

Research Partnerships and Governance Processes in the Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network:

Self-Evaluation

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Bridging, Bonding, and Building / Renforcement des liens et des capacités

Project Purpose

- measure the impact of participatory practices on the research partnerships
- measure the impact of participatory practices on the governance process
- provide evaluation information for reporting purposes
- provide feedback to Network

Rationale

Social economy organizations are characterized by participation, community responsibility and increased community capacity. It is no surprise then that the research initiatives of the Network reflect these characteristics through the use of participatory action research methodologies. The Network also has set a goal of creating a governance process that mirrors the governance processes of social economy organizations.

Measures

Each of the following measures was made available to participants via the Survey Monkey survey software. The measures were available in both French and English. The measures were selected because of their relevance to the processes under investigation and because of their use in a variety of related domains. Using existing surveys would also allow comparisons to be made to the existing literature in the area of the impact of participatory processes.

Governance Process

Kaye, G. (1993). Diagnosing your coalition: Risk factors for participation. Brooklyn, NY: Community Development Consultants

This instrument contains questions that group into ten thematic areas. The first area contains questions about the clarity of the vision and goals to ascertain awareness, communication and opportunities for review of the vision and goals. The questions in the second area deal with the structure and operation of the sub-node/node. These questions focus on the value of governance meetings and opportunities for participation in these meetings. The third theme focuses on the methods used to involve participants and addresses communication both to and from the participants. The effectiveness of the meetings both from an operational and personal perspective is the focus of the fourth theme. The fifth theme examines opportunities for participant responsibility and growth. Here the focus is on support and the meaningfulness of the participant's role. In the sixth theme, participants are asked to evaluate the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects from an operational viewpoint. Effective use of resources to support the evolving governance activities is the focus of the seventh theme. The eighth theme

examines actions that are taken to create a sense of community within the governance meetings. In the ninth theme, participants comment on whether their needs are being met within the governance activities and whether they benefit from participating in the governance process. The final theme relates to the relationships established with relevant individuals and organizations that interact with the sub-node/node.

These themes can be examined individually to provide diagnostic information about the group's governance activities.

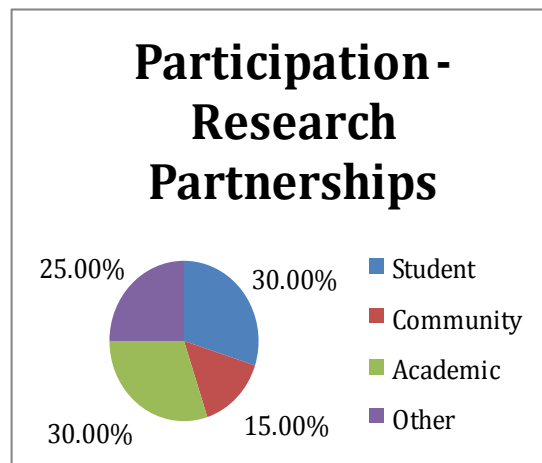
Research Partnerships

King, G., Servais, M., Currie, M., Kertoy, M., Law, M., Rosenbaum, P., Specht, J., Willoughby, T., Forchuk, C., & Chalmers, H. (2003). *The Community Impacts of Research Oriented Partnerships (The CIROP Measure)*. Available from www.impactmeasure.org.

This instrument contains a series of questions designed to assess the value of the research projects from a personal and community perspective. The purpose of this survey is to document the impact participation in the research process from conception to interpretation has on individuals and communities. It is not designed to evaluate the research; rather the focus is on the benefits of participation. There are four themes that emerge from the survey. The first two focus on personal knowledge and research skill development while the remaining themes deal with information use and development as a result of participation in the research process from a community perspective.

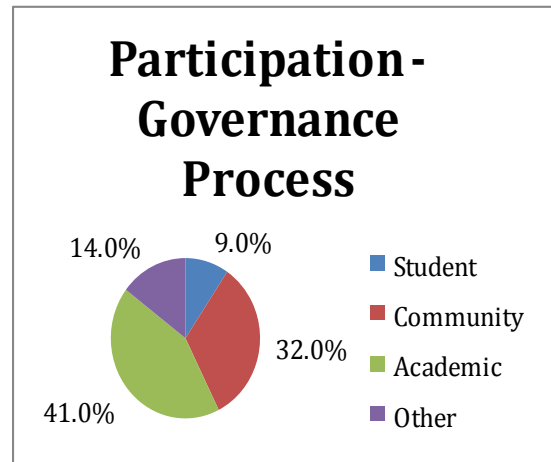
Survey Participation

For the **Research Partnership** survey, the sub-node coordinators identified 76 individuals who participated in the research activities of the sub-nodes. Each of these individuals was contacted by email and invited to complete the survey. A reminder email was sent one month after the initial invitation. Twenty of the 76 potential respondents completed the survey for a response rate of 26 percent. The accompanying graph displays the percent of respondents in the participant categories.



For the **Governance Process** survey the coordinators identified 45 individuals who participated in the activities related to the governance of the sub-nodes or the node. Again, everyone was contacted by email and invited to complete the survey. A reminder was sent one month later. Twenty-two responses were received for a response rate of 49 percent. The accompanying graph displays the percent of respondents in the participant categories.

Due to the small number of respondents no sub-node or node analyses are reported.



Research Participation Outcomes

When reviewing the results, the reader should keep in mind that the data was collected between May and August 2008.

Percentage of Respondents Who Reported Development in the Thematic Areas		
	Community	Academic
Personal knowledge development	88	97
Personal research skill development	74	87
Organizational/group access to and use of information	67	58
Community and organizational development	96	84

Indicators of personal development in terms of increased knowledge and understanding of research topics and current information in the topic area showed strong improvement for both the community and academic members of these research projects. These increases can be attributed to the exchange of information that occurs as the research projects develop. It should be kept in mind that these data were collected at a time when many of the research project were just underway, so it is even more telling that such results are apparent early in the process. That both groups indicated improvement to such a great degree is indicative of the mutual benefits from engaging in participatory research. In the area of research skill development, the results confirm that both groups have experienced substantive growth. Given that many of the projects surveyed were ongoing, there should be more opportunities for growth as the projects move towards completion. It is encouraging to note that academic participants reported more development in this area as this indicates that these participants are more actively engaged by the process and are not, as has been suggested, simply resource people for the projects.

The area of least impact is the community access to information. This is due, in part, to timing. Many of the projects were in the initial stages of development and as such the information needed by the communities had not been collected and interpreted. This is expected to change as project reports are completed.

In terms of community and organizational development it is encouraging to see evidence of growth. Across the Network, the impact of engaging in these research projects is already beginning to be realized.

...it is too early to evaluate the research partnerships which are emerging. Also I and my organization were quite far along the social economy research continuum when we became engaged so there has been less growth opportunity for us to this point

...Je sens que nous sommes encore très loin de se comprendre mutuellement (universitaire et communauté). Nous utilisons les mêmes mots mais nous n'avons pas les mêmes interprétations et définitions de ces 'mêmes' mots.

...increased awareness of need for strengthened collaborations & research

...As a student my involvement with the Social Economy has lead to new and increased opportunities for professional and personal development and a greater awareness in regards to working with non-governmental organizations; the role that universities can play in our communities

Percentage of Respondents – Governance Process Thematic Areas						
	Community			Academic		
	SA/A	N	D/SD	SA/A	N	D/SD
Clarity of vision and goals	66	33	2	85	13	2
Effectiveness of structure	72	9	29	84	14	2
Effectiveness of communication	57	23	20	75	22	3
Effectiveness of meetings	58	28	14	86	14	0
Sense of community	86	7	7	96	2	2
Member responsibility and growth	44	38	18	58	30	12
Project effectiveness	70	14	16	76	19	5
Resource use	70	23	17	80	12	8
Meets needs and provides benefits	51	24	25	75	14	11
Relationship with power players	72	21	7	70	19	11


(one respondent is equivalent to two percentage points; SA/A – strongly agree/agree; N – neutral; D/SD – disagree/strongly disagree)

The development of governance processes within the Network is modeled on participatory approaches. Individuals and organizations have various degrees of familiarity with these processes and the results are indicative of emerging potential. Overall, the academic participants provided a more positive evaluation of the emerging governance process than did the community participants. Although in all

thematic areas the majority of community participants provided a positive evaluation of the process to date.

There are four areas where improvement should be considered. These are: effectiveness of communication, effectiveness of meetings, opportunities for member responsibility and growth, and meeting the needs of members and providing benefits to members. With regard to communication, the questions deal with both method and content. Given the geographic area encompassed by the network, it is difficult to arrange meeting times and locations that accommodate all participants' needs. Also, drawing a participant away from their work during work hours may be problematic for social economy organizations. Opportunity for member responsibility and growth is the theme most in need of attention. Fostering leadership skills and mentoring in the context of governance processes would help participants experience benefits in this area. In the area of meeting needs and providing benefits, the issue appears to be related to the communication and needs/benefits themes mentioned above. An emphasis on encouraging connections among Network participants where needs are identified, communicated and addressed would be seen as beneficial. Benefits and growth are related to not only the governance process but the outcomes from the research projects. As more project reach completion, it is expected that participants will experience growth and see the benefits.

It is encouraging to note that both groups identified an increased sense of community within their sub-nodes. This foundational theme will serve to support improvements in the other areas. Many of the sub-nodes have expended much effort in creating their mandate and the processes to achieve their mandate. This is reflected in the strong ratings given to the clarity of vision and goals as well as the effectiveness of the governance structure. Resource allocation was seen as effective especially as it relates to the creation and implementation of research projects.




...the model we've used for decision-making is inclusive and appropriate

...we have an incredible strength of communication on issues of social economy and sustainability

...we function as a committee of the whole with an agreed quorum for decision-making; so we are all on the executive, as time and opportunity allows

...communication flow is a challenge in a team of this size



Conclusions – Research Partnerships

- Some personal knowledge development occurred as a result of the partnership in 88% of community members and 97% of academic members – strength that can be leveraged for further accomplishments
- Some personal research skill development in 74% of community members and 87% of academic members – a strong foundation for useful research products
- Increased access to and use of information reported by 67% of community members and 58% of academic members – information is relevant and useful (despite many studies still in process)
- Increased community and organizational development experienced by 96% of community members and 84% of academic members – capacity building is recognized

Conclusions – Governance Process

- Mission, goals and organizational structure are valued by a strong majority of both community and academic participants – the initial work in this area is proving to be useful
- Effective resource use enabled valuable projects – the interplay between research objectives and resource availability appears to be well-balanced
- A sense of community was established
- Access to persons in positions of power was valued
- Although the members of the academic community found communication and meetings suitable, about one-half of the community members called for improvement in these areas
- Both groups called for greater opportunities for member responsibility and growth
- Approximately 50% of the community members, but 75% of the academic members reported that their needs were being met and were experiencing benefits – further identification of the needs and expected benefits for the community members should be undertaken