

# **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