


# Region and Inter-Community Linkage: Consumers' Community Co-operative

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A presentation to the Policy  
Conference  
Communities Under Pressure:  
the role of co-operatives and the  
social economy

Ottawa, March 3, 2006

# Research With CCC

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- Co-operative membership and identity in a contemporary consumer food co-operative
- Two of the research questions we have been investigating:
  1. How are processes of globalization affecting CCC?
  2. How do the stores, their members, non-member shoppers, and employees “do” co-operative identity, promote social cohesion, and mobilize social capital in efforts to attain economic success?

# Consumers' Community Co-operative

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- Co-op Atlantic decision to form CCC from 28 independent co-ops that were in considerable difficulty – loss of members, financial losses.
- Opened for business January 2001.
- by Feb 2006 reduced to 17 stores
- Challenges related to ***internal issues*** (management, financing, governance, membership, local and regional identity)
- Challenges related to ***external changes*** in the economy, the industry, and the communities in which CCC stores are located

# Methods and Design


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- Consultation and collaboration with Research Advisory Committee & Board
- Observation at a variety of meetings and in stores
- Case studies of 2 stores
- Interviews (CCC and Co-op Atlantic)
- Records (minutes, press releases)
- Survey data (random sample of members)

# Context

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- Co-op Atlantic has about 10% of the grocery market in Atlantic Canada. Sobeys and Loblaws dominate; Shoppers, WalMart and others are growing in significance
- Changes in consumption patterns, and in production and distribution in the industry
- Food security concerns – access, equity, quality/healthy foods, and sustainability
- Demographic and other changes in the communities and in the region (rural and small towns)



# Two research conclusions for your consideration

# Conclusion #1

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- The natural strengths of co-operatives are shown to be a good fit with the region's local communities.
  - They are democratic, locally rooted businesses that offer employment, products and services.
  - They have a volunteer component that links them with other parts of the social economy.
  - They can reinforce or catalyze local networks of CD/CED and of a caring economy



# Example: CCC Survey Data & the Co-op Difference

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Members want to find reasons to shop in their store, to understand what it offers by way of a co-op difference. They note 4 inter-related elements:

1. Being a good food store
2. Being rooted in the community
3. Making membership meaningful
4. Standing for something (being an alternative to other grocery stores)

# Conclusion #2

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- The road is perilous, the competition fierce, and the importance of mobilizing the strengths of co-ops (co-op difference) is acute, as CCC has discovered
- Co-operative and membership identity are key elements of this mobilization

# Strategic Planning at CCC

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- CCC is reinforcing existing regional strategies, and developing new ones in 3 main areas:
  - (1) healthy food strategy;
  - (2) agrifood strategy (farm to table);
  - (3) ethical business practices (fair trade)
- While they are working on re-engagement of members, CCC recognizes that it still needs to develop and implement clear strategies in the areas of governance, and inclusion of members in the process and strategies for change

“Doing”  
Co-operative Identity

Social Change Orientation

- Co-operative ideology
- Movement perspective

Building Social Capacity

- Empowerment and bonding  
(democracy) (social cohesion)
- business efficiency to meet member  
and community needs

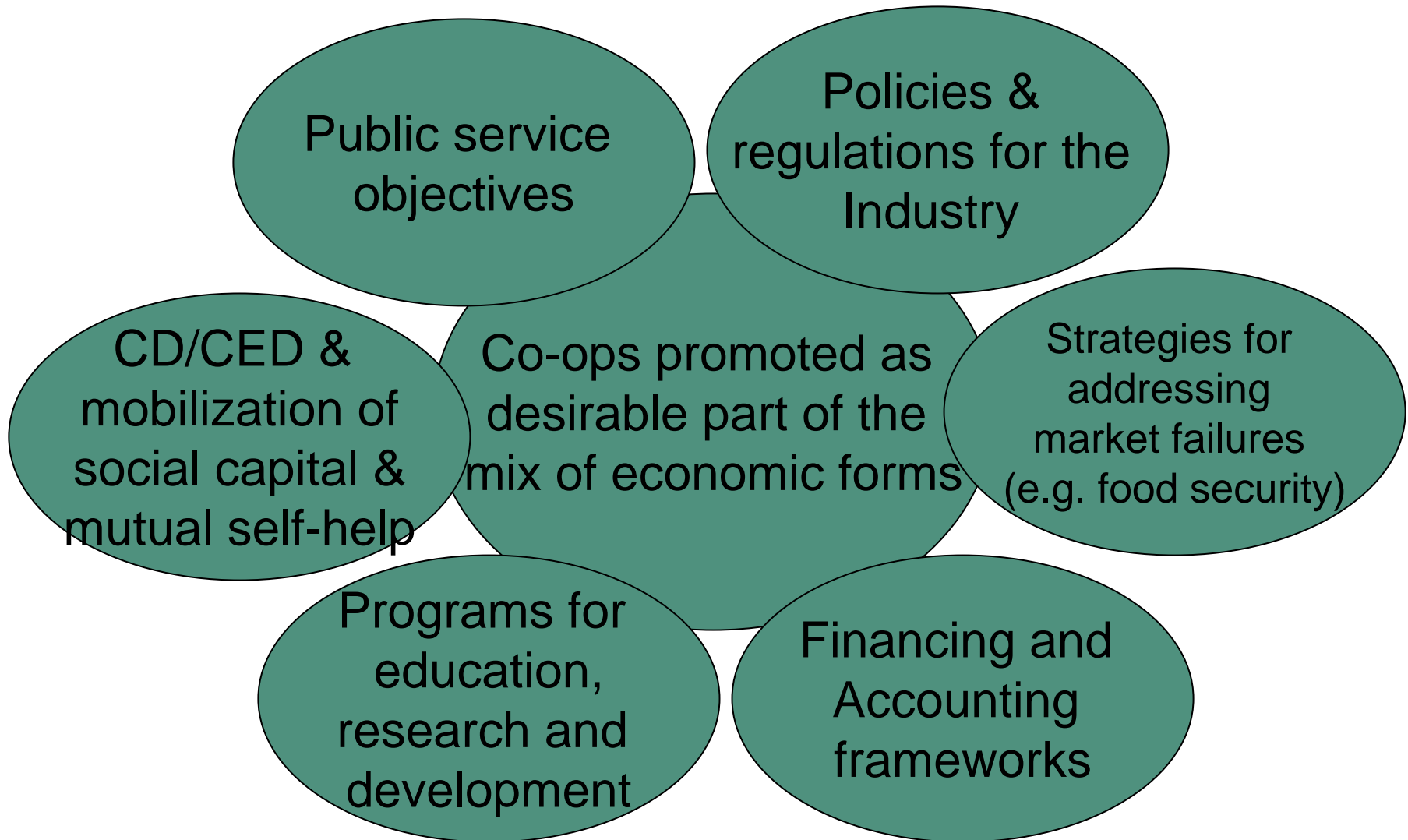
Relationship with Community

- Opportunity structure  
and support structure
- Structures and processes  
for bridging  
(social cohesion)

Meaning of Membership and  
the Place of Membership  
in a Co-operative’s Identity

- Strength of identity as a democratic  
member-owned organization
- Salience and centrality of this identity

## Policy Contributions to Opportunity Structure (examples)



# Positioning the economic within the social

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- The social economy is not just reactive or residual. It is a locus of proactive agency, creating a space where meeting people's needs, rather than profit per se, is the driving motivation.
- Co-operatives are an integral part of the Social Economy.
- Composed both of profit and not-for-profit organizations, the social economy offers an ***alternative model*** of socio-economic dynamics, benefiting from mutualism, individual and collective entrepreneurialism, & competition.

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