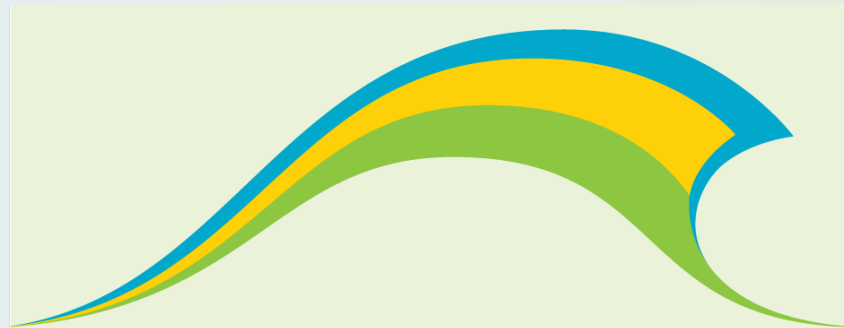


Measuring the Co-operative Difference in Affordable Housing

Réseau de recherche pour mesurer la
DIFFÉRENCE COOPÉRATIVE



Measuring the Co-operative Difference
RESEARCH NETWORK

Introduction

- Purpose of the presentation is to share findings and conclusions from three different research projects that were completed through the MCDRN CURA.

Project One: Exploring Differences Among Co-operative, Non-profit and For-profit Housing

- We did case studies of three affordable rental housing projects that were almost identical in their characteristics:
 - Built during the same time period
 - Built for the same type of resident
 - Received the same provincial funding (IAH initiative)
 - Located in similarly-sized communities
 - All had approximately the same number of units
 - The incorporation status was different: a for-profit, non-profit and co-op

Because the projects were so similar except for one characteristic, you can explore cause (so does organizational form cause any differences in housing?)

Project One: Exploring Differences

- We interviewed developers and residents from each housing project (N=44)
- **Findings:** Housing organizations secured resources to build the housing differently: the non-profit and the co-op received significant amounts of in-kind contributions and grants.
- The for-profit organization had greater experience in housing development. Both the non-profit and the co-operative were “learning by doing.”

Project One: Exploring Differences

Findings (continued):

- The non-profit and the co-operative were connected to other organizations in the community (and beyond), while the for-profit wasn't.
- The co-operative featured resident involvement in the planning phase of the housing and in decision-making in the housing, while the other two organizations didn't.

Project One: Exploring Differences

Conclusions:

- Residents are involved in decision-making in housing co-operatives.
- Housing co-operatives share characteristics with non-profit housing organizations around garnering donations and learning by doing. Importantly, like with non-profits, co-operative housing is part of a community-building strategy, rather than a bricks and mortar strategy.

Project Two: How Do Residents Benefit from Being Involved in Co-operative Housing?

I looked at involvement in housing co-operatives (through being on the board, planning social events, and doing operational tasks) and the following outcomes:

- people's capabilities (so learning financial skills, operational skills, organizational experience, skills in working with others, and self confidence)
- social ties (so fostering friendships and stronger personal support)
- the ability of members to influence decisions over their housing.

Project Two: Do Residents Benefit from Being Involved in Co-operative Housing?

- I used data from the Co-operative Housing Programs Evaluation conducted in 2001 and 2002
- 221 co-operatives across the country were randomly selected, as were residents living in these co-ops (N=2,410).

Project Two: Do Residents Benefit from Being Involved in Co-operative Housing?

Do residents benefit when they participate in operational tasks in their housing co-operatives?

Yes, they do. Specifically, they report that they gain:

- Organizational experience
- Financial skills
- Operational skills
- Influence over housing decisions

Project Two: Do Residents Benefit from Being Involved in Co-operative Housing?

Do residents benefit when they participate in planning social events in their housing co-operatives?

Yes, they do. Specifically, they report that they gain:

- Organizational experience
- Financial skills
- Operational skills
- Skills in working with others
- Self-confidence
- Friends and strengthened personal support
- Influence over housing decisions

Project Two: Do Residents Benefit from Being Involved in Co-operative Housing?

Do residents benefit when they are on the board of directors of their housing co-operatives?

Yes, they do. Specifically, they report that they gain:

- Organizational experience
- Financial skills
- Operational skills
- Skills in working with others
- Self-confidence
- Friends and strengthened personal support
- Influence over housing decisions

Project Two: Do Residents Benefit from Being Involved in Co-operative Housing?

- Being on the board matters: Financial skills, organizational experience, skills in working with others and self-confidence had the greatest chance of being experienced if a resident served on the board of directors.
- Gaining an ability to influence decisions over housing also had the strongest chance of being reported if an individual served on the board.
- But other types of involvement also led to benefits for residents.

Project three: Young Member Engagement in Housing Co-operatives

- Purpose of the project was to understand how engagement matters for young members, and how to foster greater engagement among young members
- In-depth interviews were conducted with young members, managers and directors over the age of thirty (N=18) from 6 co-ops
- Findings are similar to project two: young people reported that they learned a great deal by being involved in governance, and that this involvement helped them build social capital in their buildings

Project three: Young Member Engagement in Housing Co-operatives

Sample excerpts from interviews:

“It's also encouraged me to develop leadership skills, because sometimes I will now lead the meetings and I really like that because it's taught me to practice being diplomatic, being empathetic and also literally leading the meeting and making sure everyone stays on track.”

“We don't vote on things at work. When we have to decide something, or debate the merit of some idea or whatever, that ability to speak up a bit more, I think, is something that I've taken from sitting on the board.”

Project three: Young Member Engagement

“People are more open to talking to me in the elevator and on the phone and I get to know a lot more about people's lives.... by virtue of being on the board and by virtue of having those events, we have been able to help our neighbours out and they have been able to help us out and a lot of the barriers have been withdrawn...”

Overall Conclusions Based on MCDRN Research

Overall conclusions: Housing co-operatives contribute to community. They also foster skills development, social capital, and the ability for residents to influence decisions about the housing where they live.