



ENQUIRING, CRITICAL, AND CREATIVE SPIRIT

A History of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
at the University of Saskatchewan

MERLE MASSIE

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“If the Co-operative Movement is to benefit from this research, it needs to encourage the enquiring, critical, and creative spirit which exists at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives.”

— Chris Axworthy, first director of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, 1987¹

¹ Board minutes, 1987. Centre for the Study of Co-operatives Fonds (CSC Fonds), Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan. Quote from Chris Axworthy, first director of the Centre.

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Overview

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives opened in the Diefenbaker Building at the University of Saskatchewan in June 1984. During the subsequent thirty-five years, the Centre has consolidated its interdisciplinary focus to create a world-renowned body of co-operative and credit union knowledge. The following is a history of that organization to 2018. This work was commissioned by the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives and was researched and written by Merle Massie, PhD.

Enquiring, Critical, and Creative Spirit: A History of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan was published electronically in 2020. This print edition was published in 2024 for the 40th anniversary of the now Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives.

Foreword

It's difficult to not feel nostalgia for an era that has come and gone when reading Dr. Massie's history of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives (CSC), rebranded the *Canadian* Centre for the Centre of Co-operatives (CCSC) in 2019.

Economic Relevance

When the Centre came into being in 1984, co-operatives dominated Saskatchewan's economy and could use their clout to influence university and government decisions. As Massie recounts in her book, as recently as the early 1990s, co-operatives could rightly claim they represented 25% of the province's gross domestic product, employed tens of thousands of people, and were as integral to the fabric and identity of the province. Many years after its demise, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool's elevators are still as central to the province's iconography as yellow canola fields and living skies.

But a lot has changed.

The province's understanding of and appreciation for the co-operative sector has become more historical artefact than present-day reality. Economically, the sector still matters—Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL), credit unions and the Co-operators are still some of the province's largest and top employers—but not as much as it once did. In addition to the disappearance of the Wheat Pool, the co-operative sector has seen the dissolution of producer co-operatives (e.g., the Dairy Producers Co-operative), the sale of Concentra (formerly Co-operative Trust), the closure of the Co-operative College, and consolidation and bifurcation in the credit union sector.

Social Networks & Trust

Reading Massie's book, it is hard not to feel longing for the dense social networks that characterized the movement in the 1980s. People in the co-operative sector knew, liked, befriended, married, and otherwise socialized with each other. Trust was high. If the co-operative sector believed in a cause, it could mobilize people and money quickly, with a few phone calls or conversations at the numerous meetings that glued *the movement* together. That trust extended to the Centre: while there were unavoidable tensions around what kind of research and activities Centre faculty and staff should undertake, the co-operative sector generally took a hands-off attitude to what they did.

Today, the situation is different. The co-operative sector's leadership rarely socialize with or even know each other. Smaller co-operatives—housing, mental health, film, media, cannabis, or otherwise—live largely in isolation, with only the thinnest of networks and often carrying on in precarity. Attendance at sector-wide events is sparse, with last-minute event cancellations becoming increasingly frequent. And increasingly, as Massie documents, co-operative sector partners are asking about the “value proposition” and looking for a *quid pro quo* for their support.

Cohorts and Budgets

It is also difficult to not feel nostalgia for an era where the Centre had the means to recruit a large *cohort* of talented scholars and staff who were co-located with their own physical library. They enjoyed the camaraderie of a shared career journey, physical space, mission, and commitment to interdisciplinarity that was true to the co-operative spirit, where at its best, democratic control meant clashes of ideas and sometimes heated but ultimately productive interactions.

Today, the Centre has a less ample budget and is unable to financially support such a sizeable coterie of scholars or command such space and resources. It no longer has a library, or

effectively its own building to house an interdisciplinary team. Instead, its affiliated fellows are stretched across campus and into other universities and even other provinces and countries.

Courage

All things considered, it is little wonder then that Massie ends her book on a somewhat pessimistic note, questioning the relevance and future of the Centre. For a (mostly) outsider like I was when I took over leadership of the Centre in 2018/19, Massie's conclusion—fresh off the press at the time—was at once demoralizing and surprising. After all, would not one *expect* a book funded by and about the Centre, ostensibly celebrating its 35 years, to end on a positive note? Isn't that the way things are done? And by the way, what had I gotten myself into?

Six years into the role of director, and with two successful five-year fundraising efforts behind me, I now see the harmony between Massie's ending and the Centre's *leitmotif*. In some important way, the Centre's unstated core mission has been its commitment to the academic discipline *and* democratic practice of saying and hearing hard but true things. In the early days, this commitment found expression—as Massie documents—in inaugural Centre Director's Chris Axworthy's repeated struggles, and threats to resign, with the Centre's supervisory board, comprised as it was then of a mix of co-operative sector leaders, government officials, and university representatives, all with different objectives and wants for the Centre.

The same commitment found expression in Fulton and Fairbairn's editorials and research raising prescient concerns about the Wheat Pool's changing governance norms, effectively challenging one of the Centre's major funders and possibly putting at risk the faculty salaries (including Dr. Fairbairn's) that hinged on its ongoing support. They did not waver.

Today, these tensions are most evident in sometimes difficult conversations with the sector about balancing academic independence and the sector's growing expectation of a clear "value proposition," as well as sometimes fraught conversations

with its institutional home, the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, which has its own funding, academic, and “value proposition” pressures.

Over time, the Centre’s most loyal supporters—FCL and the credit union movement—would come to appreciate the willingness of Centre scholars to speak difficult truths. Massie cites Ted Turner, president of the Wheat Board when the Centre was created, as noting: “Organizations we trust, like the CSC, they were not criticizing just to criticize, but to make us better. We could accept that sort of thing without blowing our tops.”

In this sense, the commissioning of this book was perhaps the culmination of this courageous disposition, with Massie clearly given full discretion to report back on her findings—good, bad, or ugly. In fact, one cannot escape the impression that, at some level, Massie must have felt emboldened by what she learned about the Center, recognizing that an unflinching assessment of its future was in keeping with its past and its mission.

Concluding Thoughts

Nostalgia is core to the historical method. The historian’s coherent narrative evokes sentiments of longing for an orderly past at odds with the disorderly entropic present. At its best, the narrative helps us turn from an inward gaze rooted in the past to an outward hope for the future. If the past can appear as neatly formed and richly narrated as the historian’s account suggests, there is the prospect of bringing some order to the present.

Massie’s book, despite its somewhat pessimistic ending, accomplishes that important objective. It also points the way forward. After all, the social entrepreneurs who start co-operatives and the scholars who study them share, in some ways, the historian’s commitment to order, narrative, or otherwise. Without co-operatives in mind, the late great mathematician and founder of cybernetics Norbert Wiener described that *telos* this way: “our main obligation is to establish arbitrary enclaves of

order and system...it is the greatest possible victory to be, to continue to be, and to have been.”

And thus, the social entrepreneurs go about their work by drawing on co-operative principles and values developed over decades to inform the design and creation of new organizations, but always with an idea of adapting those principles and values to today’s reality and a more hopeful future. Their motivation for creating a co-operative *starts* from recognizing a problem, facing it head on, and doing something about it.

For the scholar and the Centre, the task is about understanding why and how co-operatives rise, prosper, and—yes—fail, and then sharing that understanding widely, courageously, unflinchingly, with an eye towards criticism (where warranted) that makes co-operatives better, not worse. A lot has changed since 1984. But that much has remained constant. Dr. Massie’s work is a reminder to hold the course for the next 40 years and continue this task of courageously studying and advising on co-operatives, these *democratic* enclaves of order and system.

Marc-André Pigeon, PhD
Director and Strategic Research Fellow
Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
2024

Preface

Reflection on writing the institutional history of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives

Growing up in rural Saskatchewan, our household purchasing power—from our accounts at the local credit union to selling grain to buying groceries and picking up farm supplies—was leveraged and given strength by co-operatives. Somehow, the fudgy ice cream treats were creamier, the pop colder, and the chips saltier when they came from the co-op store. I loved watching the little yellow balls float and whirl freely on the gas pump as gasoline poured into our vehicle’s tank. Sitting and sweating in the hot interior of the grain truck, I eagerly opened my window to take a breath as we rolled into the cool, dusty, dark cavern of the Pool elevator to unload. While my mother chatted with the teller and sorted out cheque cashing and deposits, I paced the linoleum floor at the credit union, making patterns with my (probably) muddy rubber boots.

I am now a Saskatchewan-focused author and historian, deeply rooted in both the province and the University of Saskatchewan. I took my BA double honours in English and History, then focused on Saskatchewan history for my master’s and, later, my PhD. I worked as a professional research associate with the (then) Centre for the Study of Cooperatives during the Co-operative Innovation Project in 2015, exploring the potential role of co-operatives in rural and Indigenous communities of western Canada in the twenty-first century. When the Centre asked me to write its institutional history, the opportunity was steeped in this recent professional association and pushed by the warmth of my own memories. It was both an honour and a pleasure to be entrusted to tell its story.

There’s an old adage: if you’ve visited one rural community, you’ve seen one rural community. They are all different, and change in different ways, for different reasons. A place you visit

today might be very different in ten, twenty, or forty years from now. That adage is also true for the (now) Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. As co-operatives change, so does the Centre. That sense of change, that animated spirit of discovery, rediscovery, and creativity, was clear to me as I dove into the institutional archive of the Centre and spoke at length with many past and contemporary faculty. Its history exposed an entrepreneurial spirit focused on understanding what makes co-operatives so unique, so fascinating, and so essential—and I understood why the Centre is integral to that co-operative energy.

It may be a bit of an odd choice to frame this institutional history using the concepts of *resilience* as I do in this book. I know of no other comparable historical work that uses the resilience framework in this way. Nonetheless, even years later, I love how the framework and its key concepts allowed me to think through the Centre's history in new and innovative ways. As I explain in the original prologue, thinking through the lens of resilience gave me room to focus on 'the spaces in between, where the bump and grind of history happens.' The Centre's story is one of resilience.

One thing I know for sure: it's very hard to publish a book during a pandemic—this book, like so many in 2020, came into the world in digital form. I'm so pleased that the Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, in conjunction with its 40th anniversary, is issuing this book in a limited physical release, and delighted it can now be held in hands and placed on shelves. Special thanks to Murray Fulton, who trusted me to write it in the first place; to all those who took the time to chat with me about their perceptions and share their stories about the Centre; to Nora Russell, who expertly smoothed my rough prose; and to Natalie Kallio, whose brilliance and creativity took it through to print. Best wishes on the Centre's anniversary, and here's to many more years of 'enquiring, critical, and creative spirit' to come.

Merle Massie, PhD, 2024

Prologue

Resilience and Institutional History

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives (CSC) is an institution created in the early 1980s at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Its mandate has been to study the co-operative form of enterprise and to disseminate that knowledge through teaching and publications. It exists as its own entity (a centre designed to promote study on co-operatives) but is embedded within other spheres, most notably academia, government, and co-operatives, all of which have local, regional, national, and international presence and power.

Compiling and writing an institutional history of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives opens the door to self-reflection and review, with one eye on the past and one on the future. The most common institutional histories present a chronological timeline from founding to the present day, with the occasional pause to reflect on the circumstances or results of a particular event. Readers take note: This is not that kind of history. Chronology remains central; by its nature, history is about change over time and this story is indeed about change over time at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. However, I don't think that's quite enough. For an institution, studying change over time is also a study in resilience, or how an entity has withstood or adapted to the tests of time. I have chosen to focus this history using concepts drawn from The Resilience Alliance, which studies resilience as a critical concept. While Alliance researchers focus primarily on mixed socio-ecological systems, I believe some of their concepts can be adapted as a new way to reconsider how we think about an institution, as a social system made up

of people, embedded within larger systems that have all kinds of cross-scale interactions and influences. I thought about these concepts as I worked through the history of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives.

Some of the concepts are a bit dense and require concentration. First and foremost, the Resilience Alliance defines resilience as “the capacity of a system to absorb disturbances and reorganize while undergoing change so as to retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks.” In other words, resilience is about how well something responds and adapts to pressure, be it from within or from without, but ultimately those pressures do not force a fundamental change. A lack of resilience considers the kinds of thresholds that push a system to change, to become something different from what was first created. Scientists might call that shift an alternate state with different structural and functional properties—in other words, different rules, goals, and purpose. Time, and change over time, becomes the focal point. Resilience theory also recognizes that the way a particular system works ebbs and flows: sometimes it functions well and is active and robust; at other times, it is closer to a potential critical threshold and could change into something quite different. Part of addressing and understanding resilience is identifying those points where change is more likely.

In co-operative studies, resilience and sustainability are virtually interchangeable concepts and usually refer to the resilience and sustainability not so much of the individual business, but of the co-operative model itself: Does it remain a viable model within a changing society? What are the ways co-operatives must innovate and adapt? How can we grow (or at least maintain) worldwide use of the co-operative model? How can the co-operative model adapt to work in different social environments, and are they still co-operatives? These and similar questions often drive the research agenda. Yet, there are few to no studies that investigate what it means for a co-operative, or the co-operative model, to be resilient, to consider what a

resilient institution or co-operative business looks like, and to adopt ways in which resilience can be measured or analyzed.

The question thus becomes, can the concepts developed by the Resilience Alliance and other ecological writers provide important new ways to assess and interpret co-operative institutional history? Yes. An institution (such as the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, or an individual co-operative, apex institution, or other creation) can be viewed as a focal system that contains local dynamics, set within larger-scale dynamics that contain cross-scale interactions, cascading change, thresholds, governance systems, and transitions. The focus shifts from the facts (dates, names, and so forth) to the spaces in between, where the bump and grind of history happens. In other words, it's helpful to consider things like smaller- and larger-scale circles of influence, including personalities, internal and external processes, expectations, laws, rules (written and unwritten), mandates, and goals. The concepts offered by resilience theory provide a valuable new perspective for institutional history.

The Resilience Alliance has compiled a Resilience Assessment framework workbook to help practitioners ask questions, consider multiple concepts, and assess the resilience of the system under study. The framework outlines five major components:

- describing the system
- examining system dynamics
- analyzing interactions
- exploring system governance
- acting on the assessment

The first component relates to classic institutional history, as a matter of origin stories and constructing an overall picture of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives: the legal entity, the people, the place, the issues. System dynamics, the second component, looks at the system state, the variables that fluctuate over time, and the feedbacks that flow back into the Centre. These variables could be funding, physical space, technology,

personnel change, research directions, and leadership. The third component, cross-scale interactions, looks at how the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives interacts with both smaller- and larger-scale systems within which it is embedded, particularly the University of Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan, and the co-operative world. Concepts such as adaptive cycle and panarchy are helpful here. The adaptive cycle describes four phases: rapid growth, conservation of resource, release of resources, and reorganization. Panarchy shows how cross-scale linkages affect the adaptive cycle.

System governance, the fourth component in a resilience assessment, recognizes the rules and laws and institutions, formal and informal, that guide how the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives functions. The second, third, and fourth components of this way of considering history (system dynamics, cross-scale interactions, and governance) are iterative and reflexive, which drives the analytical process of advancing understanding. While thinking, working, and writing through the history of the Centre, I was constantly backing up and rewriting or inserting things that I missed, or didn't consider. As you read through, you will bring your own experiences and observations to bear, and what is published here may trigger some thoughts and discussion points for you. You'll find holes, or places where my thought process didn't go quite far enough. At some point, though, I had to stop, publish what I had, and let you take it from here. That's how we build history over time: Let more than one voice into the conversation.

The last component of a classic resilience assessment is acting on the assessment. This is an activity not normally associated with a regular institutional history, which is mainly about capturing and recording an institution's story. It could set the ground for a robust discussion around strategies for future transformation and adaptation. It's also where those who read about the history of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, who might be contemplating building a similar centre or changing the focus of their own institution, could find some useful thoughts. An easier way to think about all of this is to remember

that resilience is a tool that helps us to think about two sides of a larger question: How does it work? When does it not work?

All of these ideas, strange as they may be to those expecting a classic institutional history, are helpful in writing a history of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, in that they encourage readers to think in new ways about Centre structures and functions beyond simple chronology. Institutional history, as noted by Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, can be too closely linked to biography, particularly to the biographies of institutional leaders such as directors or board chairs or presidents. Institutional history written by an institution—in the form of annual reports, eulogies written for colleagues, or anniversary commemorations—recounts achievements and self-valued successes, but offers little critical analysis of processes or problems. After all, it's important to put the best foot forward. Likewise, institutional histories produced by students during the course of their honours or master's programs, or those written by hired ghost-writers, tend to focus on origin stories and timelines and successes, which have value but lack true rigour.

One of the challenges is that institutional memory (as in, a single unified memory) is a misleading concept. Every institution contains multiple shared memories, many of which are internally inconsistent, difficult to document or corroborate, and often do not “match.” Sifting through the perspectives of researchers, staff, and funders over time produces a continuously changing kaleidoscope view, not a painting. Creating a seamless narrative that encompasses origin stories, progress, and achievement means writing an institutional history that quietly sweeps a lot of mismatched mess under the carpet or into the closet. It looks tidy, but we do know better. As a research historian, I know that some of the most important lessons to be learned happen in the brittle places, the unintended consequences, and the mistakes—as well as the major successes.

A related and important body of work lies in institutional theory and its critical insights. W. Richard Scott of Stanford wrote in 2004 that institutional theory “attends to the deeper

and more resilient aspects of social structure,” such as rules, norms, and routines, and how they influence behaviour in an institution. Much of this work is carried out by organizational sociologists and management scholars, although researchers who use institutional theory are spread across the spectrum. One of the central concepts in new institutional theory rejects the idea that organizations evolve rationally to pursue internally defined goals. Instead, institutional theory shows how organizations respond to outside forces, to show how, where, and why they are affected by external pressure, in order to gain or maintain legitimacy. Sometimes, those changes aren’t at all rational, but rather, are merely responsive to a particular problem. A related issue in institutional theory reflects on the immense impact of history: If an organization reflects too much on its origins, and its origin stories, it can then experience trouble with innovation, exhibiting a pull towards stability, even stasis. Strands of institutional theory prioritize the importance of an organization’s archival internal documents, as evidence of institutional processes, logics, and organization. Overall, institutional theory offers a number of concepts that are of great use to an institutional historian; however, there is as yet no unifying framework, nor is there a research guide or workbook that offers specific steps to producing an institutional history.

A resilience assessment with a view to writing an institutional history allows for a more rigorous examination of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, how the Centre has changed over time in response to disturbances and disruptions, and how it is regarded, and impacted, by larger-scale connections such as the University of Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan, and the co-operative sector. To build this history, I’ve had the good fortune to have been granted full access to the Centre’s excellent collection of archival documents, which include public documents such as published annual reports, newsletters, articles, and research publications, but also internal documents such as the multilateral signed agreements among funders, director’s reports to the board, board meeting minutes, materials related to planning sessions and retreats, strategic plans, and the original correspondence that led to the

creation of the Centre. Most of this archival record is held at the Centre itself; some is held in the University of Saskatchewan Archives in the President's Fonds and the Centre's Fonds, while a small portion was offered from one of the original founding co-operatives. In addition, I conducted a series of personal semi-structured interviews with current and previous staff, faculty, and board members, to provide a taste of the personalities and events that contributed to the Centre of the Study of Co-operatives. The list of those interviewed is by no means exhaustive, and I apologize if you would have liked to be interviewed but were not. Please consider doing so and having that interview kept as part of a larger archive of oral history on the CSC. I'm grateful for the time, energy, and thoughtful discussions shared with me. I'm also grateful to the Centre's leadership for their support during the writing of this history. My mother was stricken with terminal cancer and I was allowed to put this contract on indefinite hold while I attended to my own family. Such professional support is rare, and I remain humbled and thankful for the humanity extended to me. That story, I believe, showcases the core spirit of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives—deep generosity.

One of the reasons why classic chronological institutional history can be dry is that the author's voice is absent. The reader can easily forget who wrote it, as if it magically appeared, complete, with no struggle. But faceless history couldn't be further from the truth. If this history had been written by anyone else, the stories chosen, in what order, and which given emphasis or meaning or detail, would give you a picture as different as one artist's rendering of a flower to another. No two artists are the same; no two writers are the same; no two institutional histories, even when given access to exactly the same documents and interviews, would be the same. In reading the following history, you will note that my voice is present, and it will change from historical description to analysis and back again, peppered with some commentary on my own struggles to make sense of the story. This is a deliberate writing device.

Full disclosure: from January 2015 to mid-2016, I was employed on contract by the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives as a research officer for the Co-operative Innovation Project. I also conducted contract research for the Centre in 2017 on the Ian MacPherson papers held by the Centre, producing an internal assessment of Dr. MacPherson's partially written manuscript and supporting research on the history of credit unions in Canada. This experience with the Centre, combined with my professional capacity as a researcher, writer, and trained historian, led to the contract work you are now reading. All opinions and editorial decisions are mine.

Chapter One: Origins and Organization

Defining the Focal System: The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives

The University–Co-operative Task Force

In 1980, a soft-spoken, slight but rangy, very tall man of Icelandic descent by the name of Leo Kristjanson became the president of the University of Saskatchewan. Born in the swampy, wet farming region near Gimli, Manitoba, Kristjanson went to Winnipeg to take his first steps as a scholar, earning both a bachelor's and master's degree. He then traveled into the United States, arriving at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he earned a PhD studying the economics of rural development, population, and co-operatives. In 1959, Kristjanson came to bump his head against the doorframes while working as an economist and researcher at the Centre for Community Studies, a joint Government of Canada/University partnership located at the University of Saskatchewan. That Centre had been deliberately crafted to draw from a range of academic disciplines: sociology, economics, anthropology, psychology, and history. Specializing in community change and development, the Centre for Community Studies produced copious public reports, research, and analysis on community-level issues; it also accepted commissioned work at the request of communities, businesses, and government.

Leo Kristjanson's experiences at this centre underscored a lifelong belief in the centre-scholar model, as a way to bring multiple perspectives together to work on conceptual and practical research focused on a particular topic. The Centre for Community Studies was reformed into the Canadian Centre for

Community Studies and relocated to Ottawa in 1966. Leo Kristjanson elected to stay at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Economics and Political Science, where he soon climbed the administrative ladder: head of his department by 1969, vice-president (Planning) in 1975, and appointed president in 1980. A colleague of Leo's later noted, "People remembered you if you came up through the ranks." When you have such a long relationship with a university, it's easy to create both friends and enemies: "It [being President] was always a difficult job. He was incredibly supportive, completely committed intellectually and emotionally. A social democrat. When you have strong views, it doesn't always fit with others."²

Leo wasted no time as president. He had plans for the university, and he moved quickly to put them into action. As remains the case today, Saskatchewan in 1980 was a province where connections mattered; people from all walks of life knew each other and the degree of separation between any one Saskatchewan resident and any other was, at best, small. A population hovering around one million people meant that in practice, Saskatchewan had a strong sense of village and community. This sense of connection was even stronger for those within the co-operative sector of the province—the local wheat pool boards, the credit union boards, and the co-operative boards. If you were on one board, chances were you'd be on another, or knew the people on them, or worked with them on local or regional projects. Leo Kristjanson, a lifelong co-operative member and enthusiast who studied and taught co-operatives and credit unions in his economics classes, knew first-hand the size, power, and spirit of Saskatchewan's co-operative might. Yet, he thought, something important was missing. Co-operatives and credit unions represented some of the strongest businesses in Saskatchewan; yet, knowledge about co-operatives was dropping, and there was little to no presence in the research or teaching curriculum at all at the university level. Leo led an intervention.

²² Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

He gathered troops—Generals, actually, not troops—to discuss the problem. At Leo’s personal invitation, almost as soon as he settled into his president’s office, Leo established a University–Co-operative Task Force. Using personal links, he brought in leaders from both within and outside the university, from the left-leaning New Democratic Party government, to the leaders of the largest co-operatives, alongside the deans of the colleges on campus. On this task force: George Lee, head of Agricultural Economics; Doug Cherry, dean of Arts & Science; Blaine Holmlund, vice-president of Special Projects; Grant Mitchell, deputy minister of the Department of Co-operatives and Co-operative Development for the Province of Saskatchewan; Peter Hlushko, vice-president of Personnel and Service for The Co-operators and board chair of the Co-operative College of Canada (and who represented Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan); Vern Leland, president of Federated Co-operatives Limited; Ted Turner, president of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; and Ole Turnbull, executive director of the Co-operative College of Canada.³ It was a who’s who of the province’s co-operative community, combining decision makers from the major co-ops and the provincial government, and matching that might with university leaders.

For the co-ops, the size of each of the players mattered. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (SWP) was a farmer-owned, producer co-operative “pool” established in 1923 to commercially control the weighing, storage, and delivery of grain, particularly wheat. Farmers would commit to contracts to sell their grain to their own “pool.” Once enough farmers signed on to the idea, the Pool, as it came to be called, sold the grain over time, accumulating profit by holding the grain and selling when the market was high, rather than selling right off the combine. The Pool grew to include grain-handling facilities, terminal elevators at shipping points such as Thunder Bay, and publishing activities. By the 1980s, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool was one of

³ Leo Kristjanson Fonds, RG 001 s6 Box 12.I.22.22. Minutes Co-operative–University Task Force, Meeting No. 1, January 26th, 1981. University of Saskatchewan Archives.

Canada's largest corporations, with annual revenues of more than \$2 billion.⁴

Credit Union Central (Saskatchewan) (CUC)⁵ is a second-tier credit union, owned by Saskatchewan's credit unions. Formed in 1938, it now serves as a service supplier and liquidity manager for the credit union system in the province, as well as a consulting service for local-level credit union questions. In the 1980s, some of the province's smaller credit unions experienced severe hardship as a result of high interest rates, which led to personal and corporate bankruptcies in many towns, straining local credit unions. Credit Union Central served as a clearing-house and stabilizer for the system. By 2017, it had consolidated assets worth \$11.72 billion.⁶

Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) is also a second-tier co-operative, owned by local retail co-operatives throughout western Canada. Federated's story began in 1928, when co-operative retail stores in Manitoba and Saskatchewan identified a need for wholesaling support. Over time, provincial wholesale co-operatives and the co-operative refinery in Regina amalgamated to form Federated Co-operatives Limited. Unlike the other two major CSC partners, FCL has a cross-provincial mandate, with owners from British Columbia to Manitoba. With almost \$10 billion in sales in 2017, FCL operates in the energy, agriculture, food, and home building sectors.⁷ Nevertheless, its head office is in Saskatoon and it has retained a close association with the province, the city, and the university.

The decision to support the nascent task force is particularly notable, given the financial constraints of retail co-operatives at the time. The high interest rates of the early 1980s, which had an overall positive effect on the credit unions, placed

⁴ Garry Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots: The Remarkable Story of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1984). Numbers from Appendix F, p. 249.

⁵ Its legal name, used in the CSC contracts in the early years, was Saskatchewan Co-operative Credit Society Ltd.

⁶ <http://www.saskcentral.com/Media/Pages/Quick-Facts.aspx>, accessed 17 September 2018.

⁷ <https://www.fcl.crs/our-business/overview>, accessed 17 September 2018.

a “serious burden” on the retail co-operatives, and by extension, FCL.⁸ By coming to the table, each of these three major co-operative entities was showing support for what could become a significant change in the co-operative education world. Their leadership remained connected to other co-operatives that, while they weren’t part of the original contract, came on board in later iterations: Co-operative Trust, The Co-operators, CUMIS, and later again, Concentra Financial and CHS Inc.

From the co-operative sector, the last partner on the task force was the Co-operative College of Canada. The Co-op College, as it was known, had its roots in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where an idea to establish a co-operative institute and education centre to develop employee and director training came about in the early 1950s. This first seed grew, under the protective agency and financial support of Federated Co-operatives Limited. Over time, the Co-operative Institute became the Western Co-operative College in 1959, adding theoretical co-op content to the practical training. The college approached the University of Saskatchewan for affiliation but was rejected. To redirect and expand its influence, the Western Co-operative College re-incorporated as the Co-operative College of Canada in 1973. Director and employee training, as well as adult education and correspondence courses, remained central, but the college moved to more extension training on the ground rather than having people come to the college. It began to operate more like a research centre, producing studies, surveys, occasional papers, and films. Yet, for financial reasons, the college was running out of steam. It joined the task force, in part, as a way to address what college officials had never achieved: formal affiliation with the University of Saskatchewan, as a way to uphold the college idea, an academic space in which to study co-operatives.⁹

⁸ Harold E. Chapman, *Sharing My Life: Building the Co-operative Movement* (Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives and Harold Chapman, 2012).

⁹ Jodi Crewe, “An Educational Institute of Untold Value”: The Evolution of the Co-operative College of Canada, 1953–1987, Occasional Paper Series (Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, 2001).

What was the driving force behind this particular group agreeing to carve time out of their busy schedules—they were all leaders, with competing demands, who had to look at their calendars months in advance to make this work—to get together for these discussions? At the simplest level, the co-ops felt that they were being taken for granted. They were such a huge part of the economy and society, had given money from the local to the provincial level for thousands of projects, but felt that they didn't have the respect or recognition that perhaps was deserved. It was time, they decided, to make a big play: raise the profile of co-operatives and credit unions at the university level. "You have to get a needle in, to get things started," Vern Leland, then president of Federated Co-operatives explained.¹⁰ Ted Turner, president of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, remembered total commitment. The Wheat Pool, he said, "waved our co-operative banner wherever we went. We didn't hide it. We boasted about it. We had been strongly involved with the Co-op College of Canada. We felt it was very central to provide learning about co-operatives, their history and their purpose."¹¹ Despite decades of work at the local, provincial, and national level via fieldmen, second-tier co-op support organizations, the Co-operative College of Canada, and sporadic curriculum insertions, co-ops didn't have the same level of robust teaching, research, and analysis at the university level—and that, the co-ops decided, mattered. Students were entering university at an unprecedented rate; they had to be where the students were. To be taken seriously, to be studied and taught and debated, they needed to be a player at the university level.

The secondary issue was the pull factor. The group, including co-operative leaders and Leo Kristjanson, had excellent working relationships, near friendships, built on trust and mutual respect. They could all commit quickly and decisively to working together on a project. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, for example, was prepared to commit money, and a lot of it, because there was trust. Ted Turner later recalled, "Often it's the little things that are more influential than the big scope. Those

¹⁰ Interview with Vern Leland, 20 January 2018.

¹¹ Interview with Ted Turner, 29 January 2018.

background personal relationships meant so much. We all think it's the big issues that determine something, when often it's the many smaller connections that push you in a certain direction."¹² FCL's Vern Leland spoke of the same connection: "It seems to me that we had such a good relationship, a group of individuals that really seemed to relate to one another." The co-operative community was big enough to wield real power, but small enough to host close working relationships.

The group met at the Co-operative College of Canada board-room on a mild day in January 1981. In handwritten notes preserved from that first meeting, Leo set out his three-part goal:

1. An interdisciplinary think tank centre—a centre for the study of innovative institutional arrangements of co-operatives
2. A place for co-op people to study, something not now available
3. Strengthening of co-op offerings at university

Into the mix of conversation at that first meeting came other voices. D.R. Cherry, then dean of Arts & Science, had been suggesting that the University of Saskatchewan create an interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary degree for people who work in what he called "the semi-public sector—co-operatives, crown corporations, hospital and health care services." His vision was a degree-granting program with classes geared to public and co-operative service, as something different from learning about profit-oriented practices or perspectives. John Jordan of York University had been in contact with Leo Kristjanson in the fall of 1980, lamenting the state of academic studies in co-operatives. Academic *bona fides*, he noted, required theoretical robustness and empirical studies. In August of 1980, the Co-operative College, located in Saskatoon, had received a whopping \$100,000 government grant to pursue creating a degree program in co-operative administration. Such a grant would extend its short programs but require extensive collaboration with the university as a degree-granting institution. There were hurdles to be jumped. Ole Turnbull, head of the Co-operative College and part

¹² Ibid.

of the task force, was practical. The point, he argued, was to discuss the research and teaching needs of Saskatchewan co-operatives. His view emphasized the service role of the university to respond to the needs of the Saskatchewan co-operative sector in the same way that it was expected to respond to the needs of agriculture or medicine or education. He was asking for focused teaching and research, directed by questions or issues put forward by co-operatives.

The variety of voices and perspectives in that first meeting outlined a huge mandate. Right from the beginning, there were a lot of expectations in play:

- build an interdisciplinary think-tank to invigorate robust research and learning about co-operatives
- create a degree program with a co-operative focus “for co-op people to study,” which would extend the Co-operative College onto campus
- establish the academic *bona fides* of co-operatives as a subject of rigorous study
- create a cluster of experts designed to service the co-operative sector, to research and study and teach their issues

It was a big list, with divergent expectations.

As good decision makers, task force members decided that they needed an in-depth study and full report, ideally from three viewpoints: the university, the Co-operative College of Canada, and an independent body. The university did an internal canvas of people who knew about co-operatives and existing courses with co-operative content, to see what and whom might be a good fit. That didn't take long. Gerald Schuler,¹³ then the director of the Co-op College, wrote an overview from the college, outlining its successes and challenges. Baldur Kristjanson, Leo's brother and a long-time active co-operator with the Canadian Wheat Board in Winnipeg, was hired to interview members of

¹³ I found Gerald Schuler's last name spelled four different ways in various public and private documents; I have standardized it to Schuler.

the task force, other leaders, and government representatives, including then-premier Allan Blakeney, and write an independent analysis of the larger processes in play.

Baldur Kristjanson was a good choice. The task force needed someone experienced in government relations, higher education, and co-operatives. Baldur's thirty-page report aimed to "examine seriously the shortfall in research and education *for* [emphasis added] co-operatives and credit unions, its causes and potential remedies."¹⁴ Embedded in the report are three critical underlying issues:

1. a perception that co-operatives were "endangered," becoming "more akin" to non-co-operative businesses all the time
2. that the kind of education initiatives within co-operatives was about maintaining status quo, not about supporting (or even allowing) innovation and change
3. that universities had drifted away from their mandate to study issues of importance to Saskatchewan, and more particularly, had not been studying issues of concern to co-operatives and credit unions

The first issue was noticeable at the board tables of co-ops and credit unions, which reported a growing gap between their experiences and training, and those of their hired company leadership. It was either a failure in curriculum, or a gap in experience, but it was noticeable. The second issue, it was thought, was a result of stasis. It was hard enough to get co-ops to address or support education initiatives for their members; it was a much larger expectation for individual co-ops to consider any kind of shakeup or change. The third issue recognized that perhaps co-operatives themselves should share some blame if universities hadn't accorded them enough attention. They warranted it by virtue of numbers, but had they asked or demanded it in a concerted or united way?¹⁵

¹⁴ Leo Kristjanson Fonds, Box 12.I.22.22. "Co-operatives University of Saskatchewan Task Force," report by Baldur Kristjanson, March 25th, 1981, p. 1, Foreword.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

A related concern, recognized and discussed in Baldur's report, is the existence and scope of the Co-operative College of Canada. After all, its mandate was co-operative education, and it was right there in Saskatchewan. The college needed to be a part of any discussion that changed the nature of co-operative education, including expanding or adding to it. In the same vein, the Government of Saskatchewan, through the Department of Co-operatives and Co-operative Development, was both represented on the task force and clearly in support of a new and "fuller collaboration" regarding co-operative education.¹⁶ It was responsible for co-operative development at the provincial level, and it too was worried about co-op knowledge at the individual and community level. What was needed, Baldur wrote, was "bold initiatives" to "seek matching funds" from governments, led by co-operative "leadership of a high order."¹⁷

An issue that Baldur Kristjanson hit head-on is the fact that the Co-operative College drew much of its financing and support from the large co-operatives and credit unions, while at the same time, those same institutions were moving towards increased in-house training for both personnel and management. Yet, smaller co-ops still needed the services of the Co-operative College. It was a conundrum then, as now—the ideologies of the co-operative movement created an expectation of "co-ops helping co-ops." The on-the-ground application meant larger co-operatives financially supporting initiatives that, in some ways, were of little use to their own co-op business, but would help smaller, distant, nascent, or struggling co-operatives. At some point, the disconnect between large and small might cause trouble. In the case of the Co-op College, the technical training it provided was still viewed as necessary, especially for smaller co-ops; what was needed was a new infusion of instruction and research geared towards larger co-operative problems, or problems that faced all co-ops, large and small. In other words, the focus of research taken on by any new co-operative research initiative would be to study issues and ideas that could, in some way, cross co-operatives and provide higher-order thinking on

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

co-op advantages and problems. In addition, Baldur Kristjanson noted that university-based research should not be geared towards solving the issues of only those co-operatives that provided finances. Both the University of Saskatchewan and the government had commitments to *all* Saskatchewan people; so the university, with its government partnership, should also study co-operative enterprises (health, daycare, worker, and so forth) “on the fringe” and different from the large producer, consumer, and credit co-operatives.¹⁸ Again, studying all kinds of co-operatives is a massive mandate.

Even with its wide-ranging questions, the Baldur Kristjanson report did not go very far. Given the prominence of the task force members and the clear mandate to think big, its recommendations were meagre: make a big public announcement of collaboration between the co-operatives, university, and government; and establish “an identifiable and respected group for teaching and research for those interested within co-operatives, credit unions, and for members of other public service boards.”¹⁹ In no place did he call for anything new. Instead, he seemed to suggest little more than drawing together and focusing existing teaching and research at the university, and potentially drawing in a group from the co-operative sector. It sounded good, but it needed structure.

While Baldur’s report was circulating to the task force, Leo Kristjanson received a fascinating story from University College Cork in Ireland. There, a steering committee of combined university and co-operative/credit union representatives launched the Bank of Ireland Centre for Co-operative Studies in 1980. Reading this two-page magazine article, Kristjanson took out his pen and went to work, marking all the points he thought were significant. The new centre at Cork was built:

- in close association with the Co-operative Movement, at home and abroad
- within a university campus

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

- on interdisciplinary lines
- with a high level of postgraduate research
- with a high output of educational materials

Combining recruited academic staff and research fellows, the new co-operative research centre would deliberately draw from “relevant faculties” across the campus, including agriculture, law, economics, history, and sociology. It’s clear, given the negotiations and subsequent structure of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, that the model used at University College Cork had a major influence. In many ways, Kristjanson’s own experience with the centre-scholar model at the defunct Centre for Community Studies was reflected in the structure of the centre at Cork. Both were clearly on his mind as he worked with the task force to craft the outline for the new Centre for the Study of Co-operatives.

If Baldur’s report was great on considering big questions but lacking in nitty gritty detail, Gerald Schuler of the Co-operative College of Canada began to shape the aims and interests of the task force into a structure with bones, meat, bark, and bite. By September of 1981, he had crafted an outline for a “University of Saskatchewan Co-operative Centre” that had coalesced from Baldur’s loose affiliation into a brand new institution within the university. He took the discussion from generalities to specifics: They would create a wholly new entity. His draft was comprehensive, with details including:

- a list of the six supporting organizations represented by the task force members—the university, the Government of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan, Federated Co-operatives Limited, and the Co-op College
- the objectives of the new entity
- its administrative structure with board, academic, and support staff
- an overview of expected financial support, costs, and division of those costs, including agreeing to a five-year commitment

In essence, this document gives the first framework for what would become the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives.

The Diefenbaker Centre

The University–Co-operative Task Force wasn't the only group vying for the attention of the president. One of Kristjanson's other files, left over from his time as VP Planning, was the building and operation of the Diefenbaker Centre on university grounds. Saskatchewan-raised, Conservative Prime Minister John George Diefenbaker wished to have his personal and professional papers housed in a centre, to provide access for the general public. To accommodate such a request, the university entered negotiations to locate, plan, and build the Diefenbaker Centre. After much discussion, university planners located the new building near the South Saskatchewan River, with one of the most spectacular views on campus. Its final placement was on campus, but separate and distinct in its own building, signifying connection without domination. The Diefenbaker Centre could thereby define its own path.

Completed and opened to much fanfare in 1980, the building was virtually empty by 1981. The early rush of tourists had waned, and only a few of the offices had been filled or used. The Diefenbaker Centre, in fact, didn't have enough funds to pay its own director. With alacrity, Leo Kristjanson matched the nascent Centre for the Study of Co-operatives with the struggling Diefenbaker Centre. The task force shifted its meeting place from the Co-op College to on campus at the Diefenbaker Centre on 29 October 1981. This move signaled both intent and purpose. The choice of the Diefenbaker Centre allowed for connection to the university, but not overwhelming ownership. There remained room for government and co-operative interests to assert sway. There was a certain cachet, as well, to being located within the Diefenbaker Centre, FCL President Vern Leland noted. Maybe, he suggested, it got more attention because it established that physical connection to power—and to Conservative power, at that. Having a prime minister from Saskatchewan was quite an accomplishment for the province. Locating the new

centre within that space, he would later suggest, helped its profile.²⁰ It was at that October meeting that Gerald Schuler's robust outline was expanded and hammered into a version that satisfied all parties—the co-operative sector, the provincial government, and the university.

In essence, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives coalesced within the Diefenbaker Centre, and the two entities have shared space ever since.

The First Agreement

It took some time before the vision of the Centre, as envisioned by the co-operative and government perspective, could find a way to fit within the University of Saskatchewan. The difference between Gerald Schuler's outline and the final, signed contract that created the CSC was minimal, but perhaps significant. The Schuler outline listed four objectives for the Centre:

- to establish a program of studies at the undergraduate and graduate level with classes available to students across campus
- to undertake off-campus program collaboration with the Co-operative College
- to undertake research and publication of those results, including textbooks and curriculum
- to “review and recommend changes in the laws governing co-operatives and credit unions”

The Centre's governance structure called for nine board members, with the majority (five) from off-campus—a combination of co-operative and government representatives—with the other four from on-campus, to be appointed by the president. It also called for three academic staff (one director and two others), two clerk/stenographers, and one research assistant. The document calculated the financial commitment using existing university wage structures, splitting those costs 60 percent

²⁰ Interview with Vern Leland, 20 January 2018.

for the co-operative sector and 40 percent for the government. The university would provide office accommodation (aiming for the Diefenbaker Centre), \$3,000 annually for library accruals “to be maintained by the University Library,” general accounting, and other needed services.²¹

In the final negotiations, the university, via Leo Kristjanson and his deans on the task force, made some modifications. The first three objectives for the Centre remained virtually unchanged, while the fourth pulled back significantly from active recommendation of legal changes to simply undertaking “research concerning the legislation governing co-operatives and credit unions.” Policy or legal recommendations smacked of lobbying, which could muddy the waters of university autonomy or research integrity. The board would consist of ten people, not nine: five from the co-operative and government side and five from the university. This is a small but significant difference. After all, the majority of the money for this new venture was coming from outside the university, and the old saying, “He who pays the piper calls the tune” perhaps should have had more weight. The change increased the voting power and persuasive authority of the university on the Centre’s management board, swaying the pendulum towards the university, even though its contributions at first were minimal: office accommodation, classrooms, accounting supervision, and \$3,000 per year for the library. The final major change was in academic staff: the university wanted four, not three—a director plus three other academics. This change would cost more but, it was argued, it would spread Centre influence across more colleges, raising its profile in the campus community. The sector and the

²¹ Leo Kristjanson Fonds, Box 12.I.22.22. “University of Saskatchewan Co-operative Centre.” Redrafted by Gerald Schuler, 14 September 1981. This document also outlined a sliding scale financial structure where, over the course of the five-year commitment, the Saskatchewan Department of Education would assume an increasing amount of the cost and the Co-operative College of Canada would assume a decreased contribution. This plan was rejected by the government and the university. The money from the co-operative sector partners was further split: the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and Credit Union Central each contributed 40 percent of the sector’s financial obligation and Federated Co-operatives Limited assumed 20 percent. The Co-operative College of Canada had a flat-rate financial obligation of \$3,000 per year.

government agreed, and the first five-year operating agreement to create the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives was signed on 24 March 1982.

Power and Secrets

The origins of the Centre, as a shared agreement hammered out among the university, the provincial government, and the co-operative sector—each clearly laying out its financial and other obligations—seem quite clear. But there is a cover of secrecy over its origins that bears noting because it had repercussions for the nascent Centre as it settled into the university milieu. Other than the selected deans on the task force, few others at the university knew about the negotiations surrounding the creation of the Centre—and that mattered. Leo Kristjanson used the powers of his office as president of the university to deliberately bypass and ignore a number of university precedents. The Centre was, it has since been suggested, “illegitimately conceived.”²² President Kristjanson never went to the University Council, or Senate, to ask permission or gain approval or assent for pursuing, then signing into legal being, the new Centre.

Why did this discussion and approval matter? Wouldn't the colleges welcome the opportunity to vie for one of the four new incoming academics, whose salaries would be paid out of the new funding and not come from their own departmental budgets? Yes, and no, it turned out. The fact that Leo did not ask permission of the broader faculty set up a culture of animosity within some sectors of the university. It was a blatant expression of a president's power that did not go through proper channels or explore basic interest in such an idea. A whole centre devoted to co-operatives and credit unions? Surely there were more important issues to consider. There was even a strain of concern around university research autonomy: If this new Centre was funded from outside the university, who was calling the shots and setting its research priorities and directions? It is clear that Leo anticipated at least some of these concerns, which

²² Interview with Murray Fulton, 19 November 2017.

led him to negotiate more board power for the university within the new Centre, and to ask the co-operative sector and the government to lavish more money into hiring new academics. But if he thought those actions would be enough to stem the anger, he was wrong.

But the secrecy embedded in the origin story carried a positive spin, too. Those who became part of the CSC could choose to view the CSC as “maverick,” less bound by convention and path dependency, with a willingness not just to embrace, but to instigate change. An origin story based on blasting through the walls of the academy, starting something new—and doing so despite opposition, with the support of groups outside (and not beholden to) academia—mattered. Such an origin story gave the nascent Centre and its fledgling faculty a heightened sense that what they were doing, and what they were meant to be doing, was different.

First Director and Faculty

Although the first five-year contract did not stipulate exactly how incoming new academics would fit into the university, Leo Kristjanson’s goal and vision was to create an interdisciplinary centre somewhat like a spider’s web—weaving strands from disparate points across campus colleges and faculties to create something new and unique. That meant that each of the four Centre academics would be hired into home departments and colleges, whether that was in law, commerce, agriculture, arts and science, or education. This design gave enormous power to the home department, which could accept or reject the Centre’s hiring recommendations. It also gave the home department a clear say in whether or not the incoming academic’s research agenda, or personality, was an acceptable fit for the direction of the department.

If the department accepted the position and person, it became that department’s responsibility to award merit, including tenure decisions and advancement through the steps from assistant through associate to full professor—but the salary costs of those advances would, at least in the first years, fall to the

Centre. There were both advantages and disadvantages to this arrangement, from the perspective of the professors hired into the Centre. It gave academics access to their disciplinary homes and colleagues, a familiarity and a sense of community that would also provide challenges and set expectations. But it also meant that, in some cases, the pull between the disciplinary research and expectations of individual departments versus those of the Centre would create a dual research program far beyond what strictly disciplinary colleagues were expected to undertake.²³ Instead of having to publish in one area, some ended up trying to do research and publish in two distinct areas, with little overlap. As a result, in some cases, advancement never went beyond the associate professor level, if the home department chose not to value work done at the Centre.

In an interview on the origins of the Centre, Lou Hammond Ketilson noted: “Some of the things that came back to haunt us was the way he [Leo Kristjanson] ran with it. He created it but did not go through proper procedures. There was no support from some of the colleges that we were affiliated with.”²⁴ Brett Fairbairn echoed that comment, even going so far as to charge that the faculty union “hated” the new Centre. Lack of support from the college level manifested in various ways, from promotion problems to not approving course offerings. Course teaching loads were also uneven; some colleges allowed teaching release for faculty who were part of the Centre, but others did not, or only reluctantly, or only if the Centre paid for sessional faculty to teach those courses.

Despite the secrecy and some negative backlash from university departments, the task force—whose membership stayed on to become the first advisory board—kept to its plan, aiming for an interdisciplinary faculty membership. Once the ink was dry on the contract, the board had two jobs: send the money to

²³ The problem of “having two masters” in both a disciplinary home and interdisciplinary centre has been discussed elsewhere. See Sam Garrett-Jones, Tim Turpin, and Kieren Diment, “Managing Competition between Individual and Organizational Goals in Cross-Sector Research and Development Centres,” *Journal of Technology Transfer* 35, no. 5 (2010): 527–46, doi: 10.1007/s10961-009-9139-x.

²⁴ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

the university to solidify the Centre financially and get it ready for operation; and appoint an interim director to advertise for, and hire, the first director of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. Only then would the Centre be officially “started.” The new advisory board faced a province-wide challenge almost immediately. A Saskatchewan general election in April 1982 swept the ruling Allan Blakeney New Democratic Party government out of power, ushering in the Progressive Conservative era led by Grant Devine. But, while the connections between co-operatives and leftist-leaning political parties such as the NDP were strong, they were not formalized in Saskatchewan. As a major driver of the provincial economy, co-operatives employed and were owned by people from all sides of the political spectrum. It may have been that the task force rushed to sign the first five-year agreement before the election was called; some later suggested that the timing of the signing was “a trick.”²⁵ But they need not have worried; the new Progressive Conservative Minister of Co-operatives and Co-operative Development, Jack Sandberg, never missed a beat. A teacher, broadcaster, and former media manager for Federated Co-operatives,²⁶ Sandberg became a strong supporter of the Centre. Almost as soon as he took office, he asked for an order-in-council to allow the provincial government to start sending cheques to the University of Saskatchewan, which would hold them in trust against the assumed immediate opening of the Centre.²⁷ Even as the government changed, it honoured the first five-year financial commitment.

The commitment was substantial. The original operating agreement called for a total of \$284,731 in the first year, with co-operatives giving 60 percent of the funding and the provincial government laying out 40 percent. Those numbers would

²⁵ Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

²⁶ Jack Sandberg (John Sven “Jack” Sandberg) represented Saskatoon Centre as a Progressive Conservative MLA from 1982 to 1986. See https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Sandberg, accessed 7 February 2018.

²⁷ Leo Kristjanson forgot to let the university controller know about the agreement. The controller contacted the President’s Office in confusion and consternation, unsure of what to do with the sizeable cheques coming in. See Leo Kristjanson Fonds.

rise each year to address inflation and anticipated increases in the cost-of-living, as well as in salary and expenses. In the second year, the co-op sector put in \$213,550 and the provincial government \$130,975. Over the first five-year agreement, the provincial government put more than half a million dollars into the Centre (\$503,967), while the co-operative sector invested well over three-quarters of a million (\$824, 280). These investments came at a time of financial crisis and restructuring, particularly for Federated Co-operatives. But where the inflation rates worked against some of the co-operative's business practices and most certainly for their customers, the high interest rates worked in favour of the new Centre. As the cheques came into the university—in trust until the Centre was staffed and opened—the funds grew, garnering massive interest.

It's important to note that the Centre, while operating under a legal agreement signed by the university, the provincial government, and members of the co-operative sector, was not formally incorporated as its own entity (such as a corporation, co-operative, not-for-profit, or charity) with its own legal status. It was created, and remains, a body subsumed within the existing legal entity of the University of Saskatchewan. At the time, the university had few formal policies around creating or approving new Centres, but that oversight has since been rectified. For most of its years of operation, the CSC was viewed as a Type B Research Centre; faculty were drawn from across the campus and its activities involved significant resources (staff, faculty, research, space, technology, and so forth). For oversight and administrative purposes, its funding flows through the larger university accounting structure, though its budget and decision making remain at the Centre, guided by the director.

The second job for the board in 1982 was to hire the first director. Roger Carter, a professor in the College of Law, became acting director, responsible for advertising and co-ordinating applications and interviews on behalf of the CSC board. And board members were delighted: they received an application for the directorship from one of the most prestigious academics in Canada, whose work crossed history, agriculture, and co-operatives—Ian MacPherson. They didn't hesitate. In a unanimous decision, the board (and the History Department) offered Ian,

via telex memo, the first directorship of the new Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan, with automatic tenure and a healthy salary. But Ian turned down the offer. It wasn't that he didn't want it—he did, and he had applied for the position, had not been headhunted or coerced—but due to family circumstances, he could not accept. His regret is palpable in the letter he sent to Leo Kristjanson as chair of the CSC board of directors and president of the university. Leo tried persuasion; the answer was still no.

Sifting through the applications, the university looked again, advertised again. Clear academic credentials and certain research characteristics were the most important attributes, which meant that co-operative practitioners were not considered. The co-op sector was dismayed, even outraged: “People are being turned down if the person lacks recent research and publication credentials.”²⁸ The board of the Co-operative College of Canada was stern in rebuke to the university: “We believe co-operative knowledge and experience to be at least as valuable as recent experience in academic research.”²⁹ It was the first major indication of the difference between co-op sector expectations and academic demands. Knowing co-ops should have been the key. But the university was adamant. The incoming director, and the academic staff positions, would be housed in highly competitive disciplinary departments. Without extensive and recent academic training and experience in research, the departments would reject the candidates, so the university couldn't consider different standards. In desperation, Leo called Ian to cajole, one more time. It was a firm no.

Yet the cheques continued to roll in from the co-operative sector and the provincial government, building a war chest of funding even while the hiring process stalled. The advisory board admitted, “Progress ... has been slower than anticipated,” but, they assured one and all, “delays in order to assure high

²⁸ Leo Kristjanson Fonds, Box 12.I.22.2. Letter, Co-operative College of Canada to Leo Kristjanson, 1983.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

quality staff are better than rushing the matter.”³⁰ Nineteen eighty-two, then 1983, ticked away. Then the College of Law stepped up. They knew someone who researched and wrote about co-operatives—Chris Axworthy, then a professor at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia. On his way for a sabbatical at Stanford, Chris assessed the opportunity, then applied. The board interviewed and offered the position. Chris noted, “At the time, there were not very many senior positions in universities across the country. People weren’t moving, there were few job openings. The opportunity to start a research centre came along, and it soon became clear that this was an opportunity that I shouldn’t pass by. It was a significant opportunity.”³¹ Axworthy accepted the position in February of 1984, setting a target start date in June. Thoughtfully, Axworthy asked Kristjanson to have two items ready when he arrived: a parking spot on campus and good clerical support for the new Centre in place. Lynn Murphy became the first support staff at the Centre, creating its original working processes and policies.

The simple act of moving to Saskatchewan from Halifax hummed down the lines of Axworthy’s memories years later. “I arrived in June,” he remembered. “It was hot and dry, and then it rained. I complained about the rain and it was as if I had embarrassed myself at church. I was complaining about rain in June? In a farm community? What was I saying?”³² To get oriented not only to the job and the new university but to Saskatchewan’s culture and ways of thinking, Axworthy started reading. Prairie populism, and the peculiar brand of 1980s Saskatchewan politics, which mixed right-wing conservatism with left-wing voting, left him flabbergasted. But he jumped into his new role as director, ready to carve out its distinct place in both the university and co-operative circles.

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives opened to much fanfare with a luncheon, guest speakers—including the president of the university (of course—he was also the board chair),

³⁰ Leo Kristjanson Fonds, Box 12.I.22.2. Report, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives Management Advisory Board, 1983.

³¹ Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

³² *Ibid.*

Jack Sandberg from the government, and R.G. Klombies from the university Board of Governors—and the introduction of the new director, Chris Axworthy. The opening coincided with the 75th anniversary of both the University of Saskatchewan and the Co-operative Union of Canada, which was holding its annual general meeting in Saskatoon and had members there in full force to celebrate the opening. Minister Jack Sandberg identified the Centre as a way to “provide better research and consulting assistance to co-operatives in future planning and development,” as well as to support co-operative education. Leo Kristjanson identified both research and teaching as mandates for the Centre, with an aim to “generate new ideas for the next seventy-five years at least” for co-operative growth and development across Canada.³³ Sandberg’s viewpoint at the opening—of the Centre as a research and consulting service—was not quite the perspective of the university, or the Centre’s new director.

Despite the ongoing support of Minister Jack Sandberg, new director Chris Axworthy saw that the provincial government was shifting priorities even as the cheques continued to arrive. Getting attention and support for the CSC’s co-operative research agenda was, he noted, “a challenge,” given the new economic conservatism that led to the election of Grant Devine and his Conservative government. That economic conservatism, Axworthy pointed out, could be seen in co-ops: “You had people ... becoming directors of local credit unions and co-ops and the Wheat Pool who weren’t as committed to social changes in a progressive way. They were free-enterprise oriented, and co-ops came to reflect that perspective.”³⁴ Ideology, in other words, was the difference between *knowing* about co-operatives and *being* co-operative, this divide remaining, in fact, an understudied issue in co-operatives. In a way, opening the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives with a conservative provincial government in power was both a coup and a misfit. The misfit would

³³ Leo Kristjanson Fonds, Box 12.I.22.22. General 1983–84. Remarks to Opening of Co-operative Centre. Remarks by Dr. L.F. Kristjanson and Honourable Jack Sandberg.

³⁴ Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

be felt once more, when a conservative-oriented government cycled through again later.

Axworthy's first goal was to hire and put into place the remaining academic faculty and Centre staff, and to work with the new faculty to set the research priorities for the Centre. The Centre also spent time in the fall of 1984 and into 1985 reaching out to the larger co-operative community, both funders and others. It was a period of connection, introduction, and liaison. After all, the CSC was a big play within the Saskatchewan co-operative community and could potentially have an effect on regional, national, or even international co-operative education. Reaching out to the broad co-op community was important to establish the Centre, create research and teaching connections, garner research ideas and partnerships, and potentially interest other funders.

Generous original funding plus accrued interest from almost two years of holding the payments in trust meant that Axworthy had some leeway in hiring. If a promising researcher came into the Centre, he or she could be hired directly into a research assistant or associate position.³⁵ It was only when the Centre was negotiating with a department to hire a full-time, tenure-track faculty member that delicate negotiations mattered. Right off the hop, the Centre hired Lou Hammond Ketilson as a research associate. At the time, she was a graduate student in management and marketing and taking courses from Leo Kristjanson.³⁶ While the College of Graduate Studies balked at the idea of a graduate student taking a research associate position, the President's Office helped ease the decision. Later, Hammond Ketilson accepted a position with the College of Commerce as a marketing professor, and her CSC appointment changed from research associate to full faculty member Centre Fellow, a dual appointment with Commerce.

³⁵ Another research associate hire was sociologist Skip McCarthy, who stayed with the Centre through the first year.

³⁶ Some of Hammond Ketilson's research papers from these courses can be found in Kristjanson's Fonds in the university archives.

Promising negotiations with the Department of Agricultural Economics led to the hiring of Rhodes Scholar Murray Fulton, who joined the university and the Centre in 1985. "It was partly my decision to come back [to Saskatchewan] and do something new that was being created from scratch with an exciting potential, unique thinking about a research centre devoted to a topic that I didn't know that much about. We did our shopping at the co-op, but I had never done any co-op research."³⁷ As an agricultural economist, though, Fulton had some familiarity with co-ops and liked being part of setting up and expanding a relatively new field. The hiring negotiations preserved in the archival record reveal a fascinating technical aspect of the relationship between the Centre and the home department. Incoming faculty usually had a broader set of research interests than just co-operatives, or western Canadian co-operatives. How would the service, teaching, and research obligations be split? The Centre's view was simple: as long as the CSC "obligations to the Co-operative Movement are satisfied, academic staff members should be entitled to conduct research on other topics."³⁸ In other words, as long as there was abundant productivity to satisfy the contract with the co-operatives, researchers could pursue their own interests as well. With that reassurance, Fulton joined the CSC in 1985.

Other promising appointments ran into roadblocks. In part, the roadblocks were retaliation at the department and college level for the way Leo Kristjanson "did not go through proper procedures."³⁹ Some of the colleges the Centre had hoped would provide support and affiliation (such as the behemoth College of Arts and Science) refused to go along with the initiative. Prairie political scientist David Laycock had worked for three years as a lecturer in political science; at that point, the University of Saskatchewan faculty contract stipulated, it was time to offer a permanent position, or be let go.⁴⁰ Let go, he cast around for another position on campus and found the Centre. There, his own

³⁷ Interview with Murray Fulton, 12 December 2017.

³⁸ Leo Kristjanson Fonds, Letter exchange, Leo Kristjanson and Chris Axworthy, winter 1985.

³⁹ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

⁴⁰ Interview with David Laycock, 8 December 2017.

research interests in Prairie populism and his abilities as a researcher led to a research associate position. The Centre, delighted, asked Political Studies to take him on as faculty; his salary would be paid for through the Centre, but his position would be in Political Studies. The department voted the notion down. They didn't see a relationship between political studies and co-operatives; they weren't interested in such a research project; they hadn't chosen co-operatives as a subject of research; and they did not want to be imposed upon to enter into any kind of working relationship with Leo Kristjanson's special project. Stung, the Centre regrouped. Laycock's productivity and interests as a research associate were of considerable benefit to the Centre, but the lack of a faculty appointment was a problem. Laycock won a professorship at Simon Fraser University three years later and the CSC—and the university—lost a prominent thinker.

With Chris Axworthy, Murray Fulton, and Lou Hammond Ketilson in three of the four faculty positions, and David Laycock as a research associate, there was room to “carry out a wider and more thorough search” for a candidate, opening the door to many possible disciplines, including history. The search drew Brett Fairbairn, another Rhodes Scholar from Saskatchewan, after a colleague sent a clipping of the advertisement to Oxford. Even as he interviewed and was accepted by both the Centre and the Department of History, his supervisor in Oxford was “really disappointed. He said, ‘You don't have to take the first job that's offered, you know.’”⁴¹ Taking a cross-appointed position between a disciplinary home department and a new, untried and untested interdisciplinary centre was, from his supervisor's point of view, an unprofessional leap. Nonetheless, Fairbairn wanted to be back home in Saskatchewan and joined the CSC in 1986. With Brett on board, the Centre finally had its full complement of scholars, backed and anchored by the professional expertise of Lynn Murphy and Jo-Anne Andre. A cadre of summer students, research officers, and visiting scholars rounded out

⁴¹ Interview with Brett Fairbairn, 23 November 2017.

the Centre's new, busy life. With this last faculty hire, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives was at full working capacity.

Reflection: Origins and Resilience

This is a good point at which to pause and reflect. Does this story about the origins of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives give us clues about its resilience over the following thirty-five years? What were the main issues? The discussion, creation, and consolidation of the Centre set forth the critical system components, both visible and invisible. Visible components included the founding legal document—the first five-year agreement—which included specific stakeholders (co-operative sector, provincial government, and university, as well as outlining staff and faculty components) and outlined governance, reporting, mandate, funding, and expectations. The Diefenbaker Centre became the physical setting. The resilience of this original outline remains: The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives still operates within those same general visible components.

Many of the invisible but tangible issues that would confront the Centre can clearly be seen in the origin story. At the top of the heap: Relationships mattered. Funded by a tripartite partnership of government, co-operative sector, and university, the Centre became a connecting piece among the three. Yet those connections, at first, were based on clear linkages and personal levels of trust exhibited by the task force and the first board leadership, which worked together to create the CSC. How would or could those linkages be effectively passed to the faculty and staff, some of whom—admittedly at the time—were not yet co-op scholars, nor particularly well known in the industry? What would be the new mechanisms to draw the Centre close with funding decision makers? With faculty, staff, and a director in place, whose job would it be to manage those relationships, to ensure they remained strong? How and when would relationship power shift from the board to the staff and faculty, and what would be the ramifications?

The CSC had to follow its mandate—which, as the origin documents and later interviews clearly show, was very large

and not particularly well defined. Brett Fairbairn remembered the mandate as being open ended. High teaching expectations combined with collecting, building, and codifying a body of co-operative knowledge through research and dissemination were key; but these expectations were cross-cut by a push towards making the CSC a consulting centre for government and co-ops, a resource centre of knowledge and expertise from which to draw, and the mechanism by which students could earn a degree with a specialization in co-operatives. All of these have risen and fallen with greater or lesser force throughout the Centre's existence. Researching and teaching co-operatives meant studying the very sector from which funding flowed. How would the CSC manage those aspects? Would it study just those co-operatives that provided funding, or all types of co-operatives? Who would set the research agenda: the funders, or the academics? Defining the mandate and managing competing expectations would crop up again and again.

Relevance to the larger co-operative community beyond the core funders also mattered. As soon as his office was set up, Chris Axworthy set out to create introductions, linkages, and connections to other co-operative researchers across Canada, the US, and around the world. Soon, CSC staff and faculty became known on the conference circuit as carriers of new co-operative knowledge and representatives of a centre that was worth cultivating. Creating relevance to smaller co-operatives, engaging them and contributing to their local success, was a more difficult endeavour and never as successful for the CSC. High academic interest in large-scale questions on co-operative law reform or stories of co-operative impact on society lacked the immediacy required by a local co-operative struggling to get through to the end of the year in the black. As founders Vern Leland and Ted Turner pointed out, studying co-ops at the university level loses relevance and resonance at the member level. Supporting something like the CSC required a specific commitment to the co-operative philosophy, to something larger than the give-and-take of specific reports or contracted research. The challenge would be maintaining that commitment to the philosophical underpinnings of the Centre and not allowing the relationship to change, to become transactional—money paid for services rendered.

As a Class B Centre within the University of Saskatchewan's operating structure, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives also had to manage relationships with the university. These ran the gamut from administrative matters of budget, funding formulas, and staff payments, to working with departments and colleges on teaching and tenure issues, to negotiating space and equipment, to continuing the relationship with the President's Office. As Leo Kristjanson was both president of the university and chair of the CSC board of directors, that association was strong for the first several years. Once Leo retired in 1989, that relationship changed. Managing individual connections between core faculty and their home departments is also part of the picture. The two main challenges within this working relationship have been visibility and relevance. What activities or successes would address these challenges? Within academia, major funding awards and peer-reviewed publications are the primary vehicles for measuring success. As we will see, large grant success is a *pulse* disturbance for the CSC, a singular event that would change the dynamics of the Centre, growing a sudden cohort of students and staff to manage large projects. Once a project was complete, the CSC would return to a more steady, recognizable state.

Funding renewal through the five-year contracts is also a pulse issue for the CSC, an event that occurs with regular frequency, can be anticipated and planned for, but still has the ability to create system disturbance from minor to severe. At first the responsibility of the task force and the initial board, reviewing and renewing the five-year operating agreements fell quickly to the director. Planning for and managing the five-year agreements was part and parcel of managing the working relationship to each of the three groups involved in the original funding agreement—the provincial government, the university, and the co-operative sector. During the negotiating process to sign a new agreement, CSC staff and faculty would have to prove their relevance with each partner. It wasn't enough that the board representative thought that the CSC was doing a good job. The board member and CSC staff and faculty had, in turn, to convince each funder that the Centre was an important investment. In terms of the relationship with the provincial government,

relevance could be viewed through the lens of consulting service to the co-operative sector—a viewpoint almost directly at odds with the autonomous expectations of a university research centre. In addition, “government” is not a stable, unchanging entity. The Saskatchewan government shifted from the left-wing NDP through to the right-wing Progressive Conservatives while the Centre was in strategic development. Managing a working relationship across a changing political landscape takes concerted energy. Through the years, as we will see, the five-year agreement negotiations produced different results and brought about changes in both the funders and the contract.

Faculty and staff hiring and renewal have been both a success and an ongoing challenge. This is what is called a *press* issue in a resilience assessment—an issue that occurs continuously. The attempt to hire Ian MacPherson as the first director or David Laycock as a faculty member are examples. Within the context of finding faculty and staff suitable and acceptable to *both* the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives board as well as the university, staffing the CSC could be a site of contention and dissent. For those who may have known Ian MacPherson for his enormous body of national and international work on co-operatives, it should be asked: Would the CSC have developed differently under his leadership? The fact that MacPherson would later go on to create his own centre for co-operative study showcases the complexity of co-op studies itself: It can be done, and done successfully, in a number of different ways and in a number of different places. While some might consider multiple centres of co-op studies to be duplication, others point out that each has its own role and expertise. More, in this view, is better.

Throughout the next few chapters, I will continue to build a timeline for the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, going forward from the mid-1980s. But I will use that timeline to reflect on issues that had a direct effect on the CSC’s ongoing resilience and think about how some of those changes fundamentally shifted the Centre. Join me for the journey.

Interlude One: Timelines



Figure 1: Origin of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, 1950s to 1984



Figure 2: Centre timeline, 1984–1989

Leo Kristjanson	• President, University of Saskatchewan (chair)
Vern Leland	• President, Federated Co-operatives Limited (vice-chair)
A.D. McLeod	• Saskatchewan Wheat Pool
Norm Bromberger	• Credit Union Central
Myrna Barclay [Hewitt]	• Canadian Co-operative Association
Tom Wishart	• Dean, College of Arts & Science
W.J. Brennan	• Dean, College of Commerce
W.J. Furtan	• Head, Department of Agricultural Economics
R.P. MacKinnon	• Dean, College of Law
V. Kaisler	• Saskatchewan Department of Economic Development and Tourism

Figure 3: First board of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives

Source: “The First Five Years 1984–1989”.

Note: all board members could be represented at a meeting by an alternate from the same institution. L. Hillier was the alternate for Norm Bromberger. Ted Turner was the original board member for the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, with J. Derbowka as alternate. A. McLeod became the representative in 1987. Gerald Schuler was on the board from the Co-operative College, replaced in 1987 by J.A. Salomons, then Myrna Barclay after the merger to form the Canadian Co-operative Association. M.A. Brown, Dan Ish, and G.E. Lee all served terms on behalf of the university to 1987.

<i>Christopher Axworthy</i>	Director/Faculty
<i>E. Lynn Murphy</i>	Administration
<i>Jo-Anne Andre</i>	Financial and Publishing
<i>Skip McCarthy</i>	Research Associate
<i>Lou Hammond Ketilson</i>	Research Associate/Faculty
<i>Lars Apland</i>	Research Officer
<i>Murray Fulton</i>	Faculty
<i>Brett Fairbairn</i>	Faculty
<i>David Laycock</i>	Research Associate

Figure 4: Faculty and staff during the first three years

Source: "The First Five Years 1984–1989" and "The First Three Years," unpublished report.

Chapter Two: Rapid Growth

By 1986, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives was established. It had an operating mechanism and mandate through its agreement, full funding, full staff and faculty, and a physical home. At that point, energy shifted from the CSC board to its faculty and staff. While the board retained its management style, approving budgets and providing general direction, members would meet only three times per year. The CSC's identity became enmeshed with the Diefenbaker Centre and particularly through the Centre Scholars and staff who were the "face" of the CSC. The next ten years were witness to rapid growth. This chapter will focus on the broader thematic issues where the new CSC put energy and time. It was a period of consolidation, of forging the identity of what became the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives.

Academic Autonomy

As the first director, Chris Axworthy led the charge to set the Centre's priorities, from research to teaching to relationships with co-operatives, university departments, the provincial government, and the Co-operative College of Canada. Setting research priorities came down to somewhat of a battle of wits and power between the nascent CSC and its funders, some of whom wanted more say in setting academic and research priorities or, like the provincial government, to set the CSC up as a consulting service. "Fair to say that when the Centre was established, the big co-ops didn't know how a research centre would be established. Some wanted more of a say, others less,"⁴² Axworthy remembered. When I asked one of the co-operative leaders at the time, did you understand how the university worked? The answer: No. But, he added, that wasn't the issue, because there was incredible trust. They knew Leo Kristjanson and trusted him to

⁴² Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

set things up in a way that would help both the co-operative community and the university.⁴³

Setting research priorities when the majority of the funding came from off campus created a sensitive issue for the CSC. The priorities of funders cannot be ignored, “but this is a constant stress and strain when private funders are involved. They were putting up a lot of money and wanted value.”⁴⁴ Yet, given the need for the faculty to serve two masters—their academic home department and the Centre—it was important to set research priorities and projects that could be applicable and useful in multiple parameters. All of the faculty, except Axworthy, were hired into tenure-track positions, which meant that they had to research and publish extensively within a short timeframe to achieve tenure and promotion. Axworthy was hired with tenure, which simply meant he didn’t need to prove himself academically and could focus on setting up the Centre.

Heavily invested in the concept of collectivism, Axworthy preferred a team approach to shaping research: “We made collective decisions about research priorities.”⁴⁵ Those priorities included both individual research projects and collaborative research, which meant either multidisciplinary work from different academic disciplines or truly interdisciplinary work, in which collaboration was part of the process. Setting the Centre’s research priorities—the collaborative projects—was a bit of a messy process. “One of the things that happened was, you’re always talking and no one’s getting anything done. But it was where we hammered out our research agenda and sorted out ideas of what we would research and write about. We were a mostly close and quite dynamic small group ...”⁴⁶ At the time, Brett Fairbairn was asking shrewd questions about the Centre’s research agenda. Axworthy admitted that “our approach ... has been a mixture of planning and disorder.”⁴⁷ Murray Fulton

⁴³ Interview with Ted Turner, 29 January 2018.

⁴⁴ Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Letter, Chris Axworthy to Brett Fairbairn, 1986. Leo Kristjanson Fonds, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

remembered the original research strategy as “chaotic.” With no particular parameters other than the mandate to “undertake research of particular interest and relevance to co-operatives,” as laid out in the contract, and in addition to “undertake research concerning the legislation governing co-operatives and credit unions,” the faculty and staff were allowed to find their own way.⁴⁸ The advantage of the chaos, noted Fulton, is that the Centre faculty quickly established that they were interested in just about everything, from large co-operatives to small, from legal issues to co-operative development to social structures and everything in between. Yet, all of the research retained one specific focus: The CSC would study “co-operative-ness,” the nonbusiness aspects of being a co-operative, the “elements of co-operation that distinguish it from other forms of economic activity.”⁴⁹ That way, what the CSC studied could be broadly useable by many kinds and sizes of co-operative business.

From time to time, during board meetings, Axworthy remembered pushback from the board regarding some of the research projects. “Why are we paying for that?” was a popular comment, showing the occasional gulf between what the academics were interested in studying or supporting versus what the funders thought would be useful or interesting to them. A major bone of contention was the Centre’s focus on worker co-ops. It was a special area of interest for Chris Axworthy, both as a researcher and as an activist. Remembering his time as director, he remained proud of the CSC being “instrumental in the beginning in support of worker co-operatives, a worker co-op magazine that we sponsored that shared experiences of worker co-ops across the country. Grassroots, community purpose, but it didn’t have a big impact because worker co-ops aren’t very important.”⁵⁰ But board minutes from the period tell a different

⁴⁸ Agreement between University of Saskatchewan and the Co-operative Sector, 1982.

⁴⁹ Axworthy, “Report on the activities of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives for the period ending August 31st, 1985,” in Leo Kristjanson Fonds, RG 001 s6 Box 12.I.22.22, General 1985, University of Saskatchewan Archives. It should be noted that none of the research projects laid out in that report were about credit unions, but that credit union topics dominated the “wish we could do this” list.

⁵⁰ Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

story. At the November 1985 board meeting, they questioned Axworthy directly on the validity of publishing the worker co-operatives magazine. How, they asked, was that a justified budget line? The story also illuminates a central thread within the larger co-operative community: There is a difference between studying co-operatives from a practical or critical standpoint and taking an active role within a larger ideological movement that centres co-operative research through an ethical perspective. Former CSC student Mitch Diamantopoulos would categorize the difference as “walking the co-op walk instead of just talking the talk.”⁵¹

Axworthy felt strongly, at the time and later, that it was important to stand firm on the issue of research priorities. “We [the board and Axworthy] had a dispute about the academic priorities of the Centre and who was to set them. I have always been someone who, when I decided something was right, I wouldn’t back down. The co-op leaders weren’t used to that. We felt that the academic priority should be set by the Centre, not the funders. These matters continue about independence and academic freedom, and this matters more now than then.”⁵² Other researchers at the CSC at the time also remember Axworthy facing down the board over academic autonomy, even to the point of threatening to resign.⁵³

Yet the board, particularly the co-operative sector members of the board, were not as curmudgeonly as Axworthy remembered. At a particularly lengthy meeting in April 1986, there was a robust discussion around the role of the board as a “think tank” for the Centre to help identify research priorities, as well as support research projects. The impetus for the discussion was a questionnaire designed by Centre associate David Laycock and sent to Saskatchewan Wheat Pool members. The Centre was dismayed by the lack of response to the questionnaire, while the SWP was dismayed by several of the questions on the survey. Vern Leland of Federated warned that the Centre was at risk if it was perceived as “too political in its research.”

⁵¹ Interview with Mitch Diamantopoulos, 19 January 2018.

⁵² Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

⁵³ Interview with David Laycock, 8 December 2017.

But others demurred. J.A. Salomons from the Co-operative College, stated: "Care should be taken to ensure that the Centre not be turned into a service centre for the co-operative sector." L. Hillier of the sector added, "The co-op sector should learn from research, be it positive or negative." This point about the Centre being a source of constructive criticism for co-ops was welcome; Axworthy stated categorically that the CSC "cannot follow co-op sector views at all times; views must be based on analysis and data."⁵⁴ In the end, the two sides agreed to pass surveys and questionnaires through the board before sending them out. Those that met approval would receive internal support from the co-operative, and the board offered several concrete ideas for research projects to help set the Centre's research program. The discussion defined the board's role in research as intermediaries and allies for the researchers, but also as a sounding board and place of sober second thought.

The timing of the discussion around autonomy and guidance is critical, as Axworthy had just been elected to the board of Saskatoon Co-op, a local consumer co-operative. At the time, Saskatoon Co-op was in dire financial trouble and had experienced a number of rancorous union negotiations, strikes, and meetings. Because of the financial crisis, the second-tier co-operative, Federated Co-operatives Limited, became involved. This left Axworthy in an awkward position. As director of the Centre, he was, in a sense, an employee of FCL, but as a director of Saskatoon Co-operative, it was part of his role to be critical and to push back on some of FCL's "heavy handed" interventions.⁵⁵ At that same April 1986 meeting, board members made it clear that they were unhappy about Axworthy's foray into local co-operative politics.⁵⁶ In a way, CSC faculty and staff were also government employees, since the province contributed 40 percent of the Centre's original funding. Government employees, Axworthy was rebuked, were expected not to run for politically charged positions. In the end, FCL was instrumental in putting Saskatoon Co-op back on track, but the push-pull of

⁵⁴ All quotations this paragraph from Centre for the Study of Co-operatives Fonds, board minutes, April 1986.

⁵⁵ Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

⁵⁶ CSC board meeting minutes, April 1986.

negotiations put Chris Axworthy, and by extension, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, in a precarious position with its main funders.

Having those early discussions, even showdowns, with the board of directors around research autonomy, research priorities, and direction was a critical aspect of setting the Centre firmly within its role as part of the larger university institution, and also reinforcing the separation between funding and research outcomes. For a centre funded primarily from outside the university, this separation was of vital importance, for two reasons. First, the area of academic co-operative studies had not yet coalesced, in Canada. It required time and focused energy to be recognized and viewed as rigorous and reliable, through steady publication of peer-reviewed work. There could be no hint that the work was in any way shaped or directed by expected outcomes set by the co-operative sector. It was a difference in timelines; co-operative funders may have expected more immediate returns on their dollars via practical research results, but the Centre was aiming for the long game, to develop its academic *bona fides*, which would, of course, ultimately be a major service to the sector. Second, separation allowed the Centre to research co-operative issues beyond the interests of large consumer, producer, or credit co-operatives. The Centre understood it played a leadership role in co-operative studies, with its critical mass of researchers in a cohort, working together. With that base, as well as adept administrative backing, the Centre could spread its research, writing, and teaching interests broadly and take on larger contracts or research projects that required administrative support. As the Centre coalesced, it grew in strength, knowledge, and influence.

The risk in being autonomous is working out how to remain relevant to and supportive of research topics of interest to the funders. It's a balancing act and, for the CSC, rested on multiple (and sometimes moving) high wires. While the CSC asked the board to bring forward ideas, there was the distinct possibility that they wouldn't be rigorous or focused enough to pursue, or that they would be from the individual on the board but not necessarily from the larger co-operative organization. From the government's perspective, the Centre had the ability to do three

kinds of research: theoretical, historical, and “change directed.” In a 1987 letter delivered just as the provincial government had fulfilled its financial contractual obligations, Walter Safinuk, then executive director of Co-operative Development (now demoted from its own ministry and moved to the Department of Tourism and Small Business for the Province of Saskatchewan), chided Chris Axworthy on these research areas. Theoretical work, Safinuk declared, was of interest to other co-operative researchers but had little practical use “on the ground.” Historical research on co-ops helped give a large picture of co-operative history, and so had some limited use—but not much. The real benefit, for the government, would have been research into the concept of change, particularly innovative social and economic solutions to problems, using co-operative ideas—but this was “the most limited area of research undertaken by the Centre.” His letter was a clear signal of disharmony and separation between academic interest and practical usefulness, which would lead the provincial government to withdraw, for a time, from the Centre.⁵⁷

It quickly became a practice to have faculty come to the board meetings to discuss their work-in-progress. This gave the board a first-hand look at ongoing research, a chance to assess strategies and directions, and an opportunity to make meaningful relationships beyond the director. Faculty and research staff were also invited to spend time with funders. Murray Fulton worked closely with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and met local representatives; Brett Fairbairn focused his efforts on FCL; and Lou Hammond Ketilson did research with health care co-operatives.⁵⁸ Bill Turner of Credit Union Central, who replaced Norm Bromberger on the board, noted:

We saw [the Centre] as a strategic resource. In fact, we would want someone from the CSC to challenge us; sometimes you need to be shaken out of your comfortable chair or your comfortable spot.... There was a lot of respect for the expertise

⁵⁷ Leo Kristjanson Fonds, RG 001 s6 Box 12.I.22.22, General 1987, letter from Walter Safinuk to Chris Axworthy, 23 April 1987. University of Saskatchewan Archives.

⁵⁸ Board minutes, November 1985.

and the leading edge thinking that would come from the staff at the Centre. We could use that when we did our strategic board planning; a CSC member would be a presenter on a current issue facing co-ops. It was viewed in my opinion as a strategic resource for the broader sector. Insight, absolutely.⁵⁹

Direct discussions with the funders, whether at presentations to their boards or at large annual meetings, became common, yet it remained important for the faculty to establish and maintain personal relationships with the board members and funders.

While Chris Axworthy's position *vis-à-vis* Saskatoon Co-op and Federated Co-operatives caused a short-lived storm, Murray Fulton and Brett Fairbairn would later come head-to-head with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. The story continues to resonate for the Centre as an example of *why* academic autonomy was so necessary. During the 1990s, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool began to face a financial crisis. The Pool wanted—and needed—a better cash flow, which related directly to its co-operative business form. A corporation could simply issue a share purchase, raising capital through the market. Few co-operatives, and fewer still in Canada, have that option. In 1994, SWP proposed a financial restructuring that included splitting shares into Class A voting shares and Class B nonvoting shares. This restructuring meant that the co-operative could be publicly traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange to raise capital, a move that began in 1996.

The choice wasn't simple and generated heated discussions and debate. Murray Fulton and Brett Fairbairn wrote two opinion pieces published in the regional farm newspaper, *The Western Producer*, in June of 1994. These pieces reminded both the SWP and its members that such financial restructuring ran the real risk of changing basic co-operative ownership principles, such as separating owners and users of the business, ending competitive pricing and service at cost, and basing equity returns on shares instead of use of the co-operative. The change would also privilege existing co-op members over past and

⁵⁹ Interview with Bill Turner, 15 January 2018.

future members: they, and they alone, would benefit financially from the conversion. Such benefits ran contrary to co-operative business practices. There was a real danger, Fulton and Fairbairn noted, in this change: The SWP would cease to be a co-operative. Brett Fairbairn later recalled: “We tried to phrase the articles diplomatically, but we came out publicly against one of our sponsors. It was a test, an exercise in academic autonomy.”⁶⁰ Yet, there were no direct repercussions for the Centre—no recorded censure from the SWP via the board in the minutes, no change to their financial support. The SWP’s financial restructuring led to a period of expansion, but over time, as Fairbairn and Fulton predicted, the SWP was less and less “co-operative” in both structure and thought. The SWP continued to be a sponsor for two more operating agreements but declined to continue in 2004. It had, in effect, ceased to be a co-operative.⁶¹

Teaching Priorities

Teaching was a major focus for Centre builders during the CSC’s origin and consolidation phases. The original University-Co-operative Task Force and board wanted co-operatives, including co-operative history, thought, legal parameters, policies, and co-operative business structure, to be taught at the university level. Only through teaching about co-operatives would students learn, and eventually become both co-op leaders and trained co-operative employees. Once the CSC was in operation and had a faculty component, education initiatives boiled down to convincing university departments to offer classes about co-operatives, or to at least allow each faculty member to teach courses that included co-operative content. Convincing departments and colleges of the importance of co-operatives in the curriculum was never an easy task, and never completely satisfactory from the point of view of the board members from the co-op sector. Yet, it was suggested that perhaps misunderstandings of the way academia worked was their own fault. Vern

⁶⁰ Interview with Brett Fairbairn, 23 November 2017.

⁶¹ After a rancorous public takeover of Agrico United, another major grain company, the company restructured to become Viterra in 2007.

Leland, president of Federated Co-operatives Limited from 1978 to 1996, admitted that “most of us were not really that knowledgeable about the university. Our sole purpose was just to get that education into the university curriculum and system. We relied totally on Leo Kristjanson and the deans of the various colleges.”⁶² The co-op sector really pressed the curriculum issue, hoping to see new and expanded programs at the university level providing education about co-operatives. At the same April 1986 board meeting where Chris Axworthy and the board discussed research priorities, one of the co-operative directors, J. Derbowka, categorically commented that research should have one focus—educational purposes, particularly for course development, and more broadly for larger co-operative education purposes.⁶³ What that meant, though, was anyone’s guess.

But the university had its own standards and priorities for course development and curriculum. Unlike elementary and secondary school curriculum, which is set by the provinces in Canada, university curriculum for each course is set by the professor. On the surface, it might seem easy for each faculty member to start teaching about co-ops. But, each new class must be approved by the department before it can be taught. While Leo Kristjanson and others across campus could *continue* to teach existing co-operative courses,⁶⁴ any *new* courses would be scrutinized and debated at the department level. Some CSC professors had an easier time getting department approval than others. Brett Fairbairn remembered an uphill battle to have his second-year course on worldwide co-operative history approved, in part because he wanted to ensure that students were not required to take a first-year history class as a prerequisite. It was important, to honour the CSC contract with funders, that the class be open to anyone across campus. Eventually, the history department capitulated.⁶⁵

⁶² Interview with Vern Leland, 20 January 2018.

⁶³ Board minutes, April 1986.

⁶⁴ Murray Fulton, for example, took over teaching some of Leo Kristjanson’s courses in economics that were already in the university calendar.

⁶⁵ Interview with Brett Fairbairn, 23 November 2017.

Once a class is approved as “on the books” or in the university calendar, any professor trained in that discipline with a working knowledge of the subject matter (or willingness to learn) could teach it. Broad-scale first- or second-year courses, which would draw the most students, were preferable over smaller third- or fourth-year seminars. However, departments usually reserved those large courses for comprehensive introductory topics, like world history or Canada’s legal system or introductory economics, not a specific look at co-operative issues. By April of 1986, Axworthy was writing extensive memos to the board, outlining roadblocks to course development, and, in particular, how hard they had worked, with little success. There was specific frustration over the failure to convince colleges that did *not* have faculty representation at the Centre to develop co-operative courses, or even to add co-op content to existing courses. One option to solve the impasse was for the Centre to take on a larger role in creating courses, even to hiring specialists to develop and then teach them. This move would use resources, but would remove the burden from faculty members bound by their own college and department restrictions. However, the university offered no specific mechanism for centres or schools separate from established departments to create or offer their own curriculum. They simply weren’t allowed to create and teach co-operative courses for credit through the Centre; it could only be done through colleges and departments. The Centre was stuck.

Over the years, faculty continued to try and teach first- and second-year undergraduate courses, where and when possible. These classes, it was thought, would reach the broadest number of students, the majority of whom would not be specializing in co-operative studies, but would leave university with at least an introduction to co-operative ownership concepts. The co-op sector leaders on the board of directors favoured this approach and looked for success. At times, it came down to a question of numbers: How many classes are you teaching with co-operative content? How many students are taking these classes? Annual reports focused heavily on describing courses, counting students, and expanding the concept of “undergraduate learning” to include seminars, lectures, and presentations beyond specific

courses. Progress on developing undergraduate classes was slow and uneven throughout the Centre's existence.

As early as 1986, the CSC noted that it was easier to develop graduate-level courses, and find willing college and department hosts for them, than it was to create large-scale undergraduate classes.⁶⁶ By 1989, the first CSC *Annual Report* noted only six courses, one of which was still in development, about co-operatives: two in ag economics, two in history, and one in law, with the "in-development" course in management. It wasn't an auspicious beginning. By 1997, though, faculty were more set in their departments, with growing reputations and the ability to insert co-operative content into their courses. The 1997 *Annual Report* lists fourteen classes with co-operative content or specifically about co-operatives: one in agriculture, four in agricultural economics, one each in commerce and management, one in economics, three in history, and three in sociology. Six of the fourteen classes, though, were advanced seminars for honours or graduate students.

The downside, of course, is that graduate classes attracted far fewer students. The upside is that graduate students would often come to the Centre to work on projects, as part of their course or thesis work, or as independent researchers, and so would advance co-operative knowledge and publications in those directions. Once the Centre started issuing annual reports in 1989, there was always a section that discussed teaching, courses, and students. The section tended to emphasize undergraduate course offerings, focusing on classes offered by the core faculty. Board minutes reflect the co-op sector's continued expectation of teaching as a central, even primary, role for Centre faculty. Murray Fulton later commented:

The co-op sector was interested in teaching; they thought that teaching co-ops was the answer to the problem of people not knowing co-ops. That fixation on education showed up all over the place. You go to meetings and always there was

⁶⁶ Memo from Chris Axworthy to CSC board, "Options for the development of courses on co-operatives," 9 April 1986. CSC board files.

someone who would say, we need to get education into the curriculum, from primary school to university, and that's the problem.⁶⁷

Despite many students pointing to their experiences with CSC faculty as a definitive part of their future career working with co-operatives, the link between undergraduate teaching and co-op knowledge in the larger community was never clear. Fulton commented, "For a variety of reasons, to be honest, the faculty never quite believed that getting more students to learn about co-ops was the panacea, the magic bullet."⁶⁸

But graduate student education, a far better fit for both the teaching and research expertise of the Centre, was somewhat hit-and-miss, always at the ebb and flow of research dollars and faculty time. The University of Saskatchewan, with strong leadership from Murray Fulton, developed an Interdisciplinary Studies program after the turn of the millennium. This move opened up graduate student learning and became the primary method by which the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives could access and support graduate education. Graduate students could take their degree via Interdisciplinary Studies instead of a traditional department or college. Research centres such as CSC could develop courses that satisfied the requirements. The Centre quickly developed several co-op classes within this mechanism and ushered through both individual and small cohorts of graduate students. At the same time, the CSC became a highly successful grant recipient, earning large research contracts that operated across several years with money designed for graduate students. During those grant periods, graduate student enrolment soared.

Over the course of the CSC's existence, Fulton argues, university teaching has changed:

Instead of the undergrad degree being the thing that everyone needs, now it's a graduate degree. Academic inflation: You need a master's degree now to get what an undergrad degree

⁶⁷ Interview with Murray Fulton, 12 December 2017.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

used to be. Where the CSC has gone, due to its research and outreach mission, is to move to graduate education and get students involved in co-ops in a way beyond what they can pick up in a class. A real deep knowledge of how the co-op model works. Now we see the fruits of that. The people who did co-ops for their master's and PhDs occupying critical jobs in industry and government. We're only going to see more of that and we need to do more of that.⁶⁹

But the University of Saskatchewan formally moved away from its Interdisciplinary Studies graduate program back to a focus on undergraduate students, so the Centre once again became a misfit, its teaching and research interests better suited to the graduate level than the undergraduate. To compensate, the Centre cast around for a fit that would give it good access to graduate students. In 2014, it became formally affiliated with the new Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy.

Interdisciplinarity⁷⁰

In the 1980s, as the Centre took shape, the concept of interdisciplinary work wasn't well understood—and, in some cases, caused snorts of derision and even outright revulsion and contempt. Interdisciplinarity grew as a concept during the 1950s,⁷¹ just as Leo Kristjanson arrived at the University of Saskatchewan to work with the Centre for Community Studies. Yet despite these interdisciplinary roots at the university, professors who came to join the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives during the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ For a more in-depth look at how interdisciplinarity was developed at the CSC, see Merle Massie, "A (Limited) Study in Interdisciplinarity: Origins of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan," paper presented at "Co-operative Strength in Diversity: Voices, Governance, and Engagement," the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation, 30 May–1 June 2018, Regina. That paper delves in more detail into the development of the concept, its different acceptance by university and co-operative board members, and its connections to co-operative studies.

⁷¹ See Google Books Ngram Viewer for *interdisciplinary*.
<https://books.google.com/ngrams>

1980s faced “great suspicion”: Was a position within an interdisciplinary centre a real academic job? Was the Centre actually a good home for a true academic? Would connection to the Centre hinder the academic path? Use of the word “interdisciplinary” stagnated, even fell off, during the 1980s.⁷² The concept was “strange and off-putting” for many University of Saskatchewan faculty—a problem which, no doubt, contributed to its uneven acceptance at the university.⁷³

Leo Kristjanson might have envisioned that interdisciplinary scholarship, pulling from different departments is, in fact, *multidisciplinary*, rather than interdisciplinary. Multidisciplinary simply means making sure that the issue at hand is being studied from multiple viewpoints, such as economics, law, or business. The Centre has produced many such publications, where each faculty member and other invitees contributed chapters, each researched and written from individual disciplinary perspectives. Interestingly, even while each chapter was produced by different authors, there was a large measure of sharing during the process. Chris Axworthy, in a director’s report from 1987, stated:

The process of writing the book has shown the merits of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of co-operatives. Our frequent meetings, in which each chapter is discussed by everyone involved, has served to point out the links between the various chapters of the book and the disciplines represented in the preparation of the book. Our lively debates have given rise to suggestions for a wide array of joint, interdisciplinary projects to be attacked in the future. As has been indicated, each member of the staff has learned a good deal about their colleagues’ disciplines as a result of the close working relationship which has been required on the book.⁷⁴

Despite Axworthy’s description, later interviewees recounted that the process of multidisciplinary book production

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Interview with Brett Fairbairn, 23 November 2017.

⁷⁴ Chris Axworthy, “Director’s Report,” November 1987. Leo Kristjanson, President’s Fonds, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

was, at times, “a painful experience.” Some disciplines are vocal, territorial, and not overly kind to other ways of doing research. Some faculty experienced plenty of critique, but less constructive criticism.⁷⁵ It’s a disciplinary strategy to narrow your scope, to become adept at a particular technique, to hone a focus or test a theory, to become a leader in a particular field. Such a technique can sometimes be inimical to working with others.

The act of *being interdisciplinary* is much more complex than simply throwing people trained in different disciplines at a problem. There is a level of integration, of deliberately choosing to look at something with more than one lens *at the same time*. Yet the practice of interdisciplinarity was fairly new, and at the time, there were few descriptions of actually how to undertake it. Chris Axworthy noted that interdisciplinary work was “not all that common at the time. We did a lot of that, which was in a sense groundbreaking. Useful to do.” But, he admitted, it was messy, and it did take work.

Murray Fulton described the practical way faculty and researchers invested time in creating an interdisciplinary focus for the Centre. They started by explaining their disciplinary views. Each wrote overviews on how they would approach a topic, what they would do, and what tools they would use. These documents formed the basis for formal and informal deep discussion, debate, and intellectual arguments about the models and their underlying assumptions.

We wanted to be formal about this, because we were bumping heads as we were having conversations about our research. We needed to understand the depth of our assumptions. That was an exciting time intellectually; we were all learning a tremendous amount. We had to figure out how we could coexist and operate together with other disciplinary perspectives.”⁷⁶

It wasn’t enough to draw from different disciplinary backgrounds, throw them together, and expect interdisciplinary work. The act of being, or becoming, interdisciplinary required

⁷⁵ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

⁷⁶ Interview with Murray Fulton, 12 December 2017.

the faculty and staff at the Centre to focus on it, debate and understand it. As Lou Hammond Ketilson described, “We started doing seminars for each other, so we could help others to see what each discipline brought to the table. That was a good exercise. That is what built a sense of community within the centre.”⁷⁷

Building a sense of community through interdisciplinary work took off at the CSC in part because so many of the faculty were *from* Saskatchewan. David Laycock, a research associate and productive staff member at the CSC, noted during his interview that the “CSC really was far more than the sum of its parts because of the interdisciplinary bonus.” The act of working together to build something meant, perhaps, a little bit more for those faculty members from the province. “I had in a sense a cultural orientation to and fondness for Saskatchewan,” Laycock noted, “but I wasn’t a Saskatchewan person the way Lou, Brett, and Murray all were. That helped a lot. They saw the value of interdisciplinary work partly through the lens of wanting the CSC to succeed, and that it had value independently of their employment.” Sometimes, Laycock noted, interdisciplinary work is “just a catchphrase.” But in the case of the CSC, it became foundational, and “led to its functioning in a meaningful way in the long term,” a place that re-mapped the landscape of co-operative studies.⁷⁸

Almost immediately, they could see the difference. In 1990, the group published a classic multidisciplinary study, with each member contributing a chapter drawn from their own discipline. It was well received, but less coherent than purely disciplinary work, as multidisciplinary volumes usually are. But soon after, a call came out from the Canadian Co-operative Association to do a study on the role of co-ops in Canada. Fresh from months of concerted effort to understand each others’ disciplinary strengths and assumptions—the work of being interdisciplinary—the Centre bid on the contract, but it was awarded to a private research firm. “To put it bluntly,” Murray Fulton noted,

⁷⁷ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

⁷⁸ Interview with David Laycock, 8 December 2017.

“we were pissed off.”⁷⁹ Centre faculty and staff quickly pulled together what was to become “the little green book,” *Co-operatives and Community Development: Economics in Social Perspective*. The process was radically different from the previous group publication effort. Every week or two, the combined expertise of faculty and staff (led by communications officer June Bold and Brett Fairbairn) met to discuss pieces of the manuscript. Revisions, additions, and conversation swirled, then Bold and Fairbairn would edit. Piece by piece, the book emerged as a collaborative, interdisciplinary product over the course of about six months. It wasn’t a case of individual silos of experience, mashed together in the introduction and conclusion. This time, each chapter received the attention of every discipline and CSC member, *including* staff. Its authors are a who’s who of the CSC at the time: Brett Fairbairn, June Bold, Murray Fulton, Lou Hammond Ketilson, and Daniel Ish. June Bold, the CSC communications officer, was an active contributor and listed as second author.

Published by the Centre in 1991, the book was a runaway bestseller, used in classrooms worldwide. It touched a nerve and drove much of the discussion around the role of co-ops at the community level. It was used in classrooms, in communities, and in community economic development, as a resource and strategy support. It was also timely: the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) was revising its list of core co-operative principles to add “Concern for Community.” The green book, although not responsible for the addition, was a factor in the discussion. Interviewees remembered this book as a definitive event for the CSC, not so much for its success, but for its deliberate interdisciplinarity. It showed the way the Centre had moved from its multidisciplinary origins to a new interdisciplinarity that showcased the strength of each member, to create something new and unique.

While the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives provided a place where interdisciplinarity was valued, faculty members were bound by their home departments, so disciplinary

⁷⁹ Interview with Murray Fulton, 12 December 2017.

publications remained important. The interdisciplinary nature of some Centre publications, with multiple authors, caused consternation: Evaluators “can’t tell what percentage of the work is yours,” Hammond Ketilson noted bluntly. For some, she strongly suggested, the interdisciplinary publishing path, so valued by the co-operative and community collaborators, caused individual hardship for some of the faculty, who never achieved full professorship or chose to leave the University of Saskatchewan to seek opportunities elsewhere. But the concept of interdisciplinarity within the CSC has again shown its merit. A number of recent publications showcase an interdisciplinary focus and reach for new ways to speak about, and to, co-operatives. Still, “It takes work and effort to value what interdisciplinarity means.”⁸⁰

Because the CSC had developed internal publishing capability via the Occasional Papers Series as well as books and other publications, much of the interdisciplinary co-operative work was self-published. From an academic perspective, these publications held less merit than those published via peer-reviewed journals. From the co-operative perspective, they were the primary output of the CSC scholars. They were accessible to read, could be purchased through the Centre, and dealt specifically with co-operative issues. Some were conference proceedings or bibliographies; some were how-to books or membership training; many were histories of co-operatives or co-op movements; while others were discussion papers or reflections to guide policy decisions or provide CSC commentary on community or public issues.

Time is a factor in the process of interdisciplinarity. Over the years, CSC faculty have picked up perspectives, tools, and viewpoints that have broadened each of their research capabilities. Fulton recalled, “All of us at the Centre went on the same journey and became more interdisciplinary, more willing to accept and be fascinated by these other perspectives, to understand perspectives and to tell stories.” From this point of view, interdisciplinarity is also the product of the journey, something

⁸⁰ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

that remains after the work is complete.⁸¹ But at its core, interdisciplinary studies are a group endeavour, produced in the spaces between. Interdisciplinary implies breadth, carries depth, is borne of real work by a diverse group, is mobilized to solve complex problems, values diversity, listens with humility, and builds a legacy of expanded knowledge over time. Excellence will not come from even a dedicated scholar with interdisciplinary experience working alone; it is in the struggle to work together that scholars produce interdisciplinary co-operative studies.

Core Funding

The original funding agreement saw CSC funding split essentially sixty/forty between the co-operative sector and the provincial government, with small amounts from the Co-operative College of Canada and the in-kind support of the University of Saskatchewan via office space, technology, logistics, accounting, and other support services. The financial obligations of that agreement, which had been signed in 1982, ended in 1987. High interest rates in the 1980s were a financial boon; the University of Saskatchewan, on behalf of the CSC, was able to generate an interest windfall. Hiring Chris Axworthy in 1984 as the first director led to an amendment of the original agreement, to adjust for the lag time between the initial signing and the actual opening of the Centre. Yearly funding increases became tied to inflation based on the Saskatchewan Consumer Price Index plus one percent, which allowed for salary raises and benefit increases. Yet, the financial obligations finished 30 June 1987 while the contract would expire 6 June 1989—five years after the opening of the Centre. The signatories expected that the capital and accrued interest deposited before the CSC opened would carry them through the final two years of the contract.

Negotiations surrounding the first contract renewal occurred during a period of upheaval for the CSC. First and foremost: There was no executive director. In 1988, Chris Axworthy

⁸¹ Interview with Murray Fulton, 12 December 2017.

left the Centre to pursue a political life, having won the New Democratic Party candidacy for the federal electoral riding of Saskatoon–Clarks Crossing. When he made the decision to run for office, Axworthy visited each of the board members, concentrating in particular on the co-operative sector and the president. The general response: What kind of trouble are you getting the Centre into now? There appeared to be a clear disconnect, particularly in the minds of the funders and board members, between democratic and co-operative ideals, and supporting such ideals on the ground. A direct marriage between co-op ideals and politics, or showcasing overt political affiliations, was not welcome. Axworthy not only won the nomination, but also the riding, ushering him straight from the directorship of the Centre into national political life.

His departure coincided with renewal negotiations, which, absent an executive director, became the responsibility of the board.⁸² Before he left, Axworthy and the Centre staff, knowing that contract renewal was imminent, had provided guidelines and reports specifically geared towards financial longevity. By 1987, the provincial government had fulfilled its financial contract and opted out of any further support for the Centre, including no longer sending a provincial government representative to the board meetings. This decision was, at least in part, financial; Saskatchewan's Conservative Government was in dire financial difficulty. Combined with the antipathy between conservatism and the Centre's other co-operative funders, the withdrawal was not unexpected.

Discussions ensued at the board table in December 1987. Who, they wondered, should be at the funding table? This was no small question, as it related directly to the mandate and scope of the CSC. Was it meant to concentrate geographically on Saskatchewan (if so, funders should come from within the province), or should its scope—and by extension, possible funders—be broadened? Co-operative commitment to the CSC remained steady, and their funding was not expected to change

⁸² During interviews with long-term faculty, none remembered the chaos of the 1989–90 contract renewal negotiations. Only Dan Ish as incoming interim director knew about it.

substantially. The board decided to retain its provincial focus, approach other provincially based large co-operatives for financial support, and pursue funding negotiations “at the highest levels” with the provincial and federal governments. FCL’s Vern Leland undertook a persuasion campaign directed at other co-operative entities, including both existing and potential future funders: Credit Union Central, Co-operative Trust; Dairy Producers Co-operative; The Co-operators; Co-operative Hail Insurance; and CUMIS. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool indicated its continued commitment. The university, via the President’s Office and the CSC, created a proposal for a combined provincial-federal funding arrangement, going forward,⁸³ but despite numerous meetings and correspondence, the Centre never managed to entice federal funding.

While the removal of substantial provincial funding was disconcerting, the University of Saskatchewan, pleased at the Centre’s academic output, was poised to intervene. At the college and department levels, support came in for individuals. Dan Ish from the College of Law replaced Chris Axworthy as director of the Centre. The law college had always been a strong proponent of the Centre, serving as its virtual home base and offering clerical support and interim directorship during its establishment phase. Axworthy’s dual appointment had been with law and the CSC; Dan Ish’s appointment continued that relationship. To ease the financial crisis generated by the provincial government’s withdrawal, the College of Law released Dan Ish to become the director but retained his salary line. Agricultural Economics picked up Murray Fulton’s salary, and Commerce began the process of taking over Lou Hammond Ketilson’s. These measures created a significant shift for the Centre’s financial structuring and started a trend that would continue. Faculty salaries, one of the largest components of the CSC’s annual budget, became more and more a university responsibility. The funding line coming from the co-operative and government sectors was,

⁸³ The federal proportion was targeted from Western Diversification funds. See “Government of Saskatchewan Centre Funding 94–99” file folder, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives files.

in practical terms, used to hire staff, whether into full-time positions or short-term contracts.

Leo Kristjanson, still at the helm of both the CSC board and the University of Saskatchewan, also committed the university to pick up any shortfall generated by CSC operations during the financial black hole of contract renewal negotiations and salary line shifts between 1987 and 1990. This commitment, given at the board table, was soon tested. In the spring of 1988, the University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association went on strike for the first time in university history. Part of the reason for the strike was the growing disconnect between faculty and administration over decision-making power at the university—and Leo Kristjanson owned some of that blame. Faculty work on Council committees, setting priorities and direction, could be (and occasionally was) unilaterally ignored. Peter Millard, a strike leader in the negotiations, spoke of “having worked and worked on a committee and then you discover that the president ... has made a decision without bothering to tell you, and which has pre-empted that work.”⁸⁴ Creating the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives behind the back of University Council in the first place had irritated many faculty members. Getting agreement from the board of governors to continue financing it rankled even further. Kristjanson’s continued commitment to the Centre, including this new significant financial obligation in the wake of the provincial government’s withdrawal, set teeth on edge across campus.

Nonetheless, Kristjanson asked the board of governors directly for bridge funding; an agreement with co-operatives, he assured them, was in the process. He was backed by co-op sector board members prepared to face down the university governors. Failure to support the CSC would result in several of the large co-operatives re-evaluating their overall relationship and commitment to other university undertakings, including capital projects. Gathering ammunition, the co-ops tabulated both their financial and in-kind contributions to the University of Saskatchewan. The threat was real. The university had expansion

⁸⁴ “An Interview with Peter Millard,” *Vox* 12 (March 1993).

plans that included a new agriculture building, and the large co-ops had committed support. The co-ops expected *quid pro quo*.⁸⁵ The university, via the board of governors, approved interim funding until the new agreement was in place. The new agreement was a four-year (1990–94) half-and-half split between the university and the co-op sector. Co-operative funders included the three main original signatories (SWP, FCL, and CUC, minus the Co-operative College of Canada, which had folded into the Canadian Co-operative Association) and added three new ones: The Co-operators, CUMIS, and Co-operative Trust. The provincial government was conspicuously absent. These co-op funding partners would continue through two more contracts until the demise of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and its withdrawal from the co-operative sector in 2004.

While the co-op sector, through the task force and the board, took the lead in negotiating Centre financing for the first two agreements (1982 and 1990), funding leadership moved inexorably to the Centre in subsequent years. As noted above, the College of Law's Dan Ish took over as director of the Centre in 1989, first on a one-year contract, then a five-year position. With the backing of the Canadian Co-operative Association Region Council led by Norm Bromberger, as well as board support, most notably from Federated Co-operatives, Ish re-opened dialogue with the provincial government. They used every measure at their political hand, especially face-to-face meetings and phone calls, supplemented by letters, proposals, and negotiations. It took the full four years of the contract to hammer out an agreement. Action items included convening meetings, conducting internal CSC discussions on what government funding could do, and identifying the key government players to convince. Centre scholars adamantly defended the need for academic autonomy, expressed concern over being seen as or becoming a consulting firm for government, and reinforced the need for freedom to use the research for academic publications, not just projects or reports to be tabled or shelved.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ December 1989 Centre board meeting minutes.

⁸⁶ File, "Government of Saskatchewan. Centre funding 94–99," Centre for the Study of Co-operatives files.

A direct conversation between Hartley Furtan and Dan Ish revealed much about the government's perspective on the CSC. Furtan, a member of the Saskatchewan government's Co-ops Directorate, had been a faculty member in agriculture, and in that capacity sat on the Centre's board in the 1980s. By 1993, he was the deputy minister for agriculture for the province. His perspective, revealed in a phone call that Dan Ish later transcribed to a file memorandum, showed that the government viewed the Centre as a distinctly academic department. Furtan pointed out that the Centre wasn't particularly useful to the government because it lacked hands-on co-op developers with practical experience. It wasn't in the field at the community level, working to build co-ops. Without this expertise, all the Centre had to offer was theoretical, which was beyond the bounds of government interest.⁸⁷

In response to Ish's calls for renewed provincial funding for the Centre, the Co-operatives Directorate set up a working group with representatives from the university and the CSC, the co-op sector, and the government. Their discussions and subsequent report outlined three funding options:

1. tripartite equal core funding from the university, co-ops, and the government
2. core funding from the university and co-op sector, with *matching* funding geared specifically towards research and consulting for the government
3. core funding from the university and the co-ops, with a non-defined level of government support for contracted research

It was critical that the government agree in principle to work with the co-operative funders and the university to hammer out an arrangement; otherwise, co-op board members stated, they would face opposition within their own organizations. Without government support, co-op funding was at risk. The Centre had a specific connector role to play, as a place to bring co-operatives, university, and government together to

⁸⁷ File, "Government of Saskatchewan. Centre funding 94-99," Centre for the Study of Co-operatives files.

work and interact. But directed research, such as consulting, was at the time viewed as working against university and CSC autonomy and could, potentially, interfere with independence. Dan Ish stood firm. If the government committed to core funding—without specific government-related objectives—it could have a seat at the board table with other funders and have a say in research direction. Without funding, the government could not sit on the board. Other, or additional research, would fall outside the operating agreement. In the face of fiscal restraint on all sides, the Government of Saskatchewan re-entered as a funder, offering core funding of \$50,000 per year and signing the new five-year agreement.⁸⁸ A public announcement, including a signing, cemented the arrangement.⁸⁹ The CSC once more became the centre of a three-way conduit for the provincial government, the University of Saskatchewan, and the co-operative sector. It would stay that way until 2014.

The behind-the-scenes negotiations around the government's new commitment to the CSC in 1994 reveal the brittle character of the Centre's overall health and stability. Funding was not a given. It was a conversation to be negotiated, trust earned, and results proven every five years. As the CSC evolved, board notes reveal a continued awareness of the precarity of funding, a need to examine the funding model, and an ongoing call to invite new funders into the fold. Approaching other large co-operatives in western Canada—and potentially across Canada and even elsewhere—required effort, strategy, and connection. In addition, the co-operative sector, through its negotiations with the University of Saskatchewan, brought demands and expectations. Those demands would have merit, and teeth, only in relation to co-op financial power *and* to the willingness

⁸⁸ This agreement allowed the government to renegotiate for the final two years; it increased funding to \$75,000 per year.

⁸⁹ In 1993–94, the Centre partner contributions were: University of Saskatchewan, 50% (\$279,000); Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, 16.5% (\$93,000); Credit Union Central, 16.5% (\$93,000); Federated Co-operatives Limited, 8.5% (\$46,500); with the rest split equally among The Co-operators, CUMIS, and Co-op Trust at 2.8% each (\$15,500 each). In 1997, Murray Fulton, who succeeded Dan Ish as director, renegotiated the government contribution up to \$75,000 per year, which continued until 2014, when the government once again withdrew.

of the co-operatives to use that power as a tool to force the university to meet them halfway in supporting the Centre. Senior co-op leaders made a significant and special effort to meet with and create relationships with the new president, George Ivany, following Leo Kristjanson's retirement. Although Centre faculty could certainly contribute to forging these relationships, it wasn't enough; only the funders, through their leaders, could exert sufficient influence to ensure university support for the CSC. It's not the negotiation skills of the executive director, but the power and dedication of the co-operatives at the funding table that matter.

The demise of the Wheat Pool as a co-operative led to another internal reorganization at the CSC. At that time, Brett Fairbairn negotiated to move his salary line from the Centre to the College of Arts and Science, easing financial strain on the CSC. It was the final faculty salary to move. Even so, during the period of the Wheat Pool's withdrawal, there was real fear that the Centre would cease to exist.⁹⁰ The demise of the Wheat Pool induced other co-op funders to increase their contributions to the CSC, while government support remained the same. The Centre continued with less internal funding available for research projects or other activities. Fortuitously, the withdrawal of the Wheat Pool occurred at the kickoff of one of the largest externally funded research projects ever to come to the University of Saskatchewan, via the Centre, a point to which we will return later. So while core CSC funding was diminished, it was offset by external funding that helped smooth the transition and mitigate the damage.

Contract negotiations in 2009 were unremarkable, but 2014 saw another major change. The provincial government, with a more conservative party at the helm, cut its yearly contribution and withdrew from the CSC.⁹¹ While this cut was in part offset by a new international funder, CHS Inc. of the United States, the change was important. It was a recognition that

⁹⁰ Interview with Brett Fairbairn, 23 November 2017.

⁹¹ In the 1994 agreement, the provincial government committed \$50,000 to the CSC for three years; in 1997, that commitment rose to \$75,000, where it stayed until 2014, when all funding was withdrawn.

provincial politics still mattered, and provincial government funding reflected the will of the party in power. The 2014 agreement also signalled complexity at the co-op sector level: Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan, which had been an original signatory and funder since 1982, agreed to fund the CSC for only three years, not five, with an option to renew for the final two years. In 2017, Credit Union Central ended its funding relationship with the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. The 2019 renewal cycle will have an almost completely new landscape, with only Federated Co-operatives Limited remaining of the original signatories, along with the University of Saskatchewan.

Funding changes made the university financially responsible for half of the Centre's operations. These changes ushered in a greater need for the Centre to create and promote activities that would ensure continued university support. The board directed faculty and staff to "concentrate on projects within the university's mission."⁹² Centre staff and faculty put renewed effort into "university-approved" paths, aligning CSC direction with larger university mandates. Lou Hammond Ketilson noted, "We were trying to keep in tune with where the university was going. We devoted energy to make sure that the university valued what we were doing and saw our value as a research centre."⁹³ One direction included funding formulas related to student enrolment, but as a centre and not a department, the CSC could never conform to or perform well in such measurements. The Centre didn't have its *own* students; undergraduate teaching was through the home department. Acknowledgement for graduate teaching, particularly through the Interdisciplinary degree program, led to some improvement, but overall, the Centre was never as successful using tuition as a measurement. Research productivity, on the other hand, became the gold standard by which the CSC could bolster university approval.

⁹² Board meeting minutes, March 1992.

⁹³ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

Research Funding

There is a difference, within a centre or institution, between *core* funding and *research* funding. While crossover and spillover is common, the two are usually kept separate within accounting and reporting mechanisms. The difference is simple: Core funding is what keeps the base of a centre functioning (primarily viewed as staff and office expenses), while research funding is specific to projects, whether consulting work fees for service or grants for large research projects. Each of the five-year agreements set the core funding of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. In the first five years, when this funding came from government and the co-operative sector, it paid mainly for salaries and benefits for faculty, staff, and other researchers, as well as travel, conference fees, and other central services such as communications and library, which will be discussed below. CSC scholars could access additional research funds at the director's discretion, drawn from the lavish interest reserves, but these amounts were generally small and focused on short-term outputs.

After the provincial government pulled out of the Centre, the University of Saskatchewan stepped in, matching the co-op sector fifty/fifty for core funding. Over time, more and more of the faculty working at the Centre were paid salary lines through their home departments. These slow shifts in how the university increased its funding support allowed for somewhat of a separation in how the co-operative sector's funding was allocated. This separation was never listed specifically in the published annual budget but became part of how the director understood and used the co-op sector's core funding. That money first went to support staff salary lines, such as office manager, communications, and library, then into items like travel, office supplies, membership dues, and so forth. In some cases, co-operative funding would "pay" sessional lecturer fees as part of the agreement to release that faculty member from departmental teaching.

But over and above core funding, as the Centre solidified its staff and faculty, research productivity soared, and with it, an increase in outside research funding. In the first five to ten

years, some of that funding was internal to the co-operative sector, such as special projects with the Co-operative College of Canada, various provincial or federal Co-operatives Secretariats, or the federal Canadian Co-operative Association. Faculty and staff would outline project proposals (sometimes competitive, sometimes not) which, when funded, would provide money to hire extra researchers (short-term or summer contracts, for example) or to pay graduate students, who would do the work alongside, or as part of, their graduate projects. Examples of such work abound. In 1988, soon after his arrival at the Centre, Brett Fairbairn, a trained historian, bid on a contract to write a history of the Co-operative Retailing System and Federated Co-operatives. Awarded the contract, Brett worked with an editorial board from FCL, “who commented on drafts, back and forth.” Such a collaborative approach could lead to concern for academic autonomy: What if Fairbairn felt the need to point out something that FCL considered sensitive or problematic? Writing corporate history, as with, institutional history, carries its own challenges. Nonetheless, the book supported Fairbairn’s bid for tenure in the History Department and led over time to two more, successive, corporate history research and publishing projects between Fairbairn and FCL. While crisscrossing western Canada in the fall of 2017, working on the latest book (due for publication in 2018), Fairbairn noted that he has now become more knowledgeable about the CRS and FCL than many who actually work for the co-operative retail system.⁹⁴

Another example of contract work came in 1993, when the Centre undertook research on the connection between co-operative development and community for a national task force. This project was geared towards identifying an action plan around the services and supports that would contribute most to co-operative development success. The research involved interviews, surveys, and compiling public information—time-consuming tasks taken on by a contract researcher, Peter Krebs.⁹⁵ The final report for this project was published both electronically and in print and distributed to national and provincial groups. There

⁹⁴ Interview with Brett Fairbairn, 23 November 2017.

⁹⁵ Centre for the Study of Co-operatives *Annual Report*, 1992–1993.

were limits to such reports, though. According to Fairbairn, “Data-driven reports have short-term impact, quickly forgotten. It’s the kind of thing that governments look for, because they love reports and stats.”⁹⁶ But the interest in co-operative development as an area of study led to another project—Murray Fulton’s work on New Generation Co-operatives in the 1990s. Funded in turn by both Credit Union Central and the Agriculture Development Fund, Fulton’s work on New Generation Co-operatives and banking would build a case for the Saskatchewan government to develop new legislation. In 1999, the province created *An Act respecting New Generation Co-operatives*, opening the door to a new form of co-operative ripe for development, in part due to Fulton’s research leadership.⁹⁷

Research contracts fulfilled a dual role for the Centre. Consulting contracts, typically funded by government or other components within the co-operative sector, produced useful reports, some of which would take on a trajectory of their own, influencing the development of new co-ops or changing policy or legislation affecting them. These types of contracts would fulfill some of the provincial government’s expectations of the Centre—to be a resource for thought work on aspects of co-operatives or co-operative development. But such “push” factors have always been far outweighed by “pull” factors operating both within the Centre and, even more, as norms from within academia. Aiming for tenure and promotion within their home departments, faculty had to show research and publication success. Consulting contracts had the potential to produce new information that could be repackaged and written for academic publication.⁹⁸ Such reports or their outcomes are hard to measure if they do not fit the life cycle of a government or produce tangible results at the optimum time for public policy change. The Centre has generally experienced more success doing direct contract work for co-operatives and credit unions rather than

⁹⁶ Interview with Brett Fairbairn, 23 November 2017.

⁹⁷ See *CSC Annual Reports* from 1996 through 2001. Fulton’s research opened the concept of the “New Agriculture.”

⁹⁸ See, for example, Murray Fulton, Brenda Stefanson, and Andrea Harris, “New Generation Cooperatives and Cooperative Theory,” *Journal of Cooperatives* 11 (1996): 15–28.

government, but those contracts rise and fall depending on the personal research needs, interests, and time of each of the faculty members or research staff, as well as the interests of co-operatives.

By far the larger draw was the growing importance of vying for, and winning, large and prestigious research grants. Over the history of the CSC, funding for research within universities changed from internal support through departments or other university funding pots to external support from large, Canada-wide research funders such as the Canadian Institute of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Winning competitive grants from these agencies built the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives from an entity known primarily to Saskatchewan and Canadian scholars into an international powerhouse.

Success bred success. Establishing a core of staff support and faculty expertise, then building a Centre identity of interdisciplinarity and excellence through the 1990s, led to a florescence of SSHRC research grant success by the turn of the millennium. In early 2003, Brett Fairbairn won more than \$.5 million to study the relationship between co-operatives and community social cohesion, while Murray Fulton garnered another almost \$100,000 to study agricultural co-operatives. In 2005, these huge grants were dwarfed by the Lou Hammond Ketilson-led \$1.75 million SSHRC grant to study co-operatives as part of the “social economy.” The largest grant to that date in University of Saskatchewan history, Ketilson’s grant brought the Centre together with the newly created Community-University Institute for Social Research and leaders across Manitoba and northern Ontario to create a large, interconnected research team drawn from multiple universities. Both the social cohesion and social economy grants vaulted the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives to the forefront of university success in interdisciplinary, multi-year research projects that could leverage multiple partnerships across Canada and organize researchers and students to put a laser focus on co-operative issues.

Faculty and research staff at the Centre had the capacity to bid for, accept, and carry out larger and larger research projects for three related reasons. One, it was a team environment. As a unit, the Centre could bounce ideas, solicit help and support, and share research or divide workloads for large projects in a way that wasn't as readily available to those who worked in more insular or academically competitive departments. Often, the lead investigator had co-investigators drawn from CSC faculty. Two, the Centre was supported by up to four dedicated staff members whose workload could accept some short-term adjustments and changes. Staff resilience and project support mattered, and produced project success, timeliness, and professional output. If books weren't reshelved for a few weeks, or other nonvital tasks were put off, the Centre would still function and could devote that energy, as needed, towards a project. Lou Hammond Ketilson pointed to staff as critical: "I have made this argument before; the ability to have permanent staff, publisher, administrative support, and a librarian was absolutely critical. That enabled us to go after the big grants, because we had admin to back it."⁹⁹ Three, working within the university, with faculty spread across campus, meant that there were multiple ears and eyes available to find extra support. Short-term research, writing, and other project requirements could be met by tapping the extensive pool of students or recent graduates. Connected to multiple colleges, the Centre could draw broadly for student and short-term staffing. An off-campus research hub, less connected to departments and colleges, would not have been able to function as effectively.

Faculty

As the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives entered its growth and consolidation phase, and the University of Saskatchewan became part of the contractual cycle as a core funder, there was a more defined split between staff and faculty. The migration of faculty salaries, over time, to home departments, eased the Centre's financial burden. But this created an

⁹⁹ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

unexpectedly brittle relationship between the Centre and faculty hires, which had a direct effect on faculty renewal, turnover, and new appointments. Following the end of Dan Ish's directorship, the CSC board looked only within existing university personnel to find a new director, as they couldn't support the salary of a new faculty member without compromising core staff. So the position had to be filled by someone already on the university payroll—someone who was interested, obviously, and further, whose home department and college was willing to allow them to take over the director's role. Murray Fulton became the new director in 1995, instigating a new era in which the director would be drawn from current faculty on a rotating but competitive basis.

The departure of Dan Ish meant that the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives had a faculty position open; after a cross-campus search, Michael Gertler of Sociology took it on. With deep interdisciplinary roots, Gertler was a logical choice. His first degree was in the environment, his master's in agriculture, and his PhD in rural development sociology.¹⁰⁰ When Gertler arrived on the University of Saskatchewan campus in 1987, the Centre actively supported his candidacy in the Sociology Department, knowing that his knowledge of co-operatives and rural development would be an asset. Coming on board as a Centre Fellow, Gertler's major contributions were in the classroom, teaching about co-operatives. He carried the heaviest teaching load and spent energy as the graduate chair, supporting CSC graduate students completing their work in the Interdisciplinary Co-op Concentration.

As faculty members mature within a campus community, administrative talent becomes important. Throughout the Centre's existence, Murray Fulton, Lou Hammond Ketilson, and Brett Fairbairn all took on administrative positions either as head of their home departments, heads of colleges, administrative leaders in new campus initiatives, or won roles in senior administration, as well as taking turns as Centre director. Campus administrative positions helped to shore up on-campus support

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Michael Gertler, 9 February 2018.

for and knowledge of the CSC, but the positions would also draw core faculty away from the Centre. Hammond Ketilson became associate dean of Commerce; Murray Fulton served as head of Agricultural Economics, was a leader in developing and running the Interdisciplinary Studies program, and later was integral in creating the new Graduate School of Public Policy. Brett Fairbairn, who succeeded Fulton as director of the CSC in 2000, volunteered to be the head of the History Department in 2004, negotiating with the dean of Arts and Science to take on his salary line and ease the burden on the Centre. Hammond Ketilson took over from Fairbairn as director of the CSC, first on an interim basis, then as an appointment from 2005 to 2014, when Murray Fulton once again took the directorship. In 2008, Brett Fairbairn became the university's provost and vice-president academic, a senior administrative role he held until 2014. During sabbatical leave of an appointed director, other faculty, including Michael Gertler, would step in to handle the director's administrative tasks, though Gertler to 2018 never took the reigns directly.

Shuffling core faculty through the director's position created continuity and stability, but when core faculty accepted senior administrative positions away from the CSC, the question became, should they resign from the Centre? The problem was, with their tenured salary lines picked up by the university and CSC funds dedicated to supporting administrative staff, there was limited funding available to hire new faculty to those positions. A starting faculty position (assistant professor level) at the University of Saskatchewan in the mid-1980s garnered an annual salary of about \$30,000 to \$35,000. As of 2018, a starting assistant professor can expect between \$95,000 to \$100,000 per year. Calculated just for the cost of inflation, that \$30,000 salary from 1985 would be \$64,000 in 2018 dollars; the difference is the inflated salaries imposed by the university to attract and hold out-of-province faculty.¹⁰¹ It would be near impossible for the co-op sector to pick up salary rates for both faculty and staff at these levels. In fact, although the five-year agreements list the co-op sector and university as equal partners, the annual

¹⁰¹ See the Canadian inflation calculator, www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/

report budgets since 2001 have shown the university contribution as higher than the co-op sector, and growing over time to accommodate the rising salaries of the faculty, in line with University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association guidelines.

Knowing that faculty renewal was an issue, the CSC created a “bridging hire” in 2000 for Cristine de Clercy from Political Science. The idea was that the CSC would support her position to begin with, but that the department would gradually take over. Although associated with the Centre as a faculty member for a few years, de Clercy experienced the same dual-master issues as the other faculty. Trying to do well in two different areas of research meant more work. A secondary issue is that she had no contemporary cohort with whom to undertake the hard work of building interdisciplinarity. That kind of deep work required more time and energy than the more senior faculty members, now busy in administrative positions with the university, could provide. The disciplinary bridge couldn’t hold, and de Clercy eventually relocated to a different university. Other partial faculty hires as Centre Fellows have included Eric Micheels in Agriculture, Dionne Pohler at the School of Public Policy, and Isobel Findlay and Abdullah Mamun from the Edwards School of Business. Depending on the nature of their appointment, their work at the CSC on co-operative issues has varied. Again, the inter-faculty work of creating interdisciplinary work by addressing issues as a team was difficult to recreate and produced uneven results.

To counteract the issues of faculty renewal and faculty absence, and as a complement to the full-time Centre Fellows, the CSC created a secondary line of associates known as Centre Scholars. These individuals, who came from both within and outside the university, remained within their home department but offered their expertise for occasional teaching or seminar work, committee work for graduate students, or as co-applicants and node leaders for large research grants. Highly visible Centre Scholars have included Ian MacPherson, Morris Altman, and Isobel Findlay, who later became a Centre Fellow. Others have included Marj Benson, Dan Ish, Rob Norris, Sheryl Mills, and Len Findlay. While this model waxed and waned over time, depending on the energy expended to keep existing scholars

and identify new ones, it served to extend faculty resources, knowledge, research, and presentation expertise, as well as graduate student support.

Communications

From the start, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives invested in communications. One of the Centre's core mandates, reiterated in *all* of its operating agreements throughout the years, is to prepare publications. Faculty and staff knew that producing exclusively peer-reviewed publications that would be viewed only by those who had subscriptions to esoteric journals would not be acceptable to the funders and would not address their responsibility to the larger co-operative community. The CSC had to create a presence in all its spheres of influence: the University of Saskatchewan, the co-operative sector, *and* the disciplinary homes of faculty. It was a daunting task.

At first, publishing was almost entirely a paper process. The Centre soon developed its own Occasional Paper Series, and by 1989 had published papers on the relationship between co-operatives and employees, democratic procedures in co-ops, a history of Saskatchewan co-op law, and several encompassing bibliographies on co-op management, worker co-ops, and co-op organizations in western Canada. In some cases, these occasional papers offered a means to publish conference proceedings, sector-related information, or aspects of research projects that wouldn't fit as classic academic publications. In 1989, the annual report listed sixteen occasional papers and one monograph, all available for purchase.

By 1999, that list had more than doubled, and changed to include not only occasional papers, but resource information, videos, and electronic forms of publication, which could be accessed through the Centre's website. Sales of these publications became part of the revenue budget for the Centre, though it never adequately recouped research, writing, editing, production, printing, and related creative costs. Nonetheless, these activities became central to the CSC's growing identity, a tangible result of the commitment to outreach and service, particularly to the co-operative sector.

The computer age came early for Centre staff and scholars. The innocuous line that read Office Supplies in the original operating agreement, to be paid by the university, became a lever

to garner state-of-the-art personal computing and Centre printing systems. The CSC quickly became a haven of Apple computer fanatics. Dan Ish, the second director, told me with a laugh that about once a year, someone would come into his office to complain about something. He'd listen, then promise them a new computer and they'd leave, happy. Yet technology was foundational to the exponential growth of the Centre's research and publication output. Almost from the beginning, technology helped the Centre establish internal communications, organize large research projects, write and edit effectively and quickly, and share information widely.

The staff complement at the CSC soon reflected communications as a critical core resource. Jo-Anne Andre, in one of the first two staff positions, took on a major publication and communication role in fostering the *Worker Co-ops* magazine, though her title didn't necessarily reflect her workload. In 1990, the Centre hired June Bold as communications officer, responsible for publications, liaison, and resource centre co-ordination, as well as research, writing, and editing as needed. June was succeeded by Byron Henderson in 1992, whose work took the Centre into the forefront of digital and electronic communications, including online databases and Co-op Net, the Centre's first in-house computer network. He was instrumental in creating an online presence for the Centre as the world moved inexorably towards what was then called the World Wide Web. Henderson eventually moved on to work more directly with computers and expand online knowledge. His successor, Nora Russell, took over in 1997 and has been head of communications and publications through the Centre's longest and most prolific publishing era. In many ways, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives was far ahead of similar departments or colleges across campus. One of the largest staff expansions at the University of Saskatchewan in the past ten years has been in communications, where individual colleges, schools, centres, and institutes fill communications co-ordinator positions to handle a multitude of internal and external communications and publishing responsibilities. The Centre has been doing that all along.

While much of the Centre's communications output involved occasional papers, booklets, books, and academic

papers, the board asked the CSC to find ways to reach the broader co-operative audience and to be more generally visible. Communications received special consideration at a joint staff/board meeting in 1993. Publications would be split four ways:

- occasional papers, books, and articles, which would showcase new research and theory
- resource papers, which would compile and disseminate general information
- fact sheets, with statistics and shorter resource information
- *CSC Developments*, a new Centre newsletter to be launched immediately¹⁰²

By December of that year, the newsletter was up and running and the CSC was eyeing a move online to e-publishing and databases as well as considering distance education options. The CSC embraced online technology from its infancy; the problem, then as now, was in finding ways to ensure a readership for what the Centre had to offer.

From the beginning, the Centre's publication mandate was more than just disseminating its own work. With a core commitment to in-house expertise in editing, writing, and publishing, the Centre offered scholars across Canada, the US, and around the world a publishing vehicle. Core communications staff could work with co-op authors to produce a wide array of publications and offer them for public distribution through the Centre's growing channels. Over the years, the Centre has published everything from bibliographies to histories to biographies to thought pieces, project reports, conference proceedings, director handbooks, community organization handbooks, policy notes, international co-operative comparisons, and community reports. Straddling the line between research centre and publisher, the CSC commitment to communications offered a valuable single-point publishing vehicle that supported co-operative

¹⁰² Board minutes, March 1993.

publishing and gave the co-op community a focal point for its work.

While external communications for the co-op sector, funders, and the general public remained the primary role for the communications officer, internal communications to the university were also critical, and it takes a language of persuasion and boldness to inform and sway university leadership. By the 1990s, the University of Saskatchewan began a long series of internal reviews and evaluations, to “trim” budgets and outputs, shoring up success and eliminating line items. The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives initially came under fire, derided as catering to a “special interest group” of co-operatives. In a 1991 letter to president George Ivany, the Centre fired back. The letter pointed out that co-operatives at the time made up about one quarter of Saskatchewan’s GDP (gross domestic product); the CSC was multidisciplinary and linked to the public (exactly what large funding groups like SSHRC were looking for); its scholarly output was tremendous; and finally, cutting the Centre would affect the university’s overall budget by eliminating the co-operative funding the CSC attracted.¹⁰³

Over time, faculty and CSC communications became even more adept at showing how and where the CSC aligned with and actively promoted the university’s goals. The director and communications officer worked together to produce two reports—one for the co-op sector and one for the university, each emphasizing what would be most appreciated, understood, and acknowledged.¹⁰⁴ The communications director took on a major role in responding to and creating internal reports, self-assessments, and other strategic documents designed to find key ways to promote the Centre within the university. By 2005, in the midst of the CSC’s external grant success, the university listed the CSC as a Centre of Excellence and the Centre ranked well

¹⁰³ Board minutes, March 1991. Note that the letter used “multidisciplinary” instead of “interdisciplinary.” The University of Saskatchewan remained skeptical of interdisciplinarity until the turn of the millennium. See Massie, “A (Limited) Study in Interdisciplinarity.”

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

during the aborted TransformUS process on campus.¹⁰⁵ By strategically placing core emphasis on the role of communications, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives demonstrated a critical understanding of the importance of influence, persuasion, and knowledge mobilization. With the retirement of Nora Russell in 2018, it is as yet unclear if communications will remain a key component of the Centre, or if that role will migrate to the desk of communications officers within the larger School of Public Policy. If so, it is possible that the Centre's publishing role, particularly as a point of concentration for the larger co-op research community, will cease.

The Library

For much of its existence, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives was home to a library resource centre, a mainly English-language repository of co-operative knowledge, the largest of its kind in Canada. In the 1980s, no research could take place without a physical library; print power ruled, and the Internet and computer technology were far into the future. The co-operative research library at the CSC began at the convergence of three related points. First, in the original founding document, the University of Saskatchewan committed cash to the tune of \$3,000 per year for "library acquisitions." The CSC, set up in the Diefenbaker Centre, chose to interpret that innocuous statement as leeway to create its own library instead of requesting co-op related material to be purchased, accessioned, and stored in the main library. Identifying and controlling purchases was important, and this budget allowed for co-op accessions, disciplinary books, and interdisciplinary materials to be

¹⁰⁵ The TransformUS process at the University of Saskatchewan was a major review exercise undertaken to identify areas of strength and weakness to help address a projected budget shortfall. The process asked each department, centre, institute, and school to complete an exhaustive self-reflective review. Nora Russell produced the CSC report, which led to a good ranking for the Centre. The process was aborted in 2014 due to outcry within the University of Saskatchewan community.

conveniently housed near the staff and faculty offices, right in the Diefenbaker Centre.

Second, director Chris Axworthy remembered that research officer Skip McCarthy, a CSC staff member in the early years, was a connector.

He had really good connections with all kinds of grassroots organizations. I don't know where the first books came from, but he engineered a donation. They were looking for someplace to put them. We just took them and started storing them, other people gave us books and so on. I suppose we thought it was important to have books of interest to co-ops in our library.¹⁰⁶

These donated collections included the materials gathered by Pestalozzi College in Ottawa, as well as contributions from Federated Co-operatives, including a complete set of the *Co-operative Consumer* newspaper from 1939–1982, and many local co-op history books. Adding to this rather serendipitous origin story, and the third point of convergence, was the demise of the Co-operative College of Canada, which formed part of the original Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) in 1987. At the time, the Centre had passed its solid third year, with a full complement of staff and faculty. With Skip McCarthy's book collection growing, part of the Co-op College library moved to the CSC instead of moving to Ottawa with the CCA.

Almost as soon as a library began to take shape, the Centre hired library technicians and librarians to keep track of, contain, and tame the growing beast. As early as 1985, director's reports showed librarian expenses outweighing book purchases by a factor of three. Linda Tanner came on board in 1986 to help catalogue both the Centre's growing number of tomes, reports, booklets, and papers, and to work with the Co-op College to make sure their catalogues were up-to-date. Her work set the stage for at least a partial amalgamation. Centre staff and faculty identified which, if any, reports, books, or other items they wanted from the Co-op College library before it was sent to

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

Ottawa. More items, particularly historical and archival materials, moved back from Ottawa to the Centre in 1994 as the Canadian Co-operative Association underwent change.¹⁰⁷

The library was, for much of the CSC's existence, a defining feature. It was a physical space, curated and well kept—a treasure trove of co-operative research and knowledge, including both books and archival material, as well as photographs. Students taking classes in co-operatives or with co-op content could be found working on papers in the library, chatting with each other and with staff, discussing co-op issues and debating concepts. Staff and faculty used library materials for research and publication purposes. Not having to cross campus and contend with countless other students, faculty, and staff in the university's main library no doubt enhanced research productivity. Even as the library holdings went online, first through the CSC's internal server, then via the university's system, its physical presence remained at the CSC within the Diefenbaker Centre.

The library became a major component of the Centre's mandate for research communication and dissemination, as well as outreach. Centre visitors would always be found perusing the shelves and using the stacks. Lou Hammond Ketilson noted multiple instances where new co-op employees, particularly those less familiar with the co-op model, would drop by for an informal "crash course" in co-ops, and more particularly, Saskatchewan co-ops, in the CSC library.¹⁰⁸ International visitors frequently cited the library as part of what drew them to the Centre—its extensive provincial, but also national and international co-operative holdings in one convenient space. From its somewhat haphazard beginnings, the library became known as the Resource Room, a space for dedicated co-operative information. By 1995, it held more than two thousand items, and the Centre renovated and expanded to create a better space. By 2013, the last year the library was *in situ* at the Diefenbaker Centre, it contained well over five thousand items, ranging from books to magazines and newspapers, reports and periodicals, to

¹⁰⁷ Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, *Annual Report*, 1994.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

sound recordings and videos. Yet as the modern age of digital publications rose, questions came to the forefront. If online publishing is at the touch of a few keystrokes, and researchers both have and demand digital access, of what use is a physical library? How does a physical library serve the needs of rural, remote, northern, or international communities? These questions became part of the contentious debate that led to the relocation of the co-op holdings to the Special Collections area of the larger university library, a point to which we will return later.

Outreach and Extension

Outreach and extension activities have always been a central part of the CSC's mandate. And while that mandate has been met, in part, by its communication work and its research library, outreach and extension have played a key role in maintaining the vigour of the Centre's relationship to the broader co-operative and academic communities. It is difficult to define outreach and extension activities, as they cross over into research pursuits, governance, relationships, teaching, and service. They also vary from year to year and by faculty member. Nonetheless, examples abound. The simplest forms include meeting with senior managers and directors of co-operatives, creating back-and-forth dialogue and check-ins, producing internal policy papers and commentaries, keeping tabs on industry changes, and ensuring research relevance. Other examples include providing support services to co-operatives, such as helping run discussion groups, providing expert advice or feedback, presenting at annual general meetings, or working together on specific projects.

In reading board minutes for the Centre's entire history, it is clear that there were continual shifts in the importance of or emphasis on outreach and extension activities, and multiple discussions on how to handle them, how they should be counted, if they should be remunerated, and how to categorize and report them. If a co-operative asked for help with board training, or for someone to speak at public meetings about co-ops in general or co-op research in particular, the CSC board wondered: Should

the Centre charge a *per diem*? Does that money accrue to the faculty member, or to the Centre? How often can the faculty or staff accept such speaking engagements? How should those requests be split, and how should the Centre allocate its time? Can the Centre reasonably ask staff or faculty to volunteer for evening and weekend extension work on a regular basis? Such discussions were folded into both staff meetings and board meetings, but also became part of intense retreat sessions, where the Centre would map out its mandate, priorities, and strategic plans.

One obvious area of extension and outreach is in co-operative development. By the mid-1990s, the Centre had a large provincial profile, and requests would come in for direct co-op development, i.e., working with groups to create new co-ops. Tom Marwick, the Saskatchewan government representative on the board, pushed for co-op development to move out of the hands of the provincial government and into the Centre. But the time, energy, and extension services required for co-op development were not available at the Centre, whose mandate, focus, and core operations were in research and teaching. Extension flowed from those activities but could not accommodate the time-consuming process of direct co-op development. For faculty, such community engagement rarely led to academic publications, supported tenure or promotion decisions, or other career-enhancing activities. As well, co-operative development tends to happen within communities, at meetings and on coffee row. Asking groups of people to travel to Saskatoon to meet with professors wasn't feasible; neither was asking professors or staff to travel out to communities, except on occasion. A push towards community development in the early to mid-1990s led to several staff and faculty acting as meeting facilitators, but this initiative was short-lived. It was more common for staff or faculty to present at annual general meetings of large rural groups such as the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities or at gatherings of regional economic development authorities. Larger venues and events, often with workshops, efficiently disseminated co-op information to a broader audience, and also offered the opportunity for questions and answers.

Other university-linked co-operative centres, such as the Center for Cooperatives at the University of Wisconsin-

Madison, had a formalized co-operative development mandate and focus, with in-house staff dedicated to supporting nascent co-ops, and for this reason, it might have been expected that the CSC would be similar. But the Wisconsin–Madison centre is an extension division; the number of research faculty is dwarfed by the staff complement and co-op development mandate. The two centres function quite differently. Other Saskatchewan groups—the fieldmen of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, provincial government co-op developers, and later, those working for the Saskatchewan branch of the Canadian Co-operative Association, and still later, the Saskatchewan Co-operative Association—had a clear mandate for co-op development.¹⁰⁹ Research projects would occasionally send staff, faculty, or graduate students to communities, but the relationship was one of research, not co-op development. For example, during the Co-operative Innovation Project (2014–2016), funded with a \$1 million investment from Federated Co-operatives Limited, Centre researchers visited numerous rural and Indigenous communities across western Canada for research purposes. Revisiting each community multiple times, as would be required by co-op development, was never part of the research plan, although one aspect of the work *identified* communities and business opportunities conducive to co-op business development. But the development process itself needed to build from the community level, bringing in co-op development specialists when possible.

Conferences offered obvious opportunities for extension and outreach work. Both faculty and staff attended public or government conferences, workshops, or annual meetings, giving papers or presentations. Rural development groups in particular were a close fit. Such public engagement was complemented and extended by academic outreach. The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives grew and coalesced alongside other Canadian regional research centres, clusters, and chairs studying co-operative business practices. A critical vehicle for unifying these groups is the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-

¹⁰⁹ For an overview of co-operative development in western Canada, see the Co-operative Innovation Project final report, especially the chapter devoted to co-operative development, <https://coopinnovation.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/3-co-op-development-in-western-canada.pdf>.

operation/L'Association Canadienne pour les Études sur la Coopération (CASC-ACEC). CASC grew alongside and in concert with the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, which has always served as its home base and office. CASC has a broad mandate to bring together academics and practitioners such as co-op developers, co-op educators, and co-op staff whose positions involve co-op outreach, extension, and education. The annual CASC conference coincides with Congress, an annual gathering of Canadian academics. Since 1984, both faculty and staff have attended, given papers, reports, stood for CASC office, and supported the association. The gathering attracts co-operative researchers and practitioners from across Canada and around the world; it is an event where new research projects and collaborations, knowledge sharing, support, and community come together. The relationship between CASC and the Centre is strong. During a period of funding renewal, the question is, how can CASC members be mobilized to support a new contract for the CSC?

With its footprint in the recently renamed Diefenbaker Building, anchored by the Diefenbaker museum and archives, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives has had a unique and enviable avenue for outreach and extension through public history. The Centre has worked with museum staff on multiple occasions to showcase co-op history and research generated by the CSC. Museum displays offer a unique form of public outreach. Academic research must be distilled to its essential points and combined with visual artifacts or photographs to tell a particular story. The first such collaborative exhibit was in 1986, when Centre and museum staff produced *Building Windbreaks against the Future: The Co-operative Movement in Saskatchewan*. The Centre hosted a reception to mark the exhibit's opening, as well as sponsoring a special visit from delegates at Federated Co-operatives Limited's annual general meeting that year.¹¹⁰ Through the years, the CSC worked with the Diefenbaker Centre on smaller exhibits, or provided input into co-operative history for larger or longer exhibits. That relationship underpinned the

¹¹⁰ Centre for the Study of Co-operatives "Director's Report," 4 April 1986. Leo Kristjanson Fonds, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

2010 *Building Community: Creating Social and Economic Well-Being*. With almost one hundred panels written by Centre staff Nora Russell, Roger Herman, and summer student Norma Quaroni, designed by the Diefenbaker Centre's Teresa Carlson, alongside artifacts co-curated by a team from both units, the exhibit showcased both the role of co-operatives in communities and the history of the Centre. Opened to much fanfare in May 2010 by the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, Gordon Barnhart, the exhibit was visited by numerous school groups throughout May and June. The full exhibit also travelled to Melfort and Moose Jaw, regional Saskatchewan cities.¹¹¹ This museum experience led to three smaller, travelling exhibits, which pulled in information from communities in Manitoba and northern Ontario that were part of the "Linking, Learning, Leveraging" SSHRC-funded research. These travelling exhibits, available in both French and English, launched in concert with the United Nations 2012 International Year of Co-operatives.¹¹² The exhibit went through a third iteration in an online digital format, which was accessible across the world for several years on the Centre's website but is unfortunately no longer available.

Another major thrust of outreach and extension for the CSC has been in training, particularly training co-operative employees. As with other activities, this mandate has gone through ebb and flow. While the Co-operative College remained in existence throughout much of the 1980s, the Centre worked with the college to create instructional material and deliver courses. Once the college folded into the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA), its training and education mandate became less well defined. In the 1990s, Lou Hammond Ketilson worked on highly successful co-op director training with the new CCA, which was well received. Communications officer Byron Henderson looked into the possibilities of creating online training modules, but this initiative fizzled when he moved on. With grant successes, training shifted focus to graduate students—many of whom would go on to work for co-operatives or co-op associations—and direct training of co-operative employees diminished,

¹¹¹ "Director's Report," Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, June 2010.

¹¹² "Director's Report," Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, April 2012.

simplified into shorter occasional presentations or concentrated workshops during larger events. By 2014, the Canadian co-operative education landscape had changed dramatically, with numerous other institutions creating courses, both in-person and online, to reach co-op employees. In response, the Centre developed a certificate course in co-operatives and the social economy through its new relationship with the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, while continuing less formal events such as public seminars and a lecture series.

International Presence

From its beginnings, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives made its presence known not just in Saskatchewan or across Canada, but actively connected with researchers and co-operative practitioners across the United States and around the world. The first director, Chris Axworthy, spent time establishing these relationships as a way to link the new centre with other co-operative researchers, and to purchase publications for the library. As centre faculty began to publish, the connection point flipped. It soon became clear that having *four* faculty in such a close multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary concentration, along with dedicated research and administrative staff, meant that the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, even at a remote western Canadian university, became a world-class hub for co-operative research interests. The Centre became a magnet and international meeting place for co-operative scholarship.

There is a consistent vein of tension throughout the Centre's minutes, strategic papers, and files around addressing its core mandate. Since the majority of its financing came from within Saskatchewan, how much of its output should focus on the issues facing Saskatchewan, or at the least, western Canada? Was there a pan-Canadian or international mandate for research, and if so, shouldn't that be reflected in its co-operative funders? The first big stone to set ripples on this pond was the hiring of Brett Fairbairn. While Saskatchewan born and raised, a large portion of his research interests were set in Germany,

around German social movements and connections to co-operatives. In fact, Fairbairn has been the only Centre scholar to publish in more than one language. But, what could Saskatchewan co-operatives learn from the German experience? Fairbairn simply split his research interests to pursue some topics of direct interest to western Canadian co-operatives, including researching and writing, to date, three sequential histories of the Co-operative Retailing System and Federated Co-operatives Limited, but his German work created the first major international link. It wouldn't be the last.

A Visiting Research Fellow program began officially operating (dependent upon funding) in the early 1990s, with fellows coming to the CSC from around the world. International researchers would make a point of dropping by the Centre while touring Canadian co-operatives. Visitors have come from every continent (except Antarctica) and from places as varied as Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, and Zaire. While in Saskatchewan, visitors often spend time with local co-operatives, touring enterprises in the area, and meeting delegates, boards, and members. Many have hunkered down in the Resource Centre, making copious notes and immersing their minds in co-op content. Centre staff and faculty enjoy international visitors, relishing the opportunity "to learn about other countries and how they operate."¹¹³ Visiting fellows have developed professional working relationships with CSC scholars, some of which have led to collaborative curriculum and research program development, as well as study tours, overseas workshops, and international courses on co-operatives.

One of the Centre's partners for major international work has been the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) through the Co-operative Development Foundation (CDF). Its mandate is to promote and support co-operative organizations as a solution to local issues around the world, from poverty to

¹¹³ Interview with Patty Scheidl, 16 January 2018.

agricultural problems to gender disparity. Centre staff and faculty have been tapped to travel the world working with the CCA and CDF on specific projects. Bringing a background of academic research and knowledge into play on international projects contributes significantly to the creation of solid, effective working relationships. Credentials buy respect at international universities and with governments. Some of those working relationships on the ground multiplied through the years. Dan Ish, an expert in co-operative law, has travelled extensively on CDF projects, working in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Sierra Leone, China, Indonesia, and Ukraine.¹¹⁴ Lou Hammond Ketilson's work in Moshi, Tanzania, led to an international book shipment when Moshi Co-operative University accepted the duplicate books from the Centre's research library when the rest of the materials moved to Special Collections in the main library. "They were thrilled to accept our books. That was a huge deal. We shipped sixty-eight boxes that had to be crated; we had them boxed, couriered to Lou's acreage, and stored in her garage. Then they were trucked to Montreal and put in crates to be shipped by sea. The books got there, and they were so happy."¹¹⁵

The CSC maintains a membership in Co-operatives and Mutuels Canada (CMC), the bilingual Canadian co-operative apex organization that succeeded the CCA. CMC is a member of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), an international nonprofit organization that pulls together co-operative leaders, practitioners, and researchers from around the globe. Reflecting the importance of the Saskatchewan centre, Lou Hammond Ketilson was chair of the ICA Committee on Co-operative Research from 2007 to 2013 and remains an active member. Centre faculty are often called upon to give keynote speeches at international events, reflecting the high regard in which they are held. Travelling to international conferences or events, there is instant recognition of—and respect for—the so-called "Saskatchewan mafia" from the Centre.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Dan Ish, 1 December 2017.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Patty Scheidl, 16 January 2018.

Having or promoting an international presence has always been somewhat of a misfit with the Saskatchewan-based funders: Is an international presence part of the mandate or expectations? How does that play back to the local co-operative level? Is international “galivanting” how the funders want energy spent? Centre annual reports tended to emphasize visitors to the CSC, while mentioning but de-emphasizing international work or travel. Yet even while occasionally questioning the international connections, local funders expressed pride in these accomplishments. Bill Turner, a long-time Centre board member representing Credit Union Central, spoke about the CSC’s international presence: “On the national and international partnerships, those would have to be viewed as enhancing co-op development in this country, and perhaps in the broader world.”¹¹⁶ It was about sharing that core of expertise, helping people around the corner and around the world. Saskatchewan people tend to value personal relationships; if those relationships carried a bit of Saskatchewan around the globe, then in the end, Saskatchewan won.

Reflection: System Dynamics

The rapid growth of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives shows how the original strength of the foundation played out within the time and space of the university and the co-operative sector. It is tempting to assert that the CSC remained the same throughout its history: after all, so many of the original and established components are visible today, from the five-year funding agreements to many of the core faculty members. But within those components, adaptation led to sometimes incremental, sometimes monumental changes. Thinking about the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives through a resilience lens, the system dynamics contain fascinating patterns of rapid growth, conservation, release, and reorganization. Resilience theorists speak of these phases as the *adaptive cycle*. An ecological example might help. In a boreal forest ecosystem, forest composition flows through the adaptive cycle. A forest grows

¹¹⁶ Interview with Bill Turner, 15 January 2018.

when plants become established and quickly develop into woodland. The forest might hold its mature structure for a long time, stabilizing the forest floor and supporting particular plants and animals. A disturbance event, such as a major wind-storm or forest fire, causes a rapid release of resources and collapse. Following the collapse, the system renews itself as plants and animals recolonize it and the adaptive cycle repeats.

There are key growth variables within the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives that led to adaptive change. The first can be understood as the body of the Centre, its form and function: the five-year funding cycle based on renegotiated agreements. The second can be described as the movement of the Centre, its energy in building and disseminating a body of knowledge, and particularly the influence of grant funds on its expansion and contraction. Third, let's consider the ways in which the Centre's form and energy have touched the larger community, particularly relationships and renewal. Each of these deserves a closer look.

A major indicator of the Centre's health is the ease with which contracts are negotiated. Each contract cycle (five years), bookended by a period of negotiation, mirrors that of the adaptive cycle. Positive negotiations and signing the agreement represent the period of exploiting the resources of the university, government, and co-op sector to create space for the CSC to exist as an institution. The funding period—five years—is the phase of growth and conservation of resources, keeping the institutional aspects of the Centre steady and recognizable: administrative staff, location, mandate, and activities. The end of the funding cycle and the period of negotiation for a new funding cycle is a time of release and reorganization, often met with discussions, position papers, and the application of professional persuasion. Successful signing of a new contract, often with new partners, brings a new start to the adaptive cycle.

Although it took some time to hammer out the agreement between the founding funders for the first contract, its necessity and support was never in doubt. All parties agreed to the fundamental need to create the Centre, and the first contract was signed with great speed, considering the technical aspects

of creating a completely new kind of contract that drew together such large players: the provincial government, multiple large co-operative enterprises, and a public university. Subsequent contracts, however, showed that economic, political, and institutional change had a direct effect on the Centre's very existence. Contract renegotiation in 1989 was messy and had a high probability of failure. In fact, the Centre actually operated *without* a formal agreement for more than a year, between the end of the contract in June 1989 and before the new contract was signed 26 October 1990. With the withdrawal of the provincial government and their 40 percent funding, the University of Saskatchewan backfilled the CSC with bridge funding. But the clock was ticking. With all of its faculty either still on the tenure track (but not yet tenured) or on political leave, the Centre was at a real risk of disappearing—and for those faculty members whose salaries were paid by the Centre and not yet through the university, their very jobs were in peril. Strength and determination came from the co-op sector representatives, who stood their ground and used personal persuasion and pressure to bring the university on-board as an active funder of the second contract, while expanding their own cadre of supporters. Faculty salary lines began to migrate to home departments, easing the Centre's financing and creating what became a financial separation between faculty and staff salaries, with staff paid via the Centre's co-op sector support.

Negotiations leading to the third operating agreement signed in 1994 showed the university and the co-operative sector acting together to pressure the provincial government into coming back on board. What followed was a period of relatively stable funding and contract negotiations. The same panel of co-op sector, government, and university funding held steady for ten years, from 1994 through 2004, when the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the largest contributor, ceased to operate as a classic co-operative and dropped its external funding to a variety of organizations, including the Centre. While co-operative groups stepped up, the university also became more and more financially responsible through funding the tenured faculty lines. In 2014, the provincial government once again dropped out, but an international funding source—CHS Inc., a huge farm supply co-

op based in Minnesota—joined the other co-ops at the board table. CHS's endorsement of and financial support for the CSC underlined its importance as an international centre of co-operative excellence.

Each funding renewal negotiation revealed important dynamics among the university, the provincial government, and the co-op sector. In each case, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives had to continually prove its success and ongoing relevance. Some negotiations proved easier; others, more difficult. While the Centre could contribute to successful negotiations via strategy, positioning, or output, there were some factors over which it had little influence, such as the demutualization of a major funder or a change in government politics. The threshold event, the point at which the CSC funding system changed, was when the University of Saskatchewan became responsible for 50 percent plus of the CSC's financing via faculty salaries and other in-kind supports (office and classroom space, office supplies, and so forth). Both on paper and in practice, at the board's direction, the Centre moved to align itself clearly with university priorities. It is probable, and was suggested by at least one interviewee, that the decision to direct so much energy to serving university goals meant that "the CSC remained successful but in an academic sphere, not the co-op world."¹¹⁷

One of the major limiting factors for the Centre was the board decision to emphasize provincially based co-operatives as funders, with the exception of Federated Co-operatives Limited, which covers western Canada but has its head office in Saskatoon. The first nonprovincial (and international) funder was CHS Inc., which, as mentioned, came on board in the 2014 contract. In limiting funding to provincial co-operatives, or co-ops with dominant Saskatchewan roots, the Centre found both strength and weakness. The connection to those core co-operatives, many of which were also co-investigators on research projects or even the subject of CSC research, was important and helped to maintain the close personal ties that gave the CSC its original boost. But it became a weakness as funders left and

¹¹⁷ Interview with Myrna Hewitt, 5 February 2018.

financing became more constricted, shifting inexorably to the university and limiting the reach to other large-scale co-operatives. It's too early to say whether the CHS Inc. move may lead to more nonprovincial co-ops coming on stream. As was the case with early funding negotiations, there are limits to what the Centre, via the director, can do to promote new funding relationships. To bring new funders on board, existing funders (including the university) must actively court, negotiate, and create those relationships.

The larger question is, has the overall funding landscape changed? Some would argue, yes. "We've been successful over the years that our dollars are not tied to deliverables. I don't know how much longer we'll be able to argue that," noted Lou Hammond Ketilson, who took the reins for more than ten years as the Centre's director. She went on, "The willingness and commitment to that isn't there. Ted Turner and Vern Leland, for example—there was a generation who were so determined to support research and teaching about co-ops that they were willing to let us do our thing. That kind of leadership is no longer there." It's changed, she said, with funding tied to deliverables, boxes to be checked, fees paid for services rendered. Investment in academic knowledge for its own sake, or even for the broader co-operative public good, might be at risk.¹¹⁸ Success in one area of the original mandate—to allow academic autonomy to build co-op research and gain a viable reputation for research excellence—may prove to be a detriment, even though the overall goal of building a cadre of researchers and a body of *bona fides* co-op studies knowledge has been met, and met spectacularly. The co-operative community overall has more than benefitted from the Centre's activities—but those benefits are not always direct.

Another identifiable cycle that regularly drove change within the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives was the continual rise and fall of external research grants. Right from the start, the Centre applied for and won these types of grants, which were used to expand staff on a short-term, contract level. Those

¹¹⁸ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

grant hires (sometimes as short as a few months, others over a few years), in turn, generated by far the majority of the Centre's research output. Directed by faculty and developed with extensive input and guidance, such grants are common within academia as the primary means for faculty, departments, schools, and universities to conduct research and fund growth and change. A smaller grant might support one to two graduate students or contract researchers (at set University of Saskatchewan salary guidelines), along with funds to conduct research, including travel and sundry expenses. Outputs in such cases might include a graduate thesis, one or two academic papers, a few conference presentations, and perhaps some outreach and engagement for research or informational purposes. The CSC has won numerous small grants, the majority of which are administratively handled as part of the everyday work of CSC staff.

Larger awards, such as Brett Fairbairn's \$589,000 Social Cohesion grant (2002), Lou Hammond Ketilson's \$1.75 million Linking, Learning, Leveraging project (2005), both funded by SSHRC, or Murray Fulton's \$1 million FCL-funded Co-operative Innovation Project grant (2014), were major events in the Centre's history. Each led to short-term expansion in staff, students, and/or publishing output. Long-time office manager Patty Scheidl described the difference between regular operations and large-project activity: "It's a good thing, the CSC feels going, thriving, pumping out stuff. There is energy, and it's busy."¹¹⁹

Through a resilience lens, each of these grants can be viewed as drivers that changed the functioning of the CSC as a system for a period of time. While core staff, paid by co-op sector funds, remained stable, they would be called on to help, support, and in some cases, train incoming grant staff and students. Since the early 2000s, the larger Canadian academic community, pushed to win external agency funding, has recognized the administrative drain of these large projects, both in creating the extensive applications and, when won, managing the administrative tasks associated with running large grants. Hammond

¹¹⁹ Interview with Patty Scheidl, 16 January 2018.

Ketilson's Linking, Learning, Leveraging (aka the Social Economy project), for example, was a community-university partnership that brought together groups from four provinces (twenty-five academics in ten disciplines from thirteen universities), multiple research nodes, and upwards of sixty community-level partners in Canada, the US, Colombia, and Belgium. From telephone conferences to physical meetings, the logistics of bringing together far-flung partners to work together placed a heavy burden on CSC administrative staff and participating faculty. But the CSC benefited from increased graduate student work, more students learning about co-operatives and the social economy, a larger national profile with research connections, and a solidified presence within the University of Saskatchewan as a centre of excellence.

The Co-operative Innovation Project (CIP) 2014–2016 had different logistical issues than the Centre's SSHRC-funded work. Whereas the Social Economy project focused on pulling together multiple partners, the CIP was housed in one place (the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives) but was an ambitious, multifaceted undertaking that generated an immediate staff increase at the Centre. A research manager, a research officer, a data officer, community engagement specialists, and multiple student researchers ran the project under the guidance of both faculty oversight and a board, separate from the regular CSC board. The research itself involved both telephone and web-based surveys, twenty-six on-site community visits across four provinces, interviews, data analysis, and voluminous writing and meetings. The logistics of creating community connections, planning and organizing meeting spaces and food, getting researchers to remote northern or rural communities, conducting the research, and collating the massive amounts of data generation took the greater part of two years. Project leaders and students needed office space within the CSC's allocation in the Diefenbaker Building, stretching limits to desks, chairs, and computers. CSC staff supported the project through handling logistics, managing financial reporting, editing, providing much-needed project backbone, and facilitating its connection to the larger University of Saskatchewan system. The project produced an unanticipated outcome. Its recommendations led to

the creation of a new nonprofit entity in western Canada, Co-operatives First, dedicated to supporting an increased use of the co-operative economic and social model within rural and Indigenous communities across western Canada.

Each of these grants was a threshold event that led to change within the Centre, both during the granting period through increased activity, and afterwards, through communications, increased exposure, connections, and publications. The staff complement shrank once grant monies were fully expended. Yet grants have a way of bringing in more money; success begets success. Lessons learned in handling one large grant are held in the institutional memory of both staff and faculty and brought forward into the next grant. Staff brought on board for a large project become a pool of experts available for contract or permanent staff. Publications build a larger digital library of resources available to advance other research projects and point to new directions for future work. None of these external grants would have been as successful if the Centre did not have the ability to support core staff. In fact, it was the continuity of core staff that allowed the Centre to bid for, and win, large external grants; the short-term staff hires enabled by these large grants simply did not allow for institutional learning, memory, and continued growth.

The opposite should also be considered: If the CSC ceases to win outside research funding to generate new knowledge, what will be the result? It has maintained a role in outreach, extension, and training for the larger co-operative sector, which would continue for a period of time. But without new research questions driving new insights, training and education components will suffer. The relocation of the library away from the Centre is also a factor; the move transferred knowledge from physical sources to only those materials that have been digitized for on-line access, which are a precious few. Special Collections in the university's main library, which now houses the Centre's former holdings, does not allow clients to borrow items; they must use them *in situ*, which many regard as a major inconvenience in the digital age. Teaching priorities have firmly shifted to graduate studies, which means fewer students overall but better training, which probably ends in a net win for co-

operatives. But without research projects and new questions, what will happen to collegial interdisciplinarity? Faculty across the board reported that working together on projects, deliberately taking the time to view research problems and questions with a broad set of tools, has been foundational to the Centre's energy and output. While grant funding may look on the outside like a nice-to-have, it has consistently proven to be much more—a major energy driver, cross-cutting CSC activity and stitching together strength.

As noted so clearly in chapter one, the Centre was built on the cornerstone of the strong relationships among the original task force and board members. What is the relationship between board members and board connection, and the overall health of the CSC? This is a theme I will return to later as I think about the role of governance. Another area of strength for the CSC was the long-term stability of and ongoing relationship with its core faculty, particularly Murray Fulton, Lou Hammond Ketilson, and Brett Fairbairn, and later, Michael Gertler. Others such as Dan Ish and Isobel Findlay have retained close ties. Although Hammond Ketilson retired from the university in 2014, she remains an active researcher, with multiple projects with Isobel Findlay, also retired. However, the cohesive connection of that early cohort has been a liability for faculty renewal throughout the CSC's existence. When these faculty members were involved with other initiatives or took administrative roles across campus, their positions could not be replaced due to the individualized and departmental salary structure. Board minutes, originally excited as the University of Saskatchewan took over the faculty salary lines in the 1990s and into the 2000s, soon showed concern. Moving CSC faculty salaries to the university has proven to be a threshold event that created a new kind of system. How would the Centre replace or renew faculty members, should any choose to leave? What leverage would they have with larger university hiring processes or position openings? Conversely, each time the CSC went through the process of the five-year funding renewal contract, it wasn't just the co-operatives that had to be wooed. The university also required attention to ensure its support, particularly for funding in-kind office and teaching space, as well as tenure lines. The

Centre did not have enough funds to hire, on its own, new full-time faculty, and departments and colleges across campus could or would not necessarily bring in and share new co-operative researchers, just to have their department time cut due to commitments to the CSC. Bridging hires, where the CSC would partly fund new faculty but ask a department to take over the salary line over time (or similar arrangements such as term appointments or postdoctoral fellows), could offer some fresh perspectives and new research and teaching energy for the CSC, but these were either short-lived or otherwise less successful than the original hiring model.

The next major hurdle for the CSC faculty is a factor of time: many are past or getting near retirement. Although Michael Gertler's active role with the Centre began in 1996, his tenure at the university is almost as long as the original three. All four of those core faculty are either close to or actively changing the nature of their teaching, research, and engagement relationship with the CSC. In fall 2018, Brett Fairbairn began an appointment as president of Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC. As with any department, the departure of a faculty member leaves both a gap in institutional memory and sometimes a hole in the curriculum. Will an incoming faculty member be able to pick up those classes exactly as taught, or will there need to be curriculum renewal as well? These are legitimate questions of concern as Centre faculty look to retirement. Will the University of Saskatchewan commit to hiring co-operative-focused faculty researchers across campus to replace those who have or are nearing retirement or leaving the university? Using the original parameters, these new faculty might be in education, law, history, business, health, sociology, economics, or other unthought-of disciplines, or might be interdisciplinary scholars whose work fits well into a nontraditional school, such as the School of Environment and Sustainability or the School of Public Policy. If yes, the CSC might continue in its current, recognizable form. The 2018 hiring of Marc-André Pigeon as a Strategic Research Fellow in Co-operatives through the School of Public Policy showcases the possible success of this direction.

A related aspect of faculty renewal is the relationship to the larger co-operative community as both funders and subjects of

research. What if there are large, ongoing research projects or community relationships built on years of trust and history? How will those continue if key people leave? The opposite is also true: What if there is a dissonance between the kinds of research expected by the funders and the research interests of existing or incoming faculty members? What influence should funders have on choosing faculty? The landscape of the co-operative community is also by no means stagnant. The demise of the Wheat Pool and other large co-operatives throughout the Centre's history, the continued amalgamation of large credit unions and regional retail co-ops, and changes within the co-op research and teaching community all have an impact on the Centre's resilience. Its origins clearly show the importance of personal relationships and trust. What will be the impact as those relationships change?

The separation between staff and faculty, even in a small institution such as the CSC, showcases two separate cogs in an engine: They work together to make it run, but they are different pieces. There have been changes over time to the core staff complement, but overall there have been five key roles: office manager, administrative support, communications lead, librarian, and education/research/ outreach combined as a fifth position. These positions are key variables that show great continuity and resilience within the CSC. As funding waxed and waned, these roles would double up or constrict, or stretch out to accommodate incoming large grants or different funding allocations, but they have been, in general, easily identifiable. With the removal of the Resource Centre, the librarian's position was cut—the first major staff change. Staff positions are far more vulnerable to changes in the five-year funding agreements than faculty positions. In essence, the question becomes: Would the Centre as an entity built for teaching, research, and knowledge sharing remain the same if it lost staff? What would be the impact on its ability to address its core mandate if there were no dedicated staff component to bridge, complement, and extend faculty resources? As the Centre nears its next funding cycle in 2019, coupled with staff retirements, there is an opportunity to reassess staff positions and potentially make changes to capture

the energy needed to drive the CSC forward in its new configuration, whatever that may be.

The Centre's system dynamics show a state of continual flux, expansion and contraction in response to a rise or fall in funding resources, especially core and research funding. In examining some of its central dynamics, including an assessment of the importance of academic autonomy, teaching priorities, interdisciplinarity, and presence (from the local to the international), we see how these dynamics flow through the work of the Centre to drive its energy and output. The critical roles of communications and library resources, as well as outreach and extension activities, are the lines through which its energy (research knowledge and expertise) flows out from and back to the Centre's core. Changing any one of these areas has a direct impact on the direction, pace, and inclusivity/accessibility of its work.

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives has remained remarkably resilient throughout its lifespan. Interestingly, the structure of faculty and staff, combined with a solid connection to its physical space in the Diefenbaker Building, have allowed the Centre to withstand a multitude of changes, both internal and external. The longevity and continued presence of the Centre have had an impact on the larger spheres within which it operates: the co-operative sector, the provincial government, and the University of Saskatchewan. The next chapter will explore these spheres in depth.

Interlude Two: Timelines

The life cycle of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives can be viewed in multiple ways. The two most popular would be to consider either each of the successive five-year contracts, or the leadership style and activities of each of the directors.

While both provide insight, resilience theory offers a few other lenses. The origins of the Centre constitute the original “disturbance” to the larger co-operative, university, and government system of research and education about co-operatives. What followed was an organizational and establishment phase that covered the first two agreements and the beginning of the third. It took those iterations and that time to find a model that was sustainable, both for the Centre as an entity drawing from across the university, and for Centre scholars to become well established in their fields.

That period of establishment was followed by one of rapid growth and development, leading to a clear sense of maturity.

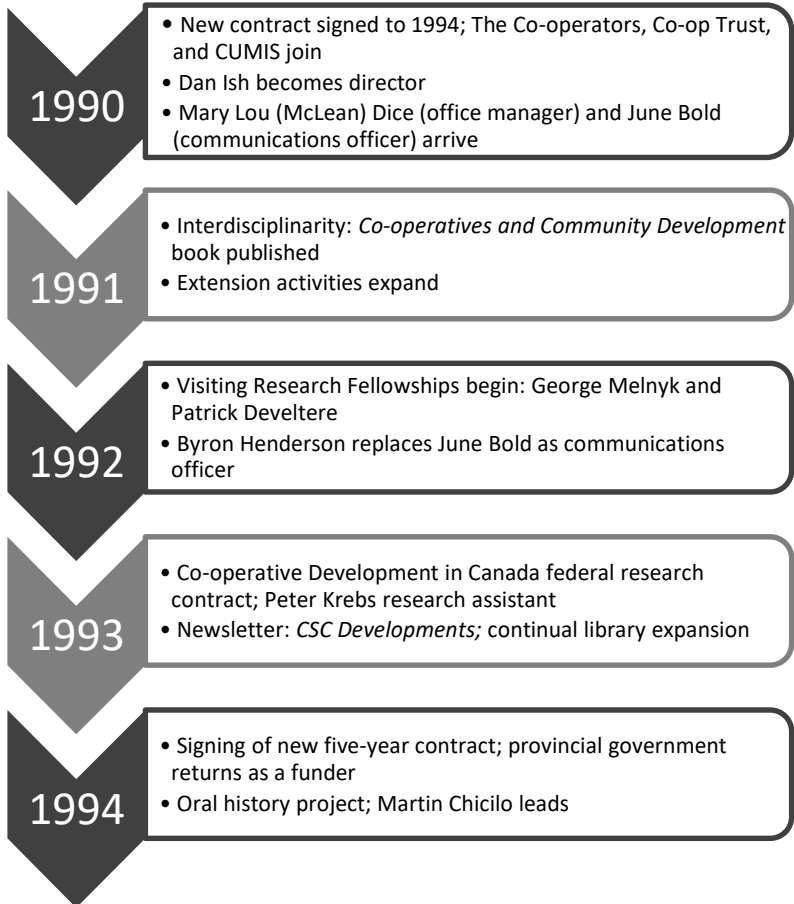


Figure 5: Timeline, 1988–1994

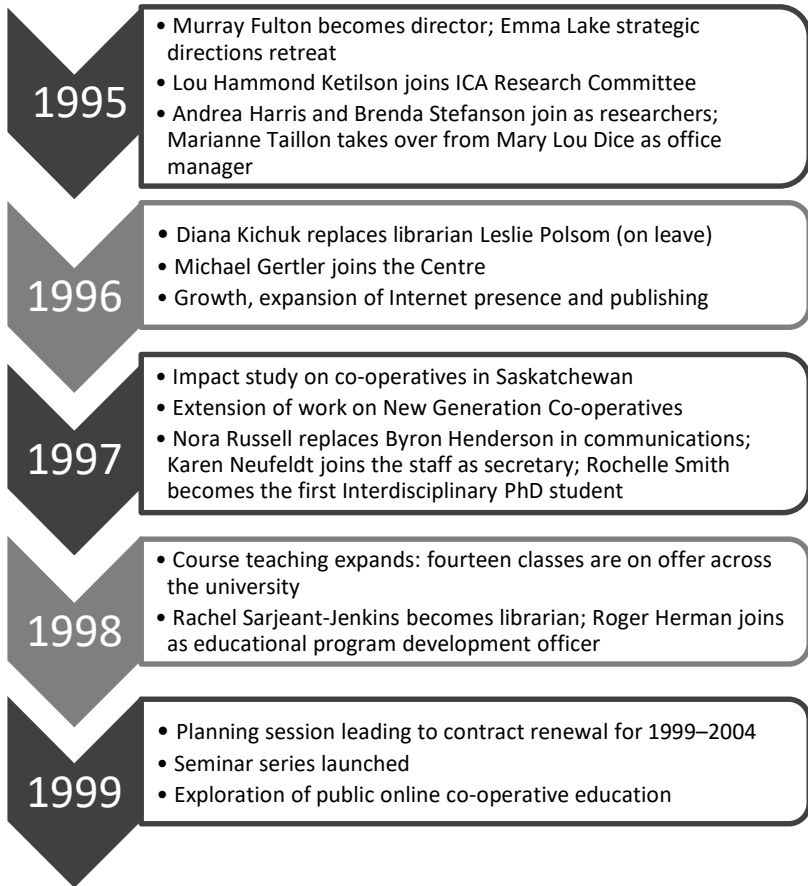


Figure 6: Timeline, 1994–1999

From 2002 to 2014, the Centre was able to capitalize on its core capacity to win and shepherd small, medium, and large research projects, expand and contract easily through those projects, develop major relationships, and bring in scholars and visitors, while successfully producing and mobilizing pertinent knowledge via many channels. Its stability showed every time it faced a potential setback or change, including funding changes or strategic planning initiatives.

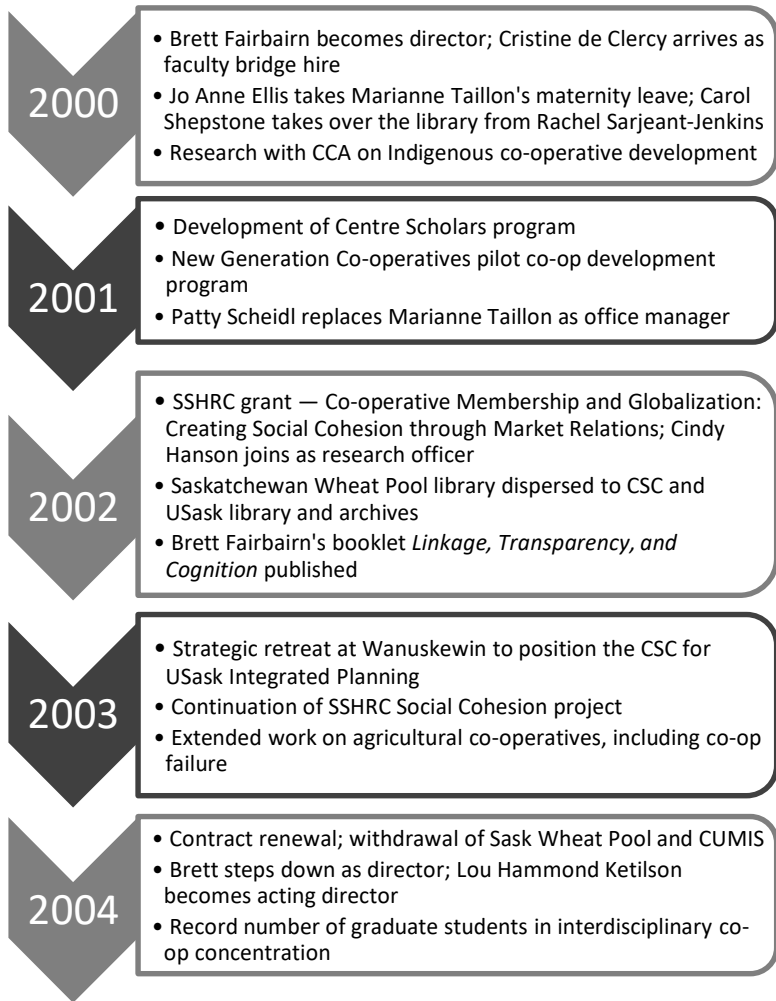


Figure 7: Timeline, 2000–2004

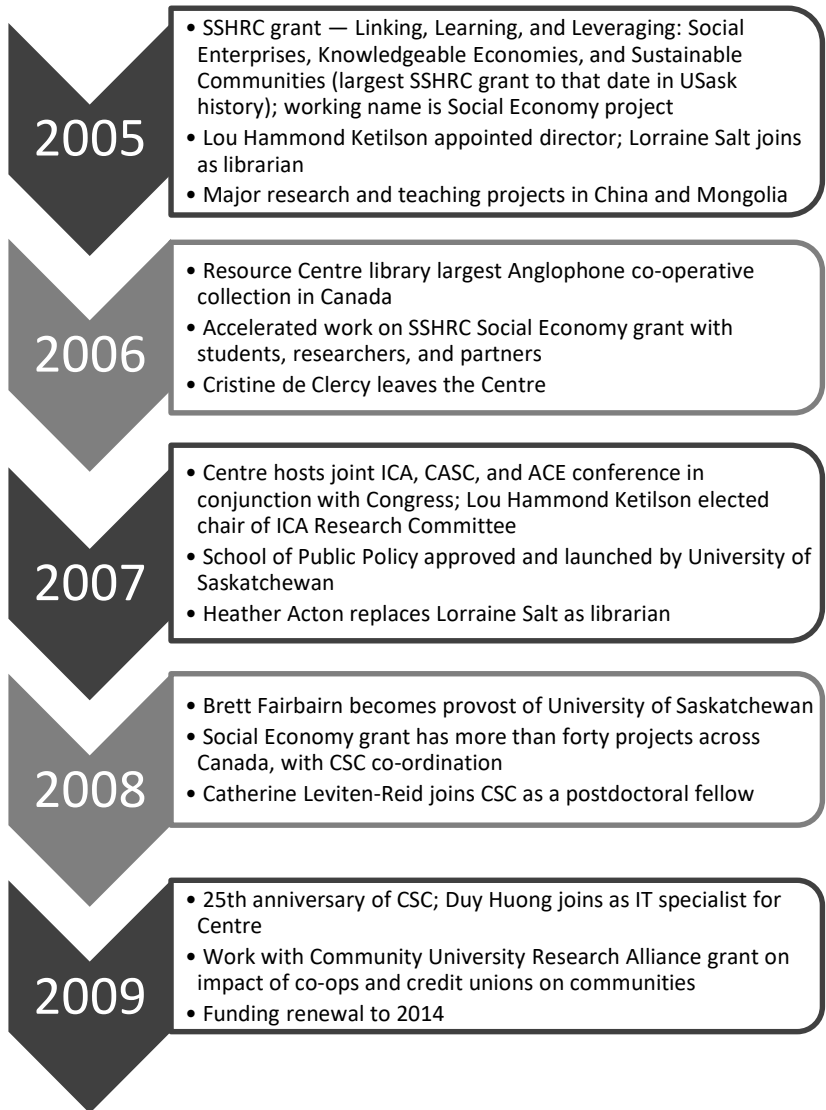


Figure 8: Timeline, 2005–2009

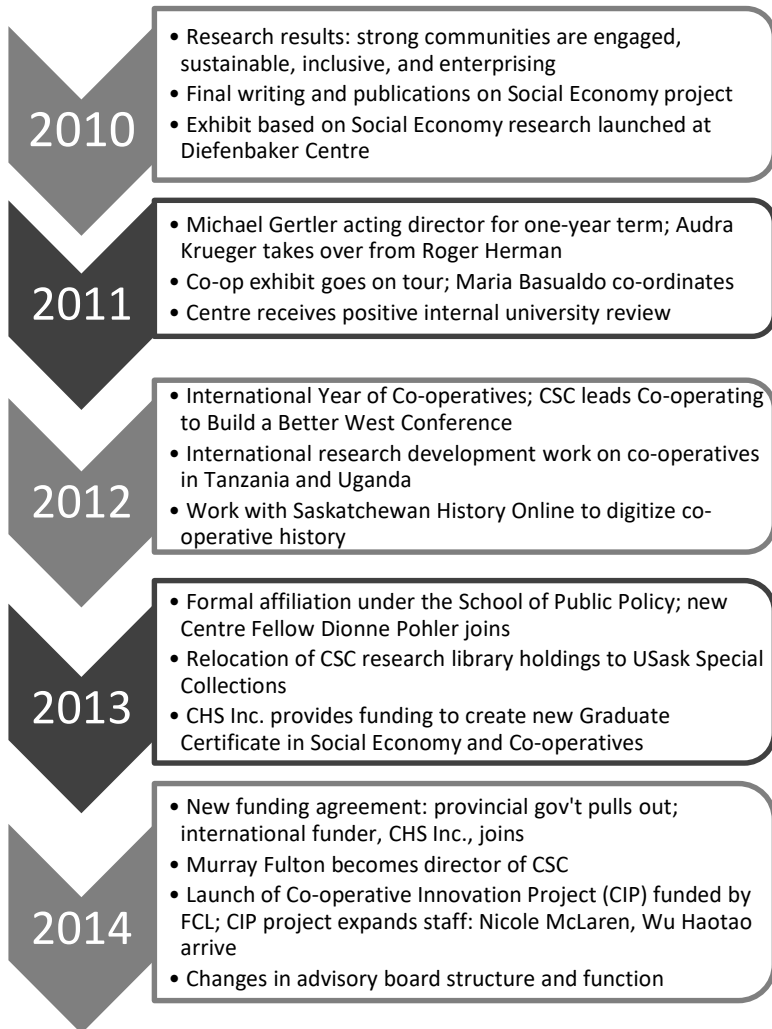


Figure 9: Timeline, 2010–2014

The Centre changed significantly between 2013 and 2014, ushering in its first major period of extensive release and reorganization. In some ways, these fundamental changes were less visible due to large grant projects in progress, and it may be too soon to tell how or if these changes will redirect the Centre going forward.

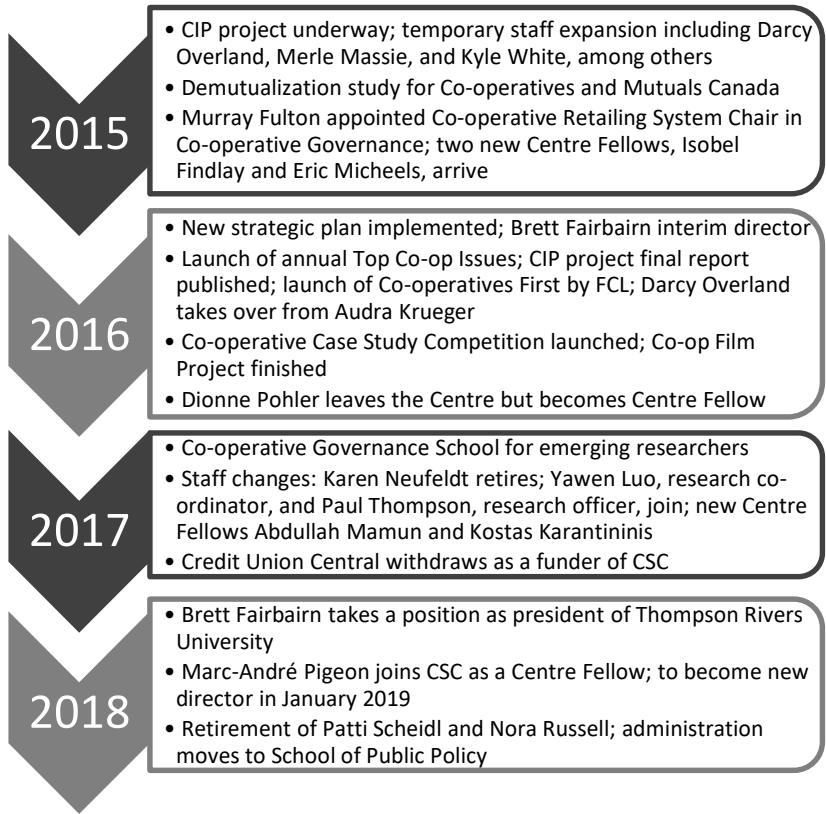


Figure 10: Timeline, 2015–2018

As of 2018, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives is in a period of contract negotiations and renewal. As of the writing of this history, a new contract is not yet in place.

Chapter Three: Panarchy

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives exists within larger-scale systems that are crucial to its longevity and success. These systems, and the interactions and linkages among them, can be understood as a *panarchy*. The two major systems that most affect the Centre are the University of Saskatchewan and the co-operative sector, with the provincial government as a distant third. The university itself operates within the larger realm of higher education in Canada, which is influenced by provincial and federal government funding, support, policies, laws, norms, and media. The co-op sector interactions include co-operative businesses (direct funders of the CSC and others), which are part of the broader economic system, co-op sector supports such as apex organizations and other similar entities, and co-operative values, such as those defined by the International Co-operative Alliance's "Statement on the Co-operative Identity."¹²⁰ Some of these larger-scale systems have been discussed tangentially in the last chapter; this chapter will examine a selection of larger panarchy interactions in more detail.

The Co-operative Sector

Sector Contributions

The health and economic well-being of each of the co-operative funders has a direct effect on the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. Over the past thirty-five and more years, eight distinct co-operative entities have contributed to the Centre's co-op sector funding. During the origin phase, some of the donors, including Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) and the

¹²⁰ See <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>.

Co-operative College of Canada, were less economically robust than others such as the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and Credit Union Central. Funding models that defined co-operative input to the CSC have always taken into account the economic health of the businesses, as well as their size and output in relation to the other funders, and have been adjusted accordingly. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and Credit Union Central were typically the largest contributors, with input from the others scaling down according to capacity. Over time, as it emerged from a period of financial restriction and instability in the 1980s, FCL's overall contribution rose, and as of the 2014–2019 agreement, it became the largest donor. Other co-op sector supporters—the Co-operative College of Canada, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and CUMIS—have withdrawn. In 1987, the Co-operative College became part of the new co-op apex service organization, the Canadian Co-operative Association, now renewed as Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada. As noted in Chapter One, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool ceased to be a co-operative in 2004, reformed as investor-owned Viterra, and revoked all funding to co-op entities, including the CSC. CUMIS also withdrew from direct funding of the Centre that same year. As its contribution was minimal, its absence was less noticeable; moreover, its contribution was split between The Co-operators and the Co-operative Trust Company, so that part did not change. From 2009 on, the funding model became more complex, with some contributing set amounts each year and others indexed to inflation via CPI increments. In 2014, Credit Union Central indicated its intention to withdraw—which it did in 2017—leaving FCL as the largest, and only remaining, original funder.

While the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives has shown remarkable resilience in the face of changes to its co-op sector funding over the years, including surviving the withdrawal of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, there remain factors at play within the larger picture that matter. The first question is, *why* do these co-operatives contribute funding to the CSC? They have all changed personnel over the course of the Centre's existence; it's impossible to expect that the original impetus for university curriculum intervention, co-operative research, or

personal relationships would remain the same. They have all faced their own internal struggles. One of the most common concerns, cited by both co-op literature and multiple interviews for this history project, is that co-ops have a difficult time, overall, operating as co-operatives or thinking co-operatively. Within regulatory and education milieux that are more familiar with investor-owned businesses and operate within a consumer-oriented transactional economy, the obvious question becomes, what direct benefit does the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives provide to each of its funders?

The nature of a changing relationship might best be exemplified by Credit Union Central (CUC). As one of the original funders, CUC had a long relationship with the Centre, but in 2017, it withdrew. Why? For Credit Union Central, the obvious benefits were no longer as visible. Myrna Hewitt, who represented the credit unions on the board, saw it as a three-pronged problem. In the first place, credit unions both provincially and nationally have invested in internal training as well as supporting university degree programs with a credit union focus. These avenues supersede any of the graduate or research training earned by University of Saskatchewan students through the CSC, which has either been more limited and sporadic, or focused on co-operatives and the larger social economy in general instead of credit unions in particular. Second, after early leader Norm Bromberger and his successor Bill Turner left the Centre's board, Myrna Hewitt wondered if the credit union representatives on the board were perhaps less strong and persuasive, less able to encourage researchers to concentrate on credit union issues. Certainly, less research has been focused on credit unions than on other kinds of co-operatives, such as retail or producer organizations. Finally, by 2014, there was a much larger transactional issue: "The CU just didn't see the connection—what value they were getting for their money; they didn't feel it anymore," Hewitt noted.¹²¹ That value-for-money transactional relationship is directly at odds with the long game promoted by

¹²¹ Interview with Myrna Hewitt, 5 February 2018.

the founding co-operators, but it is a reality of today's business world and cannot be overlooked.

The leaders of the Centre's founding co-operatives were friends and colleagues; mutual respect is evident in board minutes, correspondence, and other documents viewed for this project. But as co-operatives grow and change, their relationship to other co-ops sometimes changes as well. The CSC relies, in large part, on a continued level of mutual respect *among* its funding co-operatives, which come to the table as a group to support the Centre. Should those relationships, or those between the funding co-ops and the university or the provincial government, change or become antagonistic, there is risk to the CSC. As discussed in Chapter One, the renegotiation around the second five-year contract brought co-operative heft to bear on the university; their relationship, the co-ops pointed out, went far beyond the measly amount of money the university contributed to the Centre. The university, looking at all of its projects, capitulated.

One of the most important relationships is between the Centre and Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL), and by extension, the Co-operative Retailing System (CRS), the individual retail co-ops that are its member-owners. Throughout its thirty-five-year history, Centre faculty and graduate students have produced extensive research about the CRS, FCL, and subsidiaries, including PhD dissertations, numerous MA theses, three published history books, a major research project on rural and Indigenous co-op development, countless policy papers and keynote speeches, and a multitude of smaller projects. The relationship is strong and productive, but detractors exist. Observers have cynically called the CSC the Centre for Federated Studies.¹²² As a result, the close relationship between FCL and the

¹²² During interviews with Canadian co-operative developers during the Co-operative Innovation Project, at least three interviewees pointed out the strength of the relationship between FCL and the CSC, and one produced the moniker. I refrain from naming the source.

Centre could be a limiting factor in drawing co-operative support from other sources.

Because FCL and Credit Union Central are second-tier co-operatives, there has always been a gap between the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives and co-op people on the ground. The Centre may have a good working relationship or projects on the go with the second-tier co-ops, but that doesn't mean that it interacts effectively with the Biggar Credit Union, the Duperow Co-op, or other first-line co-operatives. Moreover, for much of its existence before today's digital age, the Centre relied heavily on board members to communicate back to their co-ops (and by extension, their co-operative owners at the community level) about the Centre's activities, research results, and new findings. Frankly, that reliance was generally misplaced, and on-the-ground co-ops had little to no idea that the Centre existed, much less that it might have something helpful to offer.¹²³

On the other hand, the Centre has built a national and international reputation on stellar research, wide-ranging interests, faculty depth, and excellent publications. The Centre's interdisciplinary approach and its close working connections with real co-operatives were also major draws.¹²⁴ For those reasons, in 2014, an international funder—CHS Inc.—joined the co-op ranks on the new five-year agreement and participated in the process that changed the Centre's governance and teaching roles. CHS helped finance the foundational work that created the new Graduate Certificate in the Social Economy and Co-operatives, which was offered through the Centre's new administrative home in the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. There is a distinct difference, long-time co-op advocate William Nelson explained to me in an interview, between corporate *philanthropy* and corporate *investment*. If a co-op or other funder views its relationship with the Centre as one of philanthropy or transaction for service, then the relationship is at risk. But sustainability rises if the relationship is regarded as one of

¹²³ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

¹²⁴ Interview with William Nelson, 29 November 2017.

investment—of recognizing the value in maintaining a major research, teaching, and publication centre that has the capacity to operate as a hub to other, smaller players such as research chairs or underfunded apex groups.¹²⁵

The CSC has been a leader in the creation of a distinct international body of work now known as co-operative studies. With journals, a large and connected on-line presence, and under the auspices of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), co-op studies have a place within both the co-operative and academic lexicon around the globe. It is now possible to chart an academic learning path that draws extensively and intensively from a worldwide group of co-op studies experts. Reflecting the original multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary makeup of co-operative studies, that path can be accessed from multiple starting points: economics, law, history, sociology, environment, business, and many others. The question becomes, is co-op studies now strong enough as an interdisciplinary conglomeration of associated researchers to grow organically, without co-op financial support and intervention? Or would it collapse and disappear without active research centres to promote its growth?

Other Sector Relationships

For the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, relationships with other sector organizations are both supportive and competitive. Support comes through mutual connections and sharing of information, interaction at conferences, on-the-ground co-op development support, and shared research goals, including partnerships for large projects. Competition is based on the limited number of large co-operatives in Canada that are in a financial position to support centres, institutions, and apex organizations. Over time, these groups have included the Co-operative College of Canada, the Canadian Co-operative Association, Co-operatives and Mutuels Canada, provincial apex organizations such as the Saskatchewan Co-operative Association, and by extension, the ICA. Of course, the Centre for the Study of Co-

¹²⁵Ibid.

operatives at the University of Saskatchewan has a significantly different mandate and goal than advocacy umbrella organizations or co-op development groups. Most often, the CSC works in partnership with these groups on specific research or curriculum projects, creating symbiotic learning and leveraging knowledge.

A secondary broad group of co-op sector relationships includes other co-operative research entities embedded within higher education. Again, these associations embody both mutual support and competition for limited funding. Examples include: various chairs based within other institutions such as the University of Winnipeg; other research centres such as Ian MacPherson's short-lived BC Institute for Co-operative Studies in Victoria; currently robust programs such as IRECUS at the Université de Sherbrooke and the International Centre for Co-operative Management at St. Mary's University in Halifax; and some institutions that offer co-operative content, often alongside community economic development. As Lou Hammond Ketilson noted, "We all have the same co-op funders—provincial associations, national associations. St. Mary's had been out fundraising; Ian started his research centre and wanted funding. There was a new centre being created in Manitoba, which FCL found challenging. The more that we succeeded in our mandate, the more the co-ops were being asked to fund those growth activities."¹²⁶ Yet, as with the co-op apex organizations, the CSC has developed critical working relationships with many of these entities, co-producing new research and sharing projects.

The Centre's publishing function, embedded within its communications mandate, provides co-operative researchers and educators around the world with a reliable, sophisticated, and accessible publishing vehicle well known throughout North America and internationally. While success in these areas indicates the health and interest in learning about co-operatives and conducting new research, it is important to recognize that all

¹²⁶ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

fundere have financial limitations. On the other hand, what is more important to the co-op sector—having a small number of well-funded, large, active centres for co-operative research and education, or a larger number of smaller centres with limited people, scope, mandate, or time? As noted in this history, a smaller centre may not have the staff capacity to support larger, longer, or more in-depth projects, including consulting projects for co-operatives. There is danger in spreading too thin.

Co-op sector funding for the Centre has and will in the future rely on two major variables: willingness on the part of the sector to continue CSC support, and the ability of the CSC to differentiate its work and impact. Original board member Vern Leland, discussing the Centre's future during our interview, noted that the CSC must have a clear focus and role. At the beginning, the Saskatchewan co-operatives that put up the money simply wanted co-op knowledge brought into the provincial university curriculum. Over time, though, it became clear that the Centre was leading critical research that helped to define and clarify the difference between co-operative businesses and other types of enterprises on a much larger scale, with national and international impact. "That knowledge would disappear," he said, "if the Centre wasn't there."¹²⁷

Certainly, the CSC is known more for its research than its teaching, although graduates across the board have been more than satisfied with their training. Other centres, such as St. Mary's, have made a point of noting the critical importance of the Centre's research output: "Tom Webb of St. Mary's University in Halifax has commented that while their business school can launch a co-op management program, it can't be done without the research carried out by our Centre. Research is complementary and fundamental to the needs of co-operatives for development and for innovation."¹²⁸ Trying to balance research with teaching has always been a central problem for the Centre.

¹²⁷ Interview with Vern Leland, 20 January 2018.

¹²⁸ "Director's Report," Centre for the Study of Co-operatives *Annual Report*, 2002–2003.

While Saskatchewan-based funders might look for co-operatives in the university curriculum, others might consider the Centre's research output to be its greatest contribution to the sector. The issue, then, is whether Saskatchewan or even western-Canadian-based funders are willing to support these larger goals. The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives most certainly cannot rest on its laurels. With multiple competing centres, chairs, and associations looking for funding, the co-op sector is itself a landscape of change.

Co-operative Principles

A fascinating aspect of co-ops is that they not only exist within the larger corporate environment, but they also operate according to a self-defined set of principles. These principles, while not prescriptive, offer a means of recognizing what is "co-operative." Researched and defined by the ICA, the seven principles are:

- voluntary and open membership
- democratic member control
- member economic participation
- autonomy and independence
- education, training, and information
- co-operation among co-operatives
- concern for community¹²⁹

While not set in stone (the principles evolve over time, and not all apply in all situations), they provide an internal "code" by which co-operatives can speak to one another. Embedded in strategic documents, the interviews I conducted, and in annual and board reports, co-operators tend to use a shorthand: principle five, for example, references education, broadly conceived. The principles also provide researchers with specific areas of

¹²⁹ See <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>.

focus. Member ownership, democratic control, and member participation have each offered ample scope to study issues of governance, decision making, and strategy in co-operative theory. And much of the work produced by the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives on the connection between co-ops and community has led to a higher understanding of the seventh principle, concern for community.

In terms of its support from the co-op community, the fifth principle (education, training, and information) has proven to be the most important in the Centre's operations, though co-operation among co-operatives and concern for community are also part of the impetus behind its funding and direction. From its origins, the CSC was created to be a leader in education, training, and information; financial support could be viewed as a "checkmark" in a funding co-operative's appropriate principle box. Such a mentality, however, misunderstands the critical role of the Centre in building and disseminating so much of the body of co-operative knowledge that is used by co-op educators around the world. It also changes the relationship between funder and CSC from one of partnership and shared vision to one of transaction and obligation. A transaction approach introduces brittleness and a sense of exchange—money paid for services rendered—a perspective that turns co-op funders into customers and co-op educational organizations, not just the CSC, into service providers. A viewpoint like this hurts all players, basically asking co-operative educational programs to become identical, like grocery stores competing for customers using price, product lists, marketing lines, and gimmicks. A transactional relationship forces co-op education to compete instead of differentiate, a risky race with constantly moving finish lines.

If the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives is viewed as an example of co-operative principle five in action, it's important to make sure that its activities somehow match or support the principle. The ICA defines principle five as follows:

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so

they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public—particularly young people and opinion leaders—about the nature and benefits of co-operation.¹³⁰

In this definition, all of the onus is on co-operative entities to educate and train their own members and staff about co-ops, and to inform (not educate) the general public about co-operatives. This makes education both internal and external to a co-operative. Larger co-operatives generally have internal training and education programs, especially for staff and leadership. These programs have sometimes used the research information and/or the living expertise of the Centre's faculty and staff, but for the most part, they are specific to the company and its culture. A few Canadian co-operatives support staff or leaders to take formalized undergraduate or master's-level courses in co-op theory or community development, such as those taught at IRECUS in Sherbrooke and St. Mary's Sobey School of Business in Halifax, or the Graduate Certificate in the Social Economy and Co-operatives at the School of Public Policy in Saskatoon, but these initiatives have not replaced internal co-operative education and training.

Yet, the problem of "informing" the broader general public about co-operatives has consistently been the more difficult of the two parts of principle five. As noted, public education was a large part of the impetus that led the original funders to create the CSC as a means of inserting co-operative knowledge into university-level courses. At the time in Saskatchewan, there was extensive knowledge of co-operatives at the government level, although policy and law research were significant issues in the Centre's original mandate. The Centre's communication function, also part of its core activities, responded to the need to reach a wider public audience, including government and policymakers, to explain the benefits of co-operative ownership and provide them with new insights into co-op business practices.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

However, the function of *informing* is difficult to quantify or measure. Should that be gauged in terms of knowledge about co-operatives? And whose responsibility is it to inform the wider public about co-ops? Co-operatives themselves, co-op apex groups such as provincial or national organizations, or research and education centres? The answer, of course, is all of them, but creating co-ordinated outreach, education, and marketing efforts that combine the energy and vitality of these groups has proven difficult. In many cases, the co-op sector is a victim of duplication, not acceleration, of these endeavours.

Principle five, as outlined by the ICA, does not specifically include the word *research*. While some might be content to assume that research is part of “education and training,” the absence of the word is disconcerting. The assumption could be that there is enough existing information about co-operatives, and principle five is simply a function of training, educating, and informing more people about co-op ownership and values. Such an assumption is, of course, absurd. Co-operatives themselves are constantly changing, creating new versions of the co-op form, conforming to legal regulations in different countries around the world, or working to establish new parameters and laws. Co-operatives are dynamic and thus require constant study if researchers and others are to remain adequately informed.

Even within a single co-operative, self-reflection and growth demands investigation through research. Some of the larger co-operatives worldwide have internal research departments whose function is generally two-fold. *Technical research*, which is related to economic performance measures, makes up the largest portion, but *research related to social performance* is gaining importance. For a co-operative, social performance includes sustainability, community relationships, and supporting other co-ops, matters addressed in principles six and seven. Social performance also involves attention to co-operative institutional success, such as growing membership, increasing member engagement, and supporting co-op governance.

There is a strong connection between co-operatives and research in western Canada. The Co-operative Union of Saskatchewan, a forerunner to today's Saskatchewan Co-operative Association, had an active research committee that aimed to identify and collate internal research activities within large credit unions and co-ops as well as the provincial Department of Co-operation and Co-operative Development. A report issued in 1964 revealed that the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and FCL both had internal research directors and analysts, and both would, in addition, contract or otherwise support university research on a project-by-project or general basis—often via the Centre for Community Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, where Leo Kristjanson held a position. Credit unions and co-operative insurance agencies would outsource such work on a piecemeal basis as required, usually to a university. The provincial co-op development department had a more robust research component that would investigate both economic and social questions for co-ops.¹³¹ Clearly, in addition to the origin story that brought these same groups together in 1980 to discuss the creation of the CSC, the major western Canadian co-operatives understood and supported the need for, and value of, research. In a way, the history of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives can be traced back to the Co-operative Union of Saskatchewan and its research committee.

Although the co-operative movement is underpinned by formalized principles, there are those within the sector who are *practical* adopters of co-operative ownership and others who support co-ops for *ideological* reasons. While in most cases this split is neither visible nor important, ideological support tends to be less critical of the downsides of co-operative ownership and more willing to overlook or even ignore the practical realities of whether or not a co-op is the right ownership model for a particular business or entity. Ideology often drives conversations around politics and the dominance of capitalism,

¹³¹ Co-operative Union of Saskatchewan. "Report — For Research Committee," 1964. In Research Committee Papers, vertical file, Co-operative College of Canada files, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives files.

characterizing co-ops and their supporters as anticapitalist. Nonetheless, ideology remains important. Researchers have clearly shown that it plays a central role within larger movements where co-operatives grow or are specifically mentored.¹³²

A related issue within the broader co-op movement is a marketing technique to brand co-operatives as more environmentally sustainable than capitalistic ownership models. While sustainable environmental practices and green energy initiatives are important, even essential, in a world facing climate change, the question becomes, is it necessary to eschew fossil fuels in order to be a true co-operative? That push might go too far. Some of Canada's largest co-operative businesses—the gas energy co-ops in Alberta, for example, or Federated Co-operatives Limited, which owns the Co-op Refinery in Regina and produces petroleum—use the co-op model as a way to gain leverage and fairness in the oil industry.¹³³ What, then, is a co-operative? Is it simply an ownership model for a business or entity, or do co-operatives have direct moral imperatives? As noted, research has shown that ideology is an important aspect of the larger co-operative sector, underpinning much new growth, movement, and change. At the university level, where research must stand on its merits and be ready for close scrutiny, what is the place of ideology? As in the broader co-op sector, some researchers have a more practical viewpoint, while others embrace an ideological perspective. Both have produced excellent research, provocative arguments, and implemented critical discussions in many directions. We need all perspectives in our efforts to grow the co-operative conversation.

¹³² See, for example, the work of Mitch Diamantopoulos, including “Breaking Out of Co-operation’s ‘Iron Cage’: From Movement Degeneration to Building a Developmental Movement,” *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics* 83, no. 2 (June 2012): 199–214. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8292.2012.00461.x>.

¹³³ A heated bear-pit discussion on this issue erupted at the annual Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation Conference in Ottawa, Ontario, in 2015. Personal experience of the author.

Today's co-operative sector, through its national and international connections, is a site of constant learning and exchange, bringing knowledge and new ideas from one place and introducing them in another. Education is not about the past; it is about the future. Leo Kristjanson, who spearheaded the creation of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, once argued: "Co-operative education should be education for living in the society of today and tomorrow and not for living in the society of yesterday."¹³⁴ The ICA has a robust research arm with its own leaders, who advocate and support co-operative research and bring together researchers in multiple events around the world each year. Centres such as the CSC, whose roots go beyond education to include research, act as a bridge and conduit for new ideas, helping co-operatives to learn different ways of organizing, governing, and growing. Research work is integral to principle five, responsible for building and constantly renewing the body of knowledge used to provide the education, training, and information functions it addresses. It may be time to consider revisiting the fifth principle, expanding it from an education function to one that encompasses the creation of new knowledge.

The University Sector

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives also operates within the larger University of Saskatchewan panarchy, which is itself part of the Canadian, North American, and world university landscape. The University of Saskatchewan was founded in 1907 as a provincially based university located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Similar in many ways to the land grant universities of the United States, it was the only university in the province (albeit with a separate campus in Regina) until 1974, when that campus officially became the University of Regina. The

¹³⁴ Leo Kristjanson, "Some Thoughts on Research for Co-operatives," paper presented to the Institute of Co-operative Education, Saskatoon, 21–25 June 1965. Research Committee Papers, vertical file, Co-operative College of Canada, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives files.

University of Saskatchewan is a medical-doctoral university, with colleges of medicine, nursing, pharmacy and nutrition, veterinary medicine, dentistry, law, education, engineering, agriculture, kinesiology, commerce (now Edwards School of Business), arts and science, and graduate studies and research, to award doctorates. Funding is a mix of provincial taxation support, tuition, and land rental, with a new focus on growing endowments.

Because the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives was funded initially from outside the university (the provincial government gave 40 percent, the co-operative sector, 60 percent), university in-kind commitment was limited. Over time, though, the university has become the Centre's largest financial supporter, contributing well over 50 percent of its operating budget. This inevitably meant that the Centre transitioned its focus to make sure it was meeting the university's expectations around research, teaching, and service. At the individual level, a typical tenured appointment expects faculty time allocation to be 40 percent research, 40 percent teaching, and 20 percent service. A change in position, such as appointment as department head, assistant or associate dean of a college, provost, or other administrative post, would shift those expectations, lowering research and teaching responsibilities and raising the service component. While reducing research output is acceptable from the university point of view—for a limited period of time—the co-op sector partners didn't share that same perspective or timeline. Their five-year funding commitments carried expectations of ongoing research and results geared towards supporting issues of concern for co-operatives, outcomes that they could report back to individual co-op boards as measures of the CSC's usefulness and success. Aligning university and co-operative timelines was often a major challenge. Affinity Credit Union affiliate Myrna Hewitt and CSC faculty Lou Hammond Ketilson once described the relationship as trying to drive a wagon with two horses hitched to the traces: when one horse is moving, the other is stock still; when the first is stopped, the second is

moving.¹³⁵ Pulling together, at the same time, was a result to be celebrated.

Other norms of university faculty careers were also occasionally a mismatch for the Centre. Administrative appointments typically do not happen until a person achieves tenure and increased rank, at least to the associate level. Early career researchers, who need to publish books or a number of peer-reviewed articles to attain tenure, are not usually asked to take on senior appointments, including directorships. None of the Centre's full-time faculty could assume the director's position until they had been awarded tenure and promotion within their home department, a factor that limited director searches to outside the university or the CSC until its faculty were well established. According to faculty union stipulations, tenured faculty are eligible for sabbatical, research, or administrative leave to compensate for service work given to the university or to underwrite longer trips for research projects. Sabbatical leave was a double-edged sword for the Centre and its co-op funders. Leaves could indeed facilitate new research work or connections—a positive benefit—but they might also reduce the Centre's research output or function for that period of time. And if a director was due for sabbatical leave, someone had to become interim director. Continuity was maintained by the general practice of other Centre faculty members temporarily stepping into the role.

In Canada, as noted above, universities compete for research funding via the federal government's arms-length research councils. Winning grant funds from these prestigious and competitive pots marks a huge measure of success for the university, the department or centre, and for the faculty members who design and write the grant application and research program. Undertaking the research improves productivity back up the chain, including drawing in new graduate students. Securing

¹³⁵ Description of university-co-operative research, Lou Hammond Ketilson and Myrna Hewitt, Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation Conference, Ottawa, 2015.

these grants also improves both the Centre's visibility and respectability within the university, which, in turn, may help cement the university's financial and other commitments to the Centre. How did these measurements play out in the co-op world? One interviewee commented, "Academics measure things in a really weird way." Large grants produce copious outputs, but that's just a matter of counting. "All they want to talk about is all the papers that they've published. Six papers using the same research. As a practitioner, I don't care about that. What did you learn from that? What use is that research to me or the co-op sector?"¹³⁶ While this adverse perspective may not be the norm across the sector, its bluntness induces respect.

But as universities in Canada have grown, both in size and in number, during the Centre's thirty-five-year existence, the ability to win significant external grants and awards has shrunk. In response, the CSC has moved back towards securing large research grants through relationships with the co-op sector; an example is the Co-operative Innovation Project funded by FCL. This move may signal a change within the Centre to focus its extensive research capacity more clearly on the co-op sector. On the other hand, this may not be consistent with university research values of autonomy and tri-council grant success. If the Centre's external funding does not help the university raise itself in the rankings, the university may cease to financially or otherwise support its activities.

The number of university-trained researchers has grown exponentially compared to those available when the Centre was building its faculty complement. While the CSC attracted researchers of enormous talent who built successful research and publishing careers, the ground has since shifted. Canadian and international universities have developed advanced training, and more people hold Master's and PhDs than universities can absorb as tenure-track appointments; the oft-cited number is that only one in five PhDs will garner a tenure-track position.

¹³⁶ Interview with Myrna Hewitt, 5 February 2018.

The result is a large pool of intellectual and research capital for smart, forward-thinking companies to employ. Writer Brenda Brouwer pointed out that PhDs are “skilled communicators, problem solvers, critical thinkers and lifelong learners who are highly motivated, comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity and are increasingly globally connected.”¹³⁷ With exceptional research and communication skills, they present a new and different body of talent; in other words, businesses no longer need to ask universities to conduct thorough, methodologically sound research to produce new information, perspectives, and ideas. As the landscape of co-operative research and education across Canada changes, it is highly probable that more non-university-employed PhDs will be involved.

Like traditional fields such as medicine, history, or economics, co-operative studies now has a strong, well-respected, worldwide academic base and has trained exceptional researchers and practitioners. The Centre’s contribution to this growth is immeasurable. It has also been a leader in the evolution of the discipline from its early focus on questions internal to co-ops to issues the sector as a whole must address and consider. In raising the profile of co-operative research and creating strong global connections, the Centre has strengthened the international status of the University of Saskatchewan, potentially reinforcing university support for its continuation and renewal.

The Provincial Government

Funding from the provincial government is a major benefit, but also has significant limitations, as the economic health of the university rises and falls with the economy of the province. This type of support, particularly for specific projects, also fluctuates with the political climate. The origins of the Centre for the Study

¹³⁷ Brenda Brouwer, “Canada needs more PhDs,” *University Affairs*, 7 March 2016. <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/in-my-opinion/canada-needs-more-phds/> accessed 3 April 2018.

of Co-operatives fall firmly within provincial government history.

The Co-operative Organization Branch was part of the Department of Agriculture from 1913 to 1944, when it was reformed into its own unit, the Department of Co-operatives and Co-operative Development. In 1955, the provincial government—then the left-wing Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF, later NDP)—created a Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. Chaired by W.B. Baker, then director of the School of Agriculture on campus, the commission chastised the university for not being of service to the people of Saskatchewan, and recommended that the university create a bureau, institute, or centre whose focus was applied research dedicated to Saskatchewan communities. This led to the founding, in 1957, of the Centre for Community Studies, with Baker as its director.¹³⁸ Leo Kristjanson came to the University of Saskatchewan to serve as a member of this centre's faculty. Baker and Kristjanson, along with the rest of the team, undertook both internally funded and contract research on a case-by-case basis, reinforcing the connection between the university and its community partners. The co-op sector in Saskatchewan was a regular patron of these services, and the Department of Co-operation and Co-operative Development also worked closely with the centre, including on the provincial co-op research committee. However, the centre was de-funded by the Liberal government of Ross Thatcher in 1966. Perceived as too left-wing and political in its motivations and supports, it was an obvious target for funding cuts.

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, built by Leo Kristjanson in part on the model used for the Centre for Community Studies, was similarly subject to funding changes relating to the political flavour of the provincial government. The Department of Co-operation and Co-operative Development remained in full activity from 1944 through the early 1980s, and

¹³⁸ Michael Hayden, *Seeking a Balance: University of Saskatchewan 1907–1982* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983), 230–32.

took part in the original discussions around creating the Centre. It also funded 40 percent of the initial five years of CSC operations, with the money flowing through its operating budget, beginning in 1982 in the dying days of Allan Blakeney's NDP government. CSC funding from the department ended in 1987, the same year it was dissolved and subsumed into Tourism, Small Business and Co-operatives.¹³⁹ With the left-wing NDP taking power once again in 1991 under Premier Roy Romanow, co-operative development shifted from its strange collaboration with tourism to a new base within the larger category of economic development. In 1994, the Government of Saskatchewan recommitted itself to financial support for the Centre as part of the 1994–1999 operating agreement. The signing authority was the Minister of Economic Development.

In 1997, the responsibility for co-ops moved to the new Department of Economic and Co-operative Development, a change that was reflected in the Centre's next five-year renewal. But once again, internal shuffling came into play, and in 2002, that ministry was subsumed into the Department of Industry and Resources. Co-operatives no longer held space in the title or name. Nonetheless, the Minister of Industry and Resources was a signatory to the Centre's 2004–2009 operating agreement. In 2007, the Saskatchewan Party came into power, and in 2008, established a new entity—Enterprise Saskatchewan—which replaced the former Department of Industry and Resources. Enterprise Saskatchewan signed the Centre's 2009–2014 agreement, but since 2014, the provincial government has withdrawn from direct support.

¹³⁹ The institutional history that traces co-operative responsibility within the provincial government can be found in the Saskatchewan Archives index fonds. Provincial archivists are responsible for the province's institutional government history and have developed finding aids for each of the entities discussed in this section. Find them online at <http://www.saskarchives.com/collection>.

Reflection: Panarchy and Resilience

The simplest aspect of resilience is longevity, and the Centre has been connected with the university for more than thirty-five years, an anchor point for the Diefenbaker Building. Longevity creates a sense of familiarity and the possibility of institutional recognition and support for continuity. Through its faculty and staff, the Centre has built a national and international reputation that Brett Fairbairn characterizes as “*very high*, with a very positive impression, perhaps even unrealistic.” There are a number of co-operative research centres around the world but none, in his perspective, are as interdisciplinary as the Centre. Between its outstanding research record and commitment to publishing, the CSC has developed a stellar presence on the co-operative stage.

But longevity is not the only defining feature of resilience for the Centre. Its adaptive capacity to changes within the co-operative, university, and government sectors has been remarkable. With only eight distinct co-op funders over its lifetime—the majority with a home base in Saskatchewan (with western Canadian or pan-Canadian mandates)—the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives has punched far above its weight, bringing western Canadian co-operatives to the attention of the world. Centre scholars, fellows, and staff have co-created new knowledge with a host of other co-operative entities, from local co-op enterprises to apex organizations to international research centres. The Centre’s publishing expertise has served as a major leveraging point for co-op knowledge. Both practical and ideologically driven research has grown the conversation about co-operatives—their place, their impact, and their future. The Centre has successfully incorporated university-defined standards of excellence, from individual faculty publications to Centre multi- and interdisciplinary success; it is a model for community relationships and has an exemplary record of tri-council and other university research funding. By multiple measures, the Centre has achieved a standard of success that lends power to its resilience, building a reserve of experience

and knowledge, and maintaining a level of expertise that garners an international reputation.

But there are indications of stress. Sector contributions have dropped while the university's have risen. At what point should the CSC be viewed as a university-focused entity? Is there a trade-off between academic achievement and success as defined by co-operatives, or are they the same measures? Some co-ops have increased their financial support—indicating approval—while others have anaemically maintained, declined, or stopped. What effect will this have on other co-ops? Will they continue to fund the CSC, based on long-standing practices and an impressive record, or will they drop their contribution in favour of institutions elsewhere? Will other national or international co-operatives now be more interested in coming on board as Centre funders and supporters, following the path of CHS Inc.?

Viewing the CSC through the lens of the co-operative principles, what is the role of research and publishing in the broader mandate of co-op education? That connection must be made clear in the minds of funders, both the co-op sector and the university. For co-operatives, does the mandate outlined in principle five (education, training, and information) hold enough scope for the importance of research as a major facet of these activities? Will principle five be used as a measurement of success for the CSC, and will its research impact, publishing, and curriculum be enough to satisfy that principle? For the university, has the field of co-operative studies grown enough to justify continuing its financial support through a period of faculty renewal and change? Will the Centre's success, alongside numerous national and international scholarly advancements in the study of co-operatives, be enough to persuade the university to continue its relationship? Or has the growth of co-op studies outstripped the need for special incubating centres? These are questions that deserve reflection.

The changes to co-op development both within the Government of Saskatchewan and reflected in its commitment to the

Centre reveal the evolving significance of co-operatives within the larger economy and society. At first, co-operatives and co-op development were part of the Department of Agriculture. Following the election of the socialist CCF government in 1944, however, co-ops got their own department that continued operations for forty-three years, including through elections that brought other ideologies into power. Changes since 1987 have included a stronger connection to small business, then a direct relationship to economic development, industry and resources, and enterprise in general. It is worthwhile to consider how those changes have affected the perception of co-operatives, acknowledging, at the same time, that the role of co-ops in the economy deserves greater attention. Considered solely under the perspective of the economy, co-operatives vie for space alongside other more well-known forms of business practices, particularly the investor-owned corporate model. If co-ops are viewed only as a business model, they could be forgotten as vehicles for social or community development, beyond the realm of industry and enterprise. If some of the Centre's research interests focus on the role of co-operatives as agents of community development and social change, how does that fit with a limited government perspective that regards co-operatives merely as part of economic development and industrial innovation?

Consider, also, the role of institutional memory. The Government of Saskatchewan has been a sponsor for twenty-five of the thirty-five years of the Centre's operation, although the signatories themselves have changed; each of the five agreements was from a different ministry or department. So while there was continuity amongst the other signatories, the government lacked that direct institutional memory. What effect has internal change and reorganization had on the strength of the government's relationship to the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives? After all, personal relationships and linkages among individual actors were certainly key to the Centre's origins. If those relationships are in a state of constant flux, they could become brittle and snap.

The networks within which the Centre operates closely reflect the three major groups of signatories invested in its initial creation and its ongoing lifecycle: the University of Saskatchewan, the co-operative sector, and the provincial government. While interactions with the government have ebbed and flowed through structural or leadership changes, there are ways forward that may rebuild those connections. The government has traditionally shown interest in research and consulting work, which might create opportunities for collaboration and shared policy development. While it might seem logical to double down on economics and build back those linkages to industry and innovation, there is a role for co-operatives in social and community development, areas of increased provincial and public concern. In any case, it's clear that the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives operates with great resilience with or without the financial support of the provincial government.

Over time, the Centre has become more closely aligned with the university and the co-operative sector. It serves as a major information hub for the international co-op sector and draws force and energy from both national and international relationships, strengthening knowledge and innovative ideas and bringing them back to Saskatchewan. However, the co-ops that sustain the CSC must, in turn, value the relationships, knowledge, information, and connections in order to continue their support into the future. The Centre has a strong profile within the University of Saskatchewan, particularly through national grant funding, its robust sector relationships and community engagement, and the institutional service provided by faculty to the broader university community. The Centre's flexibility and resilience have been built on the close collaboration with these two major areas of influence. With such strengths in mind, it's time to turn our attention to the systems of decision making and governance at the heart of these interactions.

Interlude Three: Research

In its thirty-five-year history, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives has been an international powerhouse of research and publishing on co-operatives. Creating an overview of the Centre's research and publication output is no easy task. With multiple faculty members and staff publishing both via CSC publishing vehicles and through academic channels such as books, book chapters, and journal articles outside the CSC, even creating a list is a daunting prospect. Which articles are "co-operative" enough in their content to be included? And what about all the other Centre outputs: annual reports, newsletters, newspaper articles, videos, manuals, research reports, policy papers, public history exhibitions, and legal opinions, let alone new vehicles such as websites, blogs, and social media? Some Centre publications were written by non-CSC faculty or co-op sector people. How should those be counted? Numerous students have also produced theses, dissertations, papers, and posters with co-op content, some of which the Centre has published, while others are sitting on shelves gathering dust. To catalogue and analyze this enormous research output is a project in itself and beyond the scope of this history.

Some comments around research will nevertheless be useful. The ability to come together as a cohort of researchers meant that, over time, Centre Fellows have grown within their own research practices. Initial training in quantitative and/or qualitative research techniques has broadened and deepened. The deliberate work to build interdisciplinarity has meant that Centre research projects routinely bridge disciplinary divides to create broader, stronger perspectives and tackle difficult issues. CSC Fellows and staff have consistently been at the forefront of major national and international research projects, leading students and researchers through multi-site projects with numerous moving parts.

One way to think about Centre research leadership is to look at CSC Fellow titles, which indicate areas of expertise.

Murray Fulton	Centre Fellow in Co-operatives and Public Policy; CRS Chair in Co-operative Governance
Lou Hammond Ketilson	Fellow in Co-operative Management
Michael Gertler	Fellow in Community and Co-operative Development
Brett Fairbairn	Fellow in Co-operative History and Governance
Isobel Findlay	Fellow in Co-operatives, Diversity, and Sustainable Development
Eric Micheels	Fellow in Agribusiness Co-operatives
Abdullah Mamun	Fellow in Credit Union Finance
Marc-André Pigeon	Strategic Research Fellow in Co-operatives
Kostas Karantininis	Fellow in International Co-operatives
Dionne Pohler	Fellow in Co-operative Strategy and Governance

Figure 11: From Centre for the Study of Co-operatives website, September 2018.

Note that this list includes active faculty, retired active faculty, and Fellows at other institutions who retain ties to the CSC.

The CSC website at www.usaskstudies.coop lists both research outputs and publications accessible in PDF format, but the website, while extensive, is not comprehensive. Early outputs or items published in journals or books are not accessible. But readers will find some overall themes and areas of research and publication depth. The Centre has been particularly strong in the following areas:

- Indigenous co-operatives
- agricultural co-op issues including New Generation Co-ops
- community economic and co-operative development
- co-operative education
- issues related to governance and co-operative membership
- co-operative management and strategy
- co-operative history
- issues related to social economy and social cohesion

Early research output was strong in co-operative law, but since the departure of Chris Axworthy and Dan Ish, this area lacks a champion. Although much of the CSC's research output is broadly applicable and useful to credit unions, its research depth on specific credit union issues has been sporadic—at times intense and productive, at other times, absent.

In its strategic plan for 2016–2021, the Centre will concentrate on four major themes going forward: co-operative governance, co-operative development, rural and agricultural communities, and Indigenous co-operation.

Chapter Four: Governance

Governance, simply defined, is Who gets to decide what? Governance is a dynamic concept, describing multiple players from individuals to institutions, rules, and stakeholders in any given setting. A resilient governance system must be flexible, use local (instead of off-site) decision making, but still retain some structure and continuity.¹⁴⁰ An adaptive system can react quickly to opportunities and develop local responses to changes within the larger panarchy. Well-adapted governance models respond to adversity and uncertainty with acceptance and capacity for change instead of brittleness and vulnerability.

The issue of resilience is not one of change *versus* not changing; it's about making good choices when change is required. One of the original board members was adamant during our interview that change was built into the founding of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. "When we establish these organizations, they are established to evolve. I always took umbrage with the idea that things have to stay the same. Change is a testimony that what people did in the early days set things up for evolution, to continue in today's world. It has to be relevant and to find a place to exist and grow. Staying the same is just stagnation, not tradition."¹⁴¹

For most of the Centre's history, governance involved three fundamental components:

- the series of five-year operating agreements that set out the structure and mandate of the CSC
- the board of directors
- the Centre's director, who carries the responsibility for CSC operations and sets the Centre's tone and direction

¹⁴⁰ Resilience Alliance, *Assessing Resilience in Social-Ecological Systems: Workbook for Practitioners*, revised version, 2.0, 2010, p. 36.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Ted Turner, 29 January 2018.

In practice, the office manager, support staff, librarian, research associates, communications staff, and education liaison carried the heaviest day-to-day load. Yet, staff report to the director, and from a governance perspective, that is the critical lynchpin. This chapter will discuss in more depth the Centre's three critical governance components, revealing a strong sense of change over time. The discussion to follow will reflect on governance and connect it back to notions of resilience.

Operating Agreements

The five-year operating agreements provide the legal basis for the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. There have been seven agreements between 1982 and 2018 (at the time of writing this history), with a few minor addendums along the way. The original agreement was five legal-sized pages, which included the signatory page; the most recent agreement (2014) was seven pages on letter-sized paper, including one signatory page and a schedule of co-op sector financial contributions.¹⁴² While these agreements are legal and binding, the Centre is also wholly within the legal and financial framework of the University of Saskatchewan—it is not a separate nonprofit, charity, or other legal institution.

One of the simplest ways to trace governance change at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives is to follow the subtle ways in which the operating contracts have changed over time. Each contract lists the parties involved, the objectives of the entity, the administrative structure of board and board duties, the staff/faculty structure, the financial contributions and operational responsibilities, and the services that the Centre is expected to provide.¹⁴³ As governance covers both formal and informal rules, the question becomes, how do we create value, and how do we measure what we value? The Centre as a new entity

¹⁴² In the early agreements, the co-operative payment schedule was separate.

¹⁴³ The operating agreements are in the files of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives and were shared with the writer of this history.

required clarity of shared purpose, which was achieved via the discussion around and signing of operating agreements. Each agreement was a wholly new contract, with revised signatories and a chance to build better alignment between contract vision and daily operations, or to set out new mandates for operations or governance. Two areas in particular stand out for closer review: the objectives laid out for the CSC and how those have evolved, and the services expected to be provided by the CSC and the university. A secondary level of historical review compares the operating agreements with the public annual reports, which reveal the on-the-ground interpretation and adaptation of the agreements. This is adaptive governance in action.

Objectives

The Centre's formal objectives have undergone subtle changes throughout its existence, but for the most part, the goals have remained constant. The original 1982 agreement contained four objectives:

1. Establish a program of studies at the undergraduate and graduate level with a specific focus on co-operatives and credit unions (available to students across campus).
2. Undertake off-campus programs in collaboration with the Co-operative College of Canada.
3. Undertake research of particular interest and relevance to co-operatives and make available the results of such research by publication, including textbooks and curriculum for colleges and universities.
4. Undertake research concerning legislation governing co-operatives and credit unions.

The Centre is known for its program of studies about co-operatives and credit unions, its off-campus and public work, its research, and its publications. Three of these original four objectives changed quite dramatically in the second iteration

(1990–94), in both wording and intent, although the overall thrust of the four remained similar. The first objective changed to “maintain” a program of studies for both undergraduates and graduates, indicating success in creating that program during the first contract. A secondary clause was added: the program of studies would work to “[train] a workforce of high productivity and high levels of innovation and entrepreneurship, and a particular understanding of the Co-operative Sector.” The wording of this objective is remarkable, as it shows a distinct pull towards workforce training for productivity, with co-operative knowledge as almost an add-on to the main goal. This reflects the university’s drive, and the sector’s goal, of specific workforce training at the university level for incoming employees. It sounds like the kind of objective created by government, yet the provincial government was not part of this agreement. It is the only agreement with such strong statements on workforce training.

Given the demise of the Co-operative College in 1987 and its amalgamation into the Canadian Co-operative Association, the second objective also changed significantly, becoming “provide seminars and short courses for the Co-operative Sector to improve skill levels and understanding of work and market environments.” Again, there is a distinct goal of workforce training, in this case, via seminars and short courses for the sector, not for students at the university. This objective most clearly lays out extension activities and potential roles for the staff and faculty.

The third objective changed considerably as well. It deliberately backed away from promising the publication of “textbooks and curriculum” to simply “publications based on scholarly studies.” Textbooks and curriculum outputs are rarely the purview of academic scholars, and such publications would not allow them to achieve tenure. Academics generally only write textbooks *after* they have been teaching a particular subject for many years; they know what is important and what is missing from the larger literature. Also, *for whom* would they be expected to write textbooks and curriculum? For high school

students? For college-level teaching? That was never clear. Revising the objective to “publications” in general better matched on-the-ground operations. By 1990, Centre faculty and staff had begun in-house publishing of Occasional Papers, as well as journal-based academic publications, academic and trade books, as well as reports and similar outputs. The original agreement was, in fact, far too limiting. The fourth objective, to examine legislation and regulations, remained virtually the same.

The objectives were revisited once again in 1994, and pulled back considerably from the innovation, entrepreneurship, and workforce training goals outlined in 1990. The Centre would be expected to simply maintain a program of studies at undergraduate and graduate levels with a specific focus on co-operatives and credit unions. The second and third objectives, outlining seminars and publications, remained the same, while the fourth objective (studying legislation) was dropped. This change was due in part to the departure of Dan Ish as the director; none of the remaining faculty members had specific legal training. These three objectives—a program of studies for university students, seminars and short courses for the co-operative sector, and scholarly studies leading to publications—remained the same until 2004. At that time a new line was added to the first objective, expanding the focus of university teaching to include “alternative forms of institutions associated with the co-operative sector or adhering to co-operative values and principles.” This addition reflected the growing impact of the Centre’s grant success—research and collaborative work on the social economy and concepts of social cohesion—which often included nonprofit or other community-based groups whose legal structure might not be co-operative, but whose goals and work might be in alignment. These three objectives have remained in place to 2018.

The contracts that established and then renewed the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives are not easily available to the general public, although there are copies in both the Centre’s archive and in the University of Saskatchewan archives. The easiest source of public information about the Centre, including its

objectives, is the annual reports. Digitized copies going back to 1998 can be found on the Centre's website, and physical copies are available back to 1989. Since the contracts lay out the Centre's objectives, it would be reasonable to assume that those listed in the annual report would be the same—but *they are not*. In some ways, the objectives in the annual reports reflect the interpretation and on-the-ground activation of the contracts, and so are a more accurate reflection of what CSC staff and faculty viewed as their mandate and marching orders.

The objectives begin at the same starting point: the first is to develop and offer university courses “that provide an understanding of co-operative theory, principles, development, structures, and legislation.” While this explains the contractual objective in somewhat more detail, it is fundamentally the same between the operating agreements and the annual reports. But after that, differences are obvious. In the contracts, the second objective is for the Centre to offer seminars and short courses for the co-operative sector. That objective is not listed in the annual report. It's not that the Centre doesn't offer seminars and short courses—it does, and so fulfills the contract—but it's a question of emphasis. Seminars and short courses fall under the university-defined goal of outreach and extension, which has its own section in every annual report. By *not* listing co-op seminars and short courses as specific objectives in its public report, that mandate becomes less visible and not as easy to track. Accountability changes.

In the operating agreements, the Centre is tasked with undertaking research and publishing research results. In the annual reports, that function is split into two: undertake original research about co-operatives, and publish research about co-operatives, from both Centre staff and others. By splitting research and publication into two separate objectives, the Centre reveals the importance and difference of each function. It also showcases the fact that not all research can be easily published for public consumption, nor do all publications from the Centre stem directly from Centre-based research projects. The CSC has, from the beginning, used its in-house capability to publish a

wide range of co-operative knowledge, from a broad field of scholars and authors both inside and outside the CSC. The research and publication functions are often related, but in practice, they are distinct.

The fourth objective is perhaps the most interesting and controversial. The Centre's self-mandated objective, advertised in all annual reports between 1991 to 2013, was "to maintain a resource centre of co-operative materials that support the teaching and research functions of the Centre"—in other words, a library. This objective is *not* found in the contracts; it was never imposed from or expected by the funders, with the exception of a formal request in the 1982 contract for the University of Saskatchewan to contribute \$3,000 per year for "Library acquisitions." Creating a library resource centre within the CSC was a faculty and staff decision, perhaps begun by happenstance, but built over time to become a major part of its identity. The library took on a life of its own, a space and place as tied to the Centre as its publications or people, part of the larger CSC identity as a unit attached to the university, but with its own separate mission.

During the interview process, multiple staff and faculty members spoke at length about the library, its importance to the Centre, and its function as an integral aspect of the Centre's identity and draw. Isobel Findlay, Centre scholar and then fellow, said, "I used to love when we had the library. That was a big loss. As a researcher, it's important to have a bit of happenstance in your processes. Just going into the library and finding things was important. I do miss that."¹⁴⁴ Recollecting the decision to relocate the library and amalgamate it with the larger university collection led to high emotions, even tears, during the interview process. It was a decision made, some charged, without consensus, dovetailing with administrative changes at the CSC and the Diefenbaker Centre. The new Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy came to reside in the building,

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Isobel Findlay, 24 January 2018.

necessitating a complete reconfiguration of space. The Centre's library met the same fate as other institutions pressed to change from physical to digital resources, creating meeting rooms and work stations for students in spaces once reserved for books. By 2014, it had been relocated to Special Collections within the university's Murray Library, and the fourth objective dropped from the annual report.

The annual report of 2013 cited the positive aspects of the move, including more visibility and accessibility to researchers if the collection was in the main library instead of the out-of-the-way Diefenbaker Centre, but the opposite has proven true. While the integrity of the collection was maintained—the books are in one space and archival documents are accessioned, sorted, and properly stored—it is, in fact, more difficult to access. As part of the non-circulating University Archives and Special Collections section, it can only be physically accessed during business hours and is closed evenings, weekends, and holidays. It cannot be browsed, borrowed, or otherwise used with serendipity and happenstance; researchers must know which items they would like to view and request each one separately. The Centre ceased to purchase additional publications for the collection, and while searchable on the university database, it now has a completely different dynamic for researchers.

The resource room is remembered with nostalgia as an open and welcoming space for co-operative researchers from around the world, a place where conversations sparked new ideas. It was a place of new knowledge for some. Lou Hammond Ketilson recounted: "I remember when one fellow came in as CEO of FirstSask, now Affinity. First thing he did was come to the Centre, sit in the library, and learn about Saskatchewan co-ops."¹⁴⁵ But as some of the original board members would note, this kind of nostalgia can act as an anchor point, antithetical to forward-thinking change. The library was never part of the mandate or operating agreements, but is a perfect example of

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

how those matters were translated and actioned by staff and faculty. It was a localized adaptation that suited the CSC for many years, but as governance and digital publishing changed, the library did not fit the new iteration. It seems clear that the relocation of the library has not substantially undermined the resilience of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives as a site of new research and publication on co-ops, and it remains a meeting place where conversations spark and people are the integral ingredient to learning.

Services

Each of the five-year contracts outlines the services to be carried out by the Centre and the university; in other words, it was the university's responsibility to make sure that each of these CSC activities was supported. Several of the services laid out in 1984 have never changed: the Centre's teaching and research pursuits would be net *additions* to the university (i.e., not meant to replace any existing activities); no university program of relevance to co-operatives would be curtailed or cut without consultation with the CSC board; and when space is available, auditing courses is allowed. The audit function has not often been used, but rising university tuition might make this a reality.

In the original agreement, CSC faculty were expected to teach one half-class in the Co-operative College of Canada. After the demise of the college, this service line was replaced by a commitment to work with the Canadian Co-operative Association to support or participate in off-campus programs, short courses, or seminars. It was a change from actually teaching a class to a service and extension component. This change reflected a movement within the larger co-operative community for more in-house or conference-based training instead of sending people to the Co-op College. This service expectation was in effect in all contracts between 1990 and 2014, when it was changed. Instead of a specific call to work with the Canadian Co-operative Association or its new iteration—Co-operatives and

Mutuals Canada—the agreement broadened to “make reasonable efforts to co-operate with co-operatives and co-operative associations” to support off-campus programs, courses, and seminars. This change better reflects a broader collaborative mandate beyond the national apex organization. It also acknowledges an understanding that distance, time, and budget must always be considered. In effect, this clause asks Centre faculty and staff to be a resource for the larger co-operative community—a function that CSC members have fulfilled consistently with both grace and verve.

One service clause had a small but significant change. In the original contract, faculty members were expected to undertake research related to the Centre’s objectives. In 1990, faculty-assigned duties would be *both* research related to the CSC objectives *and* within the discipline of the faculty member. This change reflected the reality of the way in which faculty were hired and how they had to function within the university. Hired into home departments, Centre faculty faced a service conundrum of two masters: their home discipline and site of tenure, and the CSC. The revision to the contract gave the university responsibility and leverage to ensure that faculty were supported in both directions.

The two most interesting service responsibilities were around teaching and financing. In 1994, an additional clause mandated the university to “use its best efforts to raise additional funds to support the activities of the Centre,” which remained in place until 2014. This put specific onus on the university to find needed funds via whatever channels it could. That could mean supporting the CSC through its grants, service contracts, or helping to bring in additional core funders. The 2014 revised and present version reads that the university will advise the Centre on “opportunities to raise additional funds ... and to assist where appropriate.” The new clause matters; between 1989 and 2014, the university’s overall financial support for the Centre rose, including up-front cash contributions when necessary and backfill of the budget. The new clause could be viewed as a pullback, indicating a switch to limiting the university’s

largesse. However, there remains a commitment to advise and support the Centre on financial matters, a point that may be useful for future Centre negotiations. The agreement essentially makes sure that the university will be at the table during any funding discussions with incoming new partners.

By far the most important service clause is about teaching. Right from the beginning, the contract stipulated that the Centre would offer at least one full-time class on co-operatives at the graduate or undergraduate level, “for each full-time faculty member employed under this contract.” The fact that the university was expressly charged with making sure this activity went forward is key. It gave extra leverage to the director and faculty desperately trying to insert co-operative content into the college or departmental course calendars. It is a cleverly worded clause, focusing on the minimum number of classes to be taught, but not specifically indicating that each faculty member must teach a class on co-ops every year. In practice, to the extent that faculty were allowed to do so in their home departments or colleges, each faculty member *would* teach a course. But over time, given sabbatical leave, research obligations, or administrative leave, faculty were busy. Four full-time course equivalents per year was sometimes a stretch. Nonetheless, CSC faculty all received accolades for teaching and graduate mentorship through the years. In 2014, this course load was revised. The new clause simply stipulates that the Centre’s academic staff will offer, at a minimum, one three-credit unit class “specifically related to the co-operative program.” With the new certificate and graduate training courses, the Centre routinely surpasses this minimum.

The Board of Directors

Early governance decisions, from idea to formal creation of the Centre and the hiring of Chris Axworthy, were in the hands of the task force committee, which morphed into the first official board. This group had the power to sign the Centre into being and to set out its mandate and operations. The board had five duties, as laid out in the original agreement:

1. Recommend candidates for the position of director
2. Advise the director concerning research priorities for the Centre
3. Report annually to the university board of governors on the accomplishments of the Centre
4. Review and advise the director on matters that the board deems appropriate
5. Provide leadership in establishing a practicum or internship at the Co-operative College of Canada

These duties reflect a stewardship role, combining decision making with advice. The board did not hire staff or faculty directly, aside from the director, nor did it make day-to-day decisions; it was never an operations board. By 1990, its role had solidified into a management board in the classic executive style, with formal director's reports and budgets, which required debate by the board before recommending approval by the university's VP academic. Although funding flowed through university accounting processes, the Centre director made minor budget decisions and otherwise guided budgets for staff action or board review and revision. This localized decision making remains in place.

For the first thirty years of its existence, the Centre's board, particularly the university deans, held strategic sway within their own spheres and brought that role and power to the board table. Lou Hammond Ketilson spoke strongly about this issue: "Having the deans sit at our governing table was very important.

It was a reminder that they had some involvement with us and that they had a faculty member whose focus was co-operatives and that they needed support. There were voices across campus to speak in support of the Centre at Dean's Council." What she saw was partnership: "Senior people from co-ops were sitting with senior university people. That spoke to the partnership between university and the co-operative sector."¹⁴⁶ There was a sense that it "was more about a commitment to a relationship than it was to a contract," added Brett Fairbairn.¹⁴⁷ That rapport proved a valuable resource for the university. Other campus undertakings, including health projects around rural agriculture and medicine, or fundraising for the new agriculture building, brought the same co-op leaders to the table—with money.¹⁴⁸

During the first few years, the ten-member management board reported through its board chair to the president of the university. Over time, although the contract stipulated direct reporting to the President's Office, these matters filtered to the office of VP Research, with financials and budgeting reported to the VP Finance and Administration, both of which positions reported to the president.¹⁴⁹ This slight change moved the reporting level one step away from the president, but still connected the Centre to the university's senior executive. The opposite was also true. The deans came directly to the Centre as university board appointees, until multiple cascading changes were introduced in 2014.

Co-op sector appointees to the board were codified in the five-year agreements, which stipulated a board member drawn from each of the co-op financial supporters. Yet those appointees changed subtly. Whereas the Centre began with direct support from leading decision makers, CSC board minutes soon began to reflect substitutions. Ted Turner, president of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, for example, was busy. "I would have

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Brett Fairbairn, 23 November 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Ted Turner, 29 January 2018.

¹⁴⁹ This informal change was formalized in the 2014–19 agreement.

liked to play a bigger role” in building the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, he remarked, but he was president and had to spend his time on other matters such as international trade negotiations or national-level policy discussions. So he delegated. Other major co-operatives also listed alternates who would attend meetings. There was a chair for each sponsor at the CSC board table, but the person filling that chair could and did change.

As is the case with co-op apex organizations such as Credit Union Central or Federated Co-operatives Limited, board members were drawn from regional representatives. Those who became board members of apex bodies became professional board meeting attendees. Major entities tend to have an interest in multiple organizations and must then find people to serve on those boards. This kind of board representation is a participation model, designed to support legitimacy and parity (one from each of the funding entities), but does not necessarily lead to strength or capacity. CSC board duty often fell to new directors with little experience and less sway. In some cases, these board members were farmers, school teachers, or others with little university experience who may have found the deans intimidating.¹⁵⁰ It was suggested during some of the interviews that the strength of the board appointees from the co-op sector was an important contributor to the Centre’s overall resilience. With strong co-op appointees, sitting head-to-head with the deans, there was collective action, network-building, and strategic capacity that satisfied both the sector’s needs and those of the university, as well as the CSC. If the sector representatives had less strength, the university could sway direction.

Provincial appointees met a similar fate. Ministers held far more sway than junior ministers or, later, staff members. As co-ops fell over time from having their own ministry to being merely a file in a deputy minister’s portfolio with a junior staff member to sit in on meetings, the Centre’s provincial

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Myrna Hewitt, 5 February 2018.

representative lost the power to influence government. The once strong connection to co-operatives and an understanding of their economic and social role in Saskatchewan society gradually disappeared from government understanding. In 2014, the provincial government withdrew.

Even though the original board viewed the CSC as a long-term project, it can be difficult, admitted Vern Leland, to defend or support some initiatives within a business milieu that worked on a transactional basis, value for money, results for input. "It [the Centre] is not all that relevant to the average [co-op] member out there," he noted.¹⁵¹ Ted Turner agreed. "I would ask, why are we spending money on the Co-op Union of Canada? It was hard to see how it was money well spent. You had to get into the area of philosophy. It was a little bit like that with the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. You couldn't measure it in dollars and cents. You had to measure it in philosophical terms."¹⁵² The issue of relevance, and measuring relevance, would come down to the difference between the funders' needs and interests, and those of the university. Myrna Hewitt sat on the board both near its beginning, and again, many years later. She traced the so-called "transactional" issues as a matter of mission drift and suggested that credit unions, whom she represented her second time around as a board member, were partly to blame. "The credit unions were sending the wrong people. They were nice people, but not directing the Centre to a place that was needed."¹⁵³ It was a management board, but, in her view, didn't do as good a job of managing as it should have. The university deans on the board pushed a different research and teaching agenda. Not enough work was being done on issues of critical importance to credit unions. Over time, the relationship between credit unions and the Centre lost its cohesive strength.

The Centre embarked on a new round of contract negotiations between 2012 and 2014, when it was also going through a

¹⁵¹ Interview with Vern Leland, 20 January 2018.

¹⁵² Interview with Ted Turner, 29 January 2018.

¹⁵³ Interview with Myrna Hewitt, 5 February 2018.

period of governance change. After years of reporting to the VP Academic, as do all other research and affiliate centres at the university, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives shifted, creating a formal partnership with the new Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy (JSGS). Formed in 2007 as a partnership between the universities of Regina and Saskatchewan, JSGS was one of three new schools formed within the University of Saskatchewan.¹⁵⁴ Centre Fellow Murray Fulton was an instrumental part of the team that created these schools, bringing many years of administrative experience and interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship to the table. While the five-year agreement signed in 2014 reiterated that the CSC would report to the VP Academic, the university assumed full control of appointing the director and routed the reporting structure through the JSGS. In effect, the university and the policy school assumed a greater level of oversight.

There were well-thought-out reasons for this change in governance. As Lou Hammond Ketilson noted in her 2013 director's report, the new relationship between the CSC and the policy school would grant "access to additional faculty and students interested in doing research on co-operatives,"¹⁵⁵ while also enhancing its focus on co-operative governance, strategy, and public policy. The partnership also solved one of the Centre's longstanding problems: as a centre and not a school, the university teaching structure did not allow it to create its own teaching curricula and programs, nor did it have degree-granting powers. While the CSC did have some success via the Interdisciplinary Studies program, that worked best when the Centre had a large, multi-year grant that could support scholarships; it had less success when there wasn't a specific grant or cohort of students. While access to undergraduate education lost ground, formally joining with JSGS allowed the Centre to develop specific senior-level courses and certificates, available to both graduate

¹⁵⁴ The other two are the School of Environment and Sustainability and the School of Public Health.

¹⁵⁵ "Director's Report," Centre for the Study of Co-operatives *Annual Report*, 2013.

students and practitioners. Instead of going hat in hand to the different departments and asking to teach about co-ops, the CSC was finally its own education master.

At a practical level, the new reporting structure goes to the JSGS's executive director. As a school within the university, the JSGS executive director reports to the VP Academic; so ultimately, the Centre still reports—albeit via a mediator—to senior university administration, but the line is no longer direct. While some might view that as a minor change, others expressed consternation and concern during the interview process for this history. “I’m very, very concerned about the loss of autonomous identity,” one long-time faculty member noted.¹⁵⁶ Many others shared those thoughts. Which will become the identity of reference, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives or the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy? What happens to institutional memory if the CSC is subsumed? In some ways, this point echoes what happened to the Government of Saskatchewan’s Ministry of Co-operation and Co-operative Development: it merged, changed and re-formed, was subsumed into economic development, until it was all but erased. As Michael Gertler pointed out, “There are costs to change. It creates excitement and newness, but you’ve lost institutional memory.”¹⁵⁷

The new governance structure does raise questions around current and new faculty recruitment. Must existing faculty be affiliated with JSGS, or can they still be drawn from across campus? Will their work be reviewed or approved based on their academic work in public policy instead of co-operatives or the broader social economy? Even though JSGS was built as an interdisciplinary school, will the focus on policy and governance outweigh other major areas of co-operative research, such as co-op history, law, sociology, economics, or co-operative principles? The closer relationship means faster decision making, as the Centre and the policy school share space in the Diefenbaker

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Michael Gertler, 9 February 2018.

Building—yet, some might argue that the old relationship allowed for more local autonomy.

The new reporting structure also means that the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives has a vested interest in ensuring the stability, academic *bona fides*, and institutional power of the policy school, and *vice versa*. They become, in effect, each others' champion—but the power relationship matters. JSGS helps to carry the Centre's flag, to defend and support it within the larger university. This is a closer relationship than the Centre ever had with its scattershot faculty affiliations with multiple departments or colleges. But concerns remain.

A related change in the Centre's governance is the structure of the board. Created and operated as a management board for most of its history, the 2014 agreement saw it revised to an advisory board, which also de-coupled from its unwritten traditional arrangement of drawing from university deans. Murray Fulton, who led these changes, noted that while deans held a lot of decision-making autonomy in the 1980s and 1990s, that ability had eroded, and having them on the board no longer created the leverage it may once have done.¹⁵⁸ The new advisory board uses the five former university positions to draw from a cadre of experienced researchers, in Saskatchewan or from non-signatory co-op sector representatives and others whose advice would be valuable. In practice, the director and existing board recommend people for these positions. Co-op signatories who provide financial support retain their board seats. In effect, co-op voices on the board have almost doubled and have broadened beyond the university to entities such as Credit Union Central of Canada, or other co-op research centres such as the Desjardins International Institute for Co-operatives (affiliated with HEC, the business school) in Montreal, or the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives in Madison.

Board responsibilities have also changed subtly. It is no longer required to review or pass budgets, but instead must

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Murray Fulton, 12 December 2017.

turn its attention outward, to ensuring the Centre's overall financial integrity. Meeting twice instead of three times per year, the advisory board still provides strategic advice on research, teaching, and training, but must now conduct an annual performance review of the director. It ensures that an annual report is prepared and provides other advice as necessary or requested. But here is a point that may prove interesting about the new configuration. On the former board, both co-op and university members brought an already-existing relationship to the table. The deans met and mixed within the university, working together on multiple other projects and governance decisions. Co-op board members did the same, building relationships outside the Centre. Both groups could leverage these connections at the CSC meetings, bringing familiarity, friendships, and trust to the table. Less time needed to be spent on board cohesion, at least within these subgroups. The new advisory body may have less cohesive connections, which may make for more interesting discussions, but trust requires time.

Part of the reason for the change is that a management board created with representatives from the different colleges and co-ops can act like a zoo—one animal of each kind, so everything is even. The structure of the new advisory board is more strategic and draws on co-operative and academic institutions across the United States and Canada. Formally aligned with the policy school, the Centre no longer needed the deans to activate a larger voice across campus. The changes to the board might make it possible to once again make room for government perspective not tied to direct funding, building bridges and bringing the provincial or other government into future contracts. The new board is tasked with considering and responding to larger issues of strategy and change in the co-operative environment beyond the University of Saskatchewan and the co-op funders, leveraging capacity at the board level to vault the CSC into a new, international era of innovation and influence.

The board also tells a story by the numbers. Over the past thirty-five plus years, sixty-four people have served on the Centre's board, or as an alternate to a listed board member. The

gender split has been 25 percent women and 75 percent men, overall, but more women have come on the board since the turn of the millennium. Those who served on the board for ten years or more included Bill Brennan, Peter MacKinnon, Gary Storey, and Lynne Pearson from the University of Saskatchewan, and Bill Turner, Bob Effa, Herb Carlson, and Karl Baumgardner from the co-operative sector. Of the sixty-four board members, twenty-six represented the university. Each of the major co-op stakeholders—FCL, SWP, and CUC—had six or seven board members over the years. Others came from the provincial government, the combined representatives for The Co-operators, CUMIS, Co-op Trust, and Concentra, with a few outliers such as an early delegate from the Co-operative College of Canada, and more recently, new funders or advisors. There has been a mix of board members with shorter appointments and those who had a long commitment and saw the Centre through multiple years of change.

As noted in the first few chapters, there was a bit of an internal organizational struggle to determine who should set the Centre's direction: the board or its faculty. Working out areas of strength meant occasionally working through major concerns and disagreements. Overall, though, the board worked best when it served as advisor and place of second thought, as well as working with CSC faculty and staff during planning sessions around research goals and directions. Contract renewals offered space for reflection, feedback, and strategy, as well as relationship building. The strength and vision of the board members has always been reflected in the overall health, vitality, and direction of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. With the new advisory board reaching beyond Saskatchewan, the CSC is poised for growth and change in the years ahead.

The Director

Each of the contract agreements stipulated staffing levels for both faculty and support staff, including budget allocation for these positions. The first contract outlined four academic

positions (one director, three academic faculty), but gave provision for hiring sessional faculty to teach courses when necessary, and seconding staff from the Co-operative College of Canada to work on research projects. Support staff levels were clear: two clerk-stenographers and one research assistant. In 1990, there were minor changes to the support staff: one clerk-stenographer and two research associates. The provision to pull staff from co-op organizations for research or teaching remained in place. The 1994 agreement had no specific stipulation for support staff, providing, instead, for staff “necessary to meet the ongoing operations of the Centre as allowed by the budget.” By keeping intentions fluid, staff could be brought in depending on funding sources—in response to major grants or project activities, for example. This basic outline—one director, three faculty, and necessary staff, sessionals, or seconded personnel—would remain in principle in every subsequent contract.

Leadership for board, faculty, and staff, to a large extent, pivoted from the director’s chair. Interestingly, despite this critical role, there are no specific provisions in the contract outlining the duties of the director until the 2014 agreement. This change was necessary partly because the board no longer had direct control over or responsibility for appointing or hiring a director; this duty passed to the university in its “ultimate sole discretion,” though in consultation with the board. As of 2014, the director must be a University of Saskatchewan employee—though it does not stipulate that the person must be faculty—and reports to the executive director of the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. The director is responsible for the “general management and operation of the Centre,” but will receive guidance “as appropriate” from the advisory board.

The director serves as the lynchpin of all the moving parts—anchoring board meetings, working on funding agreements, directing Centre staff on projects and targets, supporting and engaging other faculty, as well as guiding his or her own teaching, research, and home department commitments. “Every director has different interests,” one interviewee commented. “The CSC has moved in different directions because of their

interests.”¹⁵⁹ Even so, the formal governance structure set out by the five-year agreements created a core mandate and expectations, and a major part of the director’s responsibility has been to ensure that these are carried out. Nonetheless, there was room for personal flair. The personality and direction of the Centre would change depending on who sat in the director’s chair, and each developed goals for their directorship.

Chris Axworthy, the first director, took on the task of developing the culture and position of the Centre as a leading player in the larger co-operative community. With a complement of four academics, plus accomplished researchers and communications leads on staff, Axworthy defined the Centre’s connections to the broader North American community. “He took us international and to the US, such as conferences that we’ve gone to ever since in the same way.”¹⁶⁰ For a nascent group, finding like-minded peers and creating a new co-operative research and publication space was critical. In some ways, Axworthy’s directorship was about building brand and creating exposure.

A second aspect of Axworthy’s leadership was defining the difference between research *for* co-ops and research *about* co-ops. Much of his work with the board contested any sign of encroachment or influence by the co-op funders. After all, academic research is unpredictable: “What if the research results were not favourable? What happens then?”¹⁶¹ It was unthinkable that research results could be suppressed, skewed, or otherwise changed. Clarity through discussion led to respect; in fact, all of the co-op leaders interviewed for this project remembered *supporting* academic integrity. Ted Turner, president of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool when the Centre was created, noted: “One thing I was so proud of was that we accepted criticism. We didn’t reject it at all. Organizations that we trust, like the CSC, they were not criticizing just to criticize, but to make us better.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Interview with Chris Axworthy, 29 November 2017.

We could accept that sort of thing without blowing our tops.”¹⁶² Bill Turner, who served ten years on the board as a representative from financial co-operatives, also recalled strongly supporting academic integrity: “We were supportive of the CSC to be free in their thoughts and publicizing of their thoughts and insights through the whole process. I can’t recall any attempt to say to any of the people, ‘Don’t say anything, don’t get involved.’ There was complete academic freedom to pursue whatever they wanted to say.”¹⁶³

A third feature of Chris Axworthy’s leadership was about defining research areas of interest. It was important, he later noted, to make sure that Centre faculty were studying *all* kinds of co-ops, not just those that financially supported them. Housing and health co-ops, fishing co-ops, and worker co-ops, for example, earned their attention. The Occasional Papers series, instituted early in the Centre’s history, reveals CSC faculty interest in bringing international perspectives and activities into local focus. By 1989, there were several papers that examined international co-operative issues such as the Mondragon worker co-ops, producer co-operatives in Israel, and social democracy examples from Norway. These perspectives balanced work specific to western Canada and Saskatchewan, including a history of Saskatchewan co-operative law, a look at farm interest groups, and a bibliography of co-op organizations across western Canada. This balance among local, regional, national, and international would continue throughout the Centre’s history.

As Chris Axworthy transitioned to federal politics and left the CSC, Lou Hammond Ketilson accepted a limited interim appointment as director, under an active board and with co-operative decision making. Dan Ish from the College of Law soon became the Centre’s second director. His tenure was about stabilization and strength. Inheriting a massive funding gap with the pullout of the provincial government, Ish stabilized the Centre’s funding with the university, worked to bring the provincial

¹⁶² Interview with Ted Turner, 29 January 2018.

¹⁶³ Interview with Bill Turner, 15 January 2018.

government back on board, and developed relationships with the colleges on campus in support of faculty members involved with the CSC. Ish's leadership strengthened the core faculty as a cohort, supporting the move from multidisciplinary to interdisciplinary work and viewpoints—an active process of vision, dedication, and work to create something new and unique. The Centre was still relatively young, with faculty hungry for publications, for new research, for setting the standards of a new area of inquiry. "We thought of it as experimental and a new enterprise," Ish recalled, an attitude that allowed for creativity and failure as much as it aimed for success.¹⁶⁴

By 1993, CSC faculty were all tenured and promoted within their home departments. When Dan Ish left the Centre for a sabbatical at Stanford in 1995, Murray Fulton applied for, and won, the director's chair. "I've always been attracted to the conceptualization of the problem that I'm trying to understand. Trying to simplify it down to its essence," Fulton recalled.¹⁶⁵ That commitment to concepts and theories translated in practical ways for the Centre. Under his leadership, staff and faculty engaged in a summer retreat to discuss the Centre's strengths and direction. One major outcome was the development of vision and mission statements—a way to capture and define the essence of CSC activities, strengths, passions, and goals. His first director's report in the 1995 annual report outlined the Centre's self-defined mission: "When people in Saskatchewan or Canada or other parts of the world have a question about co-ops, the Centre should be one of the first places they think of to find the answer."

Fulton's first time in the director's chair brought a renewed commitment to international presence and research collaboration. In alignment with larger university grant initiatives, Fulton's leadership defined a new era of research that encompassed both theoretical and conceptual work, including "the questions no one wants asked," alongside selective applied

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Dan Ish, 1 December 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Murray Fulton, 12 December 2017.

research for the co-op sector.¹⁶⁶ It was aggressive, ambitious, and goal-oriented—to support the Centre in its objective to become the leader in co-operative knowledge.

As part of the renewed commitment to research, the Centre invested enormous energy in outreach and extension, particularly at the community level, working with co-ops or nascent co-ops. This offered “an opportunity to observe” what was happening in the real world and to use those observations to build better research questions and design stronger research projects. Identifying areas or issues where co-ops could provide an alternative local solution also grew in importance. This is a shift from observing co-ops in action to finding potential co-op “hot spots” where development initiatives could thrive. Communications outputs also shifted in response to these activities and began to include items such as resource kits and videos that would support co-op development. Digital technology figured high, as well, as the 1990s saw the exponential growth of online technology. Under Fulton’s directorship, one staff position was dedicated to Community-Centred Technology Programs focused on the possibilities of online learning. The Centre moved in lock-step with technological change.

Brett Fairbairn assumed the directorship in 2000 and was in the chair as the Centre ushered in a new era of major collaborative research leadership. Shared research projects with the Government of Canada’s Co-operatives Secretariat and the national Canadian Co-operative Association jostled with important new work on the connection between co-operative models and First Nations in Canada, including work with the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Department of Indian Affairs. This dovetailed with a major push at the university level to target large grants from the national funding entity, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, via multi-partner, collaborative research proposals. That new focus, Lou Hammond Ketilson noted, “shaped our

¹⁶⁶ “Director’s Report,” Centre for the Study of Co-operatives *Annual Report*, 1995, np.

work for a long time, and our relationships across the country. The co-ops were quite happy. FCL in particular wanted to see us work with others and not work in isolation.”¹⁶⁷

Under Fairbairn’s leadership, the Centre reinforced its role as a connector: connecting theory with practice, international with local, university with sector and government, students with knowledge, and research with education and extension. “The knowledge we create,” he wrote in 2001, “is co-operative in the sense of being shared and mutual.” In other words, he saw the Centre’s role as a key networking hub, a place where co-operative ideas collide and grow. Its interdisciplinarity, he argued, was central to this process. The Centre had the ability to transfer knowledge from one space to another, across time, space, and disciplinary perspective to both academic and public audiences.¹⁶⁸

When Lou Hammond Ketilson took over the director’s chair in 2004, she picked up this new mandate and charged forward. Centre faculty won and led major national collaborative research grants, which resulted in an explosion of staff and, more particularly, students. The new interdisciplinary co-op courses allowed for a concentrated cohort of graduate students working on these grant projects. Hammond Ketilson was also chair of the International Co-operative Alliance’s Committee on Co-operative Research, which raised the Centre’s international profile. Hammond Ketilson’s tenure as the CSC director defined its strongest era, combining collaborative research success with graduate training.

While celebrating this success, however, she had an ongoing battle with the university. The funding achievements ensured the Centre’s good standing at the university level, but Hammond Ketilson also worked tirelessly to see the supporting co-ops recognized for their foundational contributions. She had

¹⁶⁷ See *Annual Report, 2000–2001*; *Annual Report, 2001–2002*. Also interview with Lou Hammond Ketilson, 4 December 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Centre for the Study of Co-operatives *Annual Report, 2000–2001* and *2001–2002*.

the clearest perspective on the connection between the funding base— which provided the means to hire core staff—and the ability to apply for and carry out large collaborative research projects. That core support, she thought, should be more recognized and honoured by the university. But in her view, despite deans sitting on the board of directors, the university did not adjust its policies or practices to support the Centre. In the end, the Centre was more or less forced to alter aspects of its original mandate in order to better match university governance structures.

In 2014, Murray Fulton once again took the reigns as director, shepherding most of the recent governance and operational changes. Through the massive Co-operative Innovation Project (CIP), which Fulton led, research attention refocused on the concept of co-op development, but with a new grant vehicle— direct funding from a major co-op to carry out a public, not private, research project. This model may usher in changes in how the larger co-operative community views and funds research. The CIP also showcased how co-operatives must understand the difference between core operating funding and money for specific research projects. In this instance, FCL supported *both*. While staff and faculty retirements and relocations define contemporary change at the CSC, Fulton carries the central responsibility for building a cohort of board members and funders who share a vision of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives and once again commit to funding the core personnel who will define the Centre's future.

In addition to those who have assumed the directorship, other faculty members have contributed significantly to establishing the Centre's identity. Long-time faculty member Michael Gertler provided a frank and candid interview, replete with astute observations on the Centre's history and direction. In particular, he presented clear thoughts on how centres fit into the larger university system both in Canada and the United States, the difference between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, and insight into thornier co-operative issues such as labour relations, corporatization, and sustainability. His

perspective is quiet but clear and firm, and occasionally willing to be critical in ways that go against the grain. His research is firmly embedded in rural sociology, particularly around agricultural co-operatives and sustainable rural development, but by his own admission, he is a slow scholar, with less published output than others. Being thoughtful, though, meant that Gertler was the perfect candidate for critical positions, such as being the graduate student liaison or spearheading a major conference. A workhorse professor with a large teaching load every year, Gertler would often account for the majority of the Centre's annual teaching commitment. He was also instrumental in conceptualizing and activating the Centre Scholars program, which created a second tier of scholars connected with the CSC. As with all other faculty, his connection to the Centre has waxed and waned over the years, depending on his involvement with CSC research or sabbatical leaves. He served as acting director for a year when Lou Hammond Ketilson went on leave in 2011.

Several board and faculty interviews conducted for this history indicated that the resilience and connective strength between the Centre and its board and funders required a solid working relationship between funders and the director, with shared goals. Gertler acknowledged that his proclivity for criticism, beyond issues of academic autonomy and into the realm of ideology and sustainability, meant that despite his administrative capabilities, he would never have been selected to serve a regular term as director. The director's position, he pointed out, requires willingness to be politically adept and comfortable with a certain level of diplomacy and negotiation, including capitulation.

Other faculty members through the years have included Cristine de Clercy (2000–2006), Catherine Leviten-Reid (2008–2010), Dionne Pohler (2013–2016), and more recently, Eric Micheels, Isobel Findlay (now retired but active as a researcher), Abdullah Mamun, and Marc-André Pigeon. Through the years, there have also been a number of research associates and assistants whose positions were critical to the Centre's research and publication productivity. These have included Skip

McCarthy, David Laycock, Lars Apland, Andrea Harris, Brenda Stefanson, Roger Herman, Byron Henderson, Audra Krueger, and Darcy Overland, among others. One of the Centre's defining features, in fact, is that it has consistently hired staff who also had research and publication depth and were able to carry the CSC mandate forward. It would be far too simple to say that faculty carried out research and staff played a supportive role. In many cases, staff held advanced degrees and were well able to pursue independent projects. In a booklet on interdisciplinarity published by the Centre in 2000, Murray Fulton and Brett Fairbairn argued that true interdisciplinarity required diversity and included non-academic members of different ranks, skills, and orientations equally and fully integrated into the team.¹⁶⁹ Their point reflected the Centre's everyday experience: knowledge building came from multiple team players, working together. However, staff did not have the same level of autonomy as faculty. Particularly in the case of major research grants, faculty members were the principal investigators who defined and set the projects, while staff carried the operations load.

Reflection: Governance and Resilience

Governance and decision making at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives have flowed from three major points: the operating agreements, the board, and the director's chair. The three operate on a revolving axis of power that combines immediate decision making with long-term planning, alignment, and shared vision. The formal policy-making power of the contracts sets out responsibilities, while the board manages a connecting role between the Centre and its three main spheres of influence: co-operatives, the university, and the provincial government. The director oversees operations, which take the mandate into

¹⁶⁹ Brett Fairbairn and Murray Fulton, *Interdisciplinarity and the Transformation of the University* (Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, 2000).

action. This shared triple layer of governance provides strategic checks and balances at different scales.

Minute changes to the operating agreements and service requirements over the past seven contracts indicate how the contract renewal process allowed signatories to create the mandate, then adjust it over time to bring mandate and operations into alignment. Unlike institutions created with a long-term operating agreement or founding documents that are filed away and never viewed again, the contracts are an integral part of the Centre's governance and operations structure. They are living documents that define both the operating mandate and the relationship and responsibilities of the signatory funders, staff, and faculty. The five-year cycle built extensive resilience into the system, even though, in the words of one director, contract renewal was always a time of upheaval and uncertainty. Renewal discussions favoured reflection and realignment, as a shared contract. They also offered the opportunity to drop mandates that were no longer suitable—working with the Co-operative College or researching law—or to insert new or expanded mandates, such as redefining research around the social economy or working with co-operatives and co-op groups beyond apex organizations. The contracts allow for both Centre personnel and funders to build shared directions, goals, and strategies.

The Centre's on-the-ground operations, as reflected in annual reports, provide another view of governance and decision making. Extension activities, particularly offering short courses and serving as a knowledge pool for the broader co-op community, receive different levels of emphasis in the operating agreements and the annual reports. Nonetheless, providing the co-operative and general public with informational assistance and support beyond academic teaching has been a key activity. In the case of the library, there was a significant difference between what was outlined in the contracts and how faculty and staff interpreted matters on the ground. None of the contracts expressly indicated that the CSC should operate its own library. The idea was led by faculty and supported by the board via yearly library budget allocations for staff and purchases, but

none of the contracts were ever revised to bring the library into the official mandate. It's possible that the library was always viewed as a "nice to have," but in times of budget restraint or reorganization would be the first to face cuts. In any case, the library's relocation and amalgamation with the larger university library did not necessitate any official changes to the operating agreement. Annual reports show the contracts in action, and in turn, become strong documents to support annual review within the five-year cycle, offering a smaller timeframe as a place for reflection and renewal.

The board has been a site of both collaborative and contentious governance for the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. It brings a connection first and foremost to the signatories who build the five-year agreements and participate in the core funding. Their collaboration to create the living agreements underlies much of the Centre's success and longevity. The board also reaches into the larger co-operative, university, and government communities, drawing them into a collaborative association with the Centre. Over time, these relationships waned somewhat within the co-op and government communities, as board members from these groups pivoted from active leaders to those in support roles. This may have created a board with leadership from the university deans that proved stronger than co-op or government direction, potentially skewing research towards university- rather than co-operative- or government-approved topics. On the other hand, at the same time, university funding for the Centre rose, which bolstered its overall health and resilience.

The sweeping board governance changes wrought in 2014 reset that balance in favour of the co-operative sector. However, this has created less resilience within the university milieu, as the CSC is tied strongly to a single school—the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy—and may have a difficult time asserting its independence, forging its own research direction, and de-coupling from issues that may affect the JSGS directly. Conversely, the CSC is set to enjoy the benefits of that relationship as well; the JSGS brings in students from two universities

(Saskatchewan and Regina) and enjoys strong support from university leaders. Overall, though, building a governance system that includes a board provides a breadth of perspectives and connections that adds to the Centre's overall resilience. Management and advisory boards provide high-level direction, guidance, and feedback that move in two directions: back into the operating contracts, and forward, to guide the director. At its most basic level, the board remains powerful via its connection to funding, signing the living contracts, and negotiating new iterations and future directions. Without a board participating in negotiating and signing contracts, the Centre ceases to exist.

The third level of governance and decision making at the Centre flows from the director, who ensures that the day-to-day operations carry out the mandate as outlined in the living contracts, with the support and guidance of the board. Because this position guides the Centre's public face and activities, it holds as much power in some ways as the other two governance arcs. Each director's style and self-set mandate determined the Centre's objectives and path under his or her tenure. Carrying out the contractual mandate was, in fact, the easier aspect of the position, and it's clear that the operating directive and day-to-day activities were never expected to be a complete match, giving leeway for localized interpretation and decision making. The working relationship between the funders (via the board) and the director has always been critical. In times of stress, such as asserting academic autonomy or negotiating new contracts, the director was a pivotal figure in defining these associations and ironing out differences. Luckily, the tripartite CSC governance structure has never faced the ultimate test—firing a director. Up to 2014, the contract carried no specific terms outlining conflict resolution protocol, and any difficulties were met with collaborative decision making. Since 2014, the board's advisory capacity allows for both more and less oversight of the director. While the board has only a strong advisory role in hiring, it provides annual reviews to the JSGS's executive director, leveraging the board and the larger co-operative community's perspective in a tangible way.

The tripartite governance structure of contracts, board, and director has led overall to an enhanced resilience and exceptional longevity for the Centre. Resilience can be found mainly in the fluidity of the governance components, each of which can be modified. Contracts reflect different funders and subtle changes to the mandate over time. Board change has been fluid as long as it conformed to overall parameters; moreover, both co-operative and university board members meet in other settings and activities, building an enhanced connection beyond Centre board meetings. The director's chair allows for both stability and a certain fluidity through appointments and interim arrangements that keep Centre operations functioning smoothly. Governance could not flow from just one source; only in working within and among these three main structures can the Centre maintain integrity and legitimacy.

Conclusion

History and Future of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan was created in 1982 and launched in 1984 as a partnership among three core spheres of influence—the University of Saskatchewan, the co-operative community, and the Government of Saskatchewan. Its purpose has been to find new ways and places to have critical conversations and explore new learning about co-operative enterprises. That concerted effort has resulted, to date, in six contract renewals among groups who believed that the Centre was an important player within its spheres of influence, fulfilling a mandate built by multiple partner perspectives.

Why write a history of the Centre? In large part, writing and reading this history allows all of us to think about and renew our understanding of and relationship to the Centre. The CSC is more than the sum of its activities: it is the ongoing result of a continuing relationship among supporting entities with shared goals. But as time passes, we have an opportunity—perhaps a duty—to revisit that relationship, examine it, and pass on what has been learned. As Murray Fulton noted, “It’s a constant reinventing ... each group or cohort has to rediscover the elements of the arrangement. They don’t pass from one cohort to the next. That transfer is imperfect, and each group has to come to its own understanding of how the relationship works.”¹⁷⁰

The Centre is strongly tied to a distinct sense of place, which moves in circles outward: the Diefenbaker Building, which has always been its physical home; the University of Saskatchewan, its

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Murray Fulton, 12 December 2017.

institutional home and support; and the Province of Saskatchewan and the partner co-operatives based here that have funded the Centre and provided much of its subject matter. The CSC operates as well within a western Canadian and pan-Canadian sense of place, which brings a bit of Saskatchewan to the larger international co-operative community. The academic, public, and co-op world have all benefited from the massive amount of research, publication, resource, and collaborative work pursued with vigour by the staff and faculty associated with the Centre. Originally built on the strength of personal relationships and trust, the CSC has fostered not only its reputation but the resilience of its research and collaboration on continued social networks. If there is one thing to be learned from the institutional history of the Centre, it is this: Relationships matter.

Those founding relationships have been built into the Centre's ongoing stewardship model: the co-op funders, the university, and the provincial government. Of these, critical support has come from the co-operatives and the university, which carry the heft of responsibility for its continuance. The CSC has twice survived the withdrawal of guidance and funding from the provincial government, with little major change to its operating output or governance model. But the Centre would not survive the withdrawal of either the university or the co-op sector. These two parties, and their relationship to one another, are key.

This somewhat unorthodox institutional history has considered and assessed the Centre through the concept of resilience. Through its structure, operations, and governance, as well as its simple longevity, the CSC has displayed a remarkable ability to not only bounce back, but to bounce forward. Its structure and operations made it possible for the Centre to grow or shrink depending on both internal and external funding, pulsing larger and adding people to conduct research projects, moving back to a steady state once a project was finished. During times of growth and increased output, operations expanded and shifted into high gear, focussing on student teaching and training, communications and publications, and collaboration with research partners. The governance structure of living five-year contracts, board, and director provided for continual renewal and

checkpoints. Within this tripartite governance model, change was malleable, not brittle. Funders could grow or shift the size of their contributions or withdraw from the Centre, which changed the contract signatories and internal funding model, but the CSC itself continued. The contracts were revisited and renewed within terms sufficient to allow for real growth, but short enough to maintain an ongoing level of supervision. Five directors have led the Centre through seven contract periods, which both cultivated change and fostered continuity.

The CSC is, in essence, a cohort of interdisciplinary researchers brought together to form a nucleus for co-operative ideas, knowledge, research, and their dissemination. It has been the hub of a larger panoply of energy and creativity, which includes other academic research chairs and institutes, co-operatives, co-op apex organizations, and government-based co-ops and co-op development departments. With a mandate to introduce co-ops to new audiences on and off campus and to reflect on co-operative issues, the Centre has been a major player working to solidify co-operatives as a legitimate field of study for both the academic community and the broader co-op sector. Its work has shifted co-operative research from the kind of in-house activity required by a company seeking to build its business or raise the bottom line, to addressing larger issues and problems specific to co-operative enterprises. In doing so, it has leveraged these concerns into new ways of thinking that benefit co-op theory, philosophy, *and* practice. In producing and mobilizing accessible publications, the CSC has created a new vocabulary around co-operatives: what they are, what they do, and how they fit into the larger society.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Autonomy has been integral, indeed critical, to these studies. As a university-based research and teaching centre, the CSC has used its independence to augment research practice. Autonomy allows Centre researchers to ask tough questions and consider and express answers that may be uncomfortable or unwelcome to particular co-operatives or to the larger co-op community. Negative results and critical opinions are parts of a healthy research relationship. Autonomy does not mean criticism for its own sake, or a vendetta; any commentary, be it positive or negative, must be the result of judicious applied research. Academic rigour and autonomy build legitimacy, from which all co-ops can benefit, whether they are asking the Centre to conduct in-house research or using its publications or quotations in annual reports, annual general meetings, or as part of policy papers. In truth, autonomy at the CSC has been a dance between academic integrity and investing in resilience by keeping good relationships with funders. There are ways to mitigate the impact of negative results—such as limited public communication—that can offset problematic changes in professional working relationships. But overall, autonomy and legitimacy have been positive contributors to the strength of the relationship between the broader co-op community and the specific funders of the Centre.

But history is not only about the past; history can also guide the future. A proper resilience assessment considers the question, What next? The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan is at a crossroads. With core funding and the current contract set to expire at the end of June 2019, the Centre once again sits at a moment of truth: Will the relationships that have built and sustained it for the past thirty-five years support its continuation? What might a creative renewal or new iteration look like? How would that fit the goals of the co-operative community, whose vision and support have been the Centre's lifeblood? How would it fit university needs? What will be missed if the Centre has reached the end of its lifecycle?

There were two major turning points in the relationship between the university and the co-op funders:

1. the decision to migrate tenured faculty salaries over to the university, which left staff salaries essentially a co-op funding responsibility
2. the more recent decision to formally report to the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy

The first move created an operating structure that built strength and professional longevity for the faculty (via tenure in home departments), supporting a cohesive cohort that could grow together on a professional journey. This also meant, however, that staff and related research professionals bore the brunt of changes in co-op funding supports, including short-term contracts, adjustments to positions, or cuts. The university, with four faculty tied to the CSC, had a vested interest in continuing its support, albeit leaving those decisions primarily at the department or college level. The co-op sector leveraged the work of those faculty members by building a cohesive home base with administrative, research, resource, and publications support, which allowed faculty to be incredibly productive. It was a win-win situation for everyone, but only because one side leveraged the other: the Centre was the faculty, and the Centre was the staff, and both had a major role to play.

The second significant change was the alignment with the JSGS, which allowed the Centre to build a new advisory board that was not limited to the funders and the university, but went beyond Saskatchewan to the national and international community, bringing in new co-operative thought and advice. It also gave the Centre the opportunity to offer its own classes towards a degree, a goal that the co-ops have always sought but that never fit the previous scattershot model of teaching classes across the university. Students at the policy school now have the chance to learn about and research co-operatives in-depth.

Alignment with the policy school was advantageous in some respects, but it has left the Centre even more vulnerable than after the migration of faculty salaries. If, in the interest of efficiency, funding

marked for Centre administration is paid to the policy school—which already has a large and growing staff component who could handle administrative tasks such as budget and accounting—how will the CSC maintain its separate identity, policies, relationships, and institutional memory? What are the new mechanisms by which the CSC will remain involved in the larger co-op community? Traditionally, Centre faculty and staff have participated in the governance of other co-operative entities such as the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation, the provincial and national co-op apex associations, and the International Co-operative Alliance. This has included board meeting attendance, organizing conferences, workshops, and meetings, making presentations, and travel. Will the policy school's administrative staff be willing to devote evenings or weekends to this kind of work? In other words, how co-operatively minded is the policy school, and will it extend its participation into these places, where co-operative relationships are built? If there isn't a separate and visible administrative staff accountable *only* to the Centre's director and board, will the co-op sector financially support such an entity? The Centre already reports directly to the School of Public Policy; if administration migrates to the policy school as well, how can the CSC define itself as a separate entity? The advisory board and director must consider these questions. Since there has not been a contract renewal since the major governance changes brought about in 2014, it's unknown if those transformations have fundamentally altered the longstanding relationship between the university and the co-op sector.

Both current and future funders in the co-operative sector must build a cohesive vision of what they need from a nucleus centre such as the CSC. In the 1980s, co-op leaders were looking to insert co-operative content into the university curriculum and to build a clearer understanding of the co-op model in the larger public sphere via research and publications. Do those same goals resonate today? If so, are educational expectations currently being met by other Canadian or international centres, or is it important to retain a place for co-operative education in western Canada? Does the Graduate Certificate in the Social Economy and Co-operatives offered through the

policy school meet the educational component? Does the co-op sector maintain its support for academic research and publications, or is it looking for something different? Co-ops may now prefer a more transactional relationship, similar to what the provincial government once wanted—a place that offered high-quality co-operative research services. There have been numerous professionals trained in co-operative knowledge and rigorous research practices, many through the Centre. This cadre of experts could be drawn together as a wholly new research and think tank dedicated to solving co-operative issues. It's possible that such an entity would win back support from provincial or even federal governments, but funding would be more costly. Without the university as a partner, co-operatives would bear the brunt of both core and research funding. The trickiest problem would be credibility and legitimacy. Without the power of academic autonomy, how would this type of unit navigate the minefield of producing critical research that may not be acceptable to a funder? How would it find its way across the existing co-op landscape—terrain already divided between those who support co-ops for practical purposes and those who believe in them for moral or philosophical reasons?

One potential innovative solution would be to build an entity that retains some academic ties via a senior research leader, but is run by a research staff that is not tied to the university or the university-driven model of tenure-track publications. Canada has produced far more senior graduates with MA- and PhD-level training than can be accommodated into university-based tenure research. This pool of individuals could build a new centre based on research and service rather than teaching. Non-faculty research, in fact, has always been central to CSC publications output—including this history—so that change would be seamless. This type of solution would remove the requirement for direct ties to the policy school, though any PhD researchers could retain adjunct positions with the university in order to supervise new graduate student training and research projects.



As I noted at the outset, this study is more than a history. It is an analysis that aims for assessment rather than simple recounting. Readers know more about the history of the Centre, but are consistently allowed, even expected, via questions and prompts, to think about some of the larger issues at play. It is an interactive document—sometimes you might nod your head in agreement, other times yell about something I’ve misrepresented or missed—a document that does more than provide information. It invites discussion and reflection.

The history of the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives is really a history of relationships, and relationships result from building dialogue. Throughout its history, the Centre has created relationships within itself via interdisciplinary, inclusive engagement with a team approach to a shared goal—increasing overall understanding of what co-operatives are, who builds them, how they are constructed, how they operate, when a co-op is the right model, and why they are different. The Centre’s relationships with larger circles such as those encompassed by the university, the government, and the co-op sector have led to numerous small and a few large changes to its operations, personnel, governance, funding, and mandate. Through it all, the enquiring, critical, and creative spirit developed at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives has had an enormous impact on the broader co-operative and university communities. That impact will resonate for many years to come.

The Centre for the Study of Co-operatives opened in the Diefenbaker Building at the University of Saskatchewan in June 1984. During the subsequent thirty-five years, the Centre consolidated its interdisciplinary focus to create a world-renowned body of co-operative and credit union knowledge.

Enquiring, Critical, and Creative Spirit is a history of that organization to 2018. This work was commissioned by the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives and researched and written by Merle Massie, PhD.

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