conveniently scaled and bounded system, which facilitates investigation
Case studies demonstrate...

- Positive importance of social economy organizations
- Negative impacts of insufficient, unstable funding
- Limitations of charity and volunteerism in delivery of essential services
- Importance of localized policy- and decision-making
Case studies demonstrate...

- Gender issues (SE staffing, child care policies)
- Role of civic engagement outside the formally defined SE
- Need to balance consistency and flexibility of funding programs
- How collaborations among academics and SE organizations can support empowerment and inclusion
Social Justice: The Transformative Value of Community Organizations Influencing Public Policy

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The context...

• Barriers to justice and equality arise in legislation, in economic development planning, and in processes for accessing government services.
• The promise of democracy is that citizens guide and influence – even lead – policy change to remedy problems that affect us.
• But often, citizens seem to lack confidence that policy is something they can be implicated in between elections.
The thesis...

• Community organizations have a particular role to play in transforming individual experiences and insights into better policy.
• By working with citizens’ insights about what would constitute positive policy change, community organizations animate a potentially liberating transformative cycle.
Case Studies

• Women for Environmental Sustainability (WES), who have intervened in fisheries disputes in Eastern Prince Edward Island and advocated for an increased role for women in fisheries management, and

• Women’s Network PEI, a membership-based women’s equality-seeking organization that works on issues of economic, social, cultural, and political equality.
The case studies illustrate how advocacy groups

- represent diverse perspectives
- hold knowledge on how to build representative coalitions
- often serve an efficiency function by pooling resources, coordinating efforts, and becoming a clearinghouse of information
- enable citizens to be involved in social justice issues
The case studies illustrate how advocacy groups

- share their determination and patience when government resistances to equality might otherwise undermine resolve
- inspire and encourage citizens to have a voice in public processes
- make authentic and meaningful contributions to policy discussions