



Social Enterprises
Knowledgeable Economies
and Sustainable Communities

The Reality of the Social Economy and Its Empowering Potential for Boreal Anishinaabek Communities in Eastern Manitoba

Alon Weinberg

**A research report prepared for the Northern Ontario, Manitoba,
and Saskatchewan Regional Node of the Social Economy Suite**

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Entreprises sociales
économies intelligentes
et communautés durables



The Reality of the Social Economy

Thanks to Ernest McPherson of Little Black River
and to all other Anishinaabek people of Waabanong Nakaygum
who have engaged intimately with the land,
either through traditional economic practices or, with great adaptability,
through industrial processes, and often through both.

The sharing of your knowledge and skills is a heritage to us all.

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in Eastern Manitoba

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The notion of integrating social goals into matters of business and economy may seem like a foreign concept to many, but by probing a bit more deeply, we discover that for much of human history, social goals have been central to governing how we managed our economic transactions.

— Mike Lewis ¹

*Well, our life is more than our work,
and our work is more than our job.*

— Charlie King ²

1. Mike Lewis, *Building Community Wealth: A Resource for Social Enterprise Development* (Victoriaville, QC: Centre for Community Enterprise, 2006), 1.
2. Charlie King, "Our Life Is More Than Our Work." ©1978, Charlie King/Pied Asp Music (BMI).

Introduction

THERE ARE MANY ISSUES involved in understanding how a social economic approach to development can assist and empower Aboriginal people on reservations in Manitoba to improve their social and economic situation. Included among them are the following:

- Aboriginal quality of life: who defines it and how is it measured?
- economic opportunities: who drives them and how are the greatest number of community members able to derive benefit from them?
- cultural values: how can economic development be aligned with, even dependent upon, social development and cultural continuity? How can it not?
- ecological and economic sustainability: can the development sustain future generations without depleting the living systems within the area of their operation?
- political involvement: how can you contextualize the social economy as part of Aboriginal self-determination and self-governance? How can it contribute to building these movements?

Without answering these questions effectively, economic development on Aboriginal reservations runs the risk of replicating significant aspects of the mainstream economic reality, which has been socially and ecologically destructive and failed to provide for collective interests, while both challenging and attacking cultural continuity. Hydroelectric development in northern Manitoba in the 1960s and 1970s, which took scant notice of Aboriginal peoples' interests and flooded large swathes of traditional land-use areas, is an excellent example of how not to approach development. As is Tembec Lumber's mismanagement of both the forest and Aboriginal relationships in Pine Falls, Manitoba, near the boreal Anishinaabek homeland known as Waabanong — meaning “east” in Ojibway — on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. The impacts of these industrial developments have been so devastat-

ing to the land and the people that they have not fully recovered to this day, though in the case of Manitoba Hydro, the utility has come knocking again at the doors of the northern Cree nations.

The Researcher's Position

I am conscious of my position as a non-native outsider conducting research into the social and economic impacts of roads on boreal First Nations. The hydro example reveals that only members of a given community can decide what form of development, if any, is in their interests. Further, community members should decide collectively on shared interests and the goals that will be the impetus for social and economic decisions. This paper will examine the concept of the social economy and ask how it can serve as a signpost for Aboriginal communities seeking to better their members' lives. It will seek a methodology that will allow an academic and a boreal Anishinaabek community in Manitoba to investigate the social economy in a co-operative manner. The goals are to find results that improve community members' quality of life as defined by themselves, as well as a praxis that maximizes community involvement in the process of moving towards these goals. Community members, according to the "change-agent model" described by Lewis and Lockhart, are the central actors in development, as "policy and programs that support services ... are designed to 'act upon the environment to produce demonstrable changes in the well-being' of Aboriginal individuals and communities."³ It is important to keep this objective of well-being in mind when considering the combination of the development process and its tangible results.

The Social Economy — History and Conceptualization

The social economy is situated against a backdrop "struggle to interpret and relate the practice of economics and the development of economic institutions to the question of social benefit."⁴ A growing number of people are failing to have their minimum needs met

3. Mike Lewis and Dr. R.A. Lockhart, "Performance Measurement, Development Indicators, and Aboriginal Economic Development" (Port Alberni, BC: The Centre for Community Enterprise, 2002), 23.

4. John Restakis, "Defining the Social Economy: The BC Context," paper prepared for the BC Social Economy Roundtable (Victoria: British Columbia Co-operative Association, 2006), 2. Online at http://www.msvu.ca/socialeconomyatlantic/pdfs/DefiningSocialEconomy_FnlJan1906.pdf

for social and economic well-being; the gap between rich and poor is growing; increasing number of people in Canada, and elsewhere, are relying on food banks; and child poverty persists.⁵ These issues are especially acute within Canada's Aboriginal population.⁶ As a result of the failure of the profit-driven economic model, more interest is being paid to "the social economy as a means of redressing these failures by placing social and human concerns at the centre of economics."⁷ This shifting of focus onto social concerns is the hallmark of the social economy. Without expounding at length on the history of the social economy and its academic discourse, a few words about its background might help frame a contemporary understanding of its context *vis-a-vis* western society. It might also help clarify how the field of social economy became embedded in the abstract, discursive history of western society, and in particular, within that of growth economics. The discussion should be approached with nuance and acknowledge the additional element of an external researcher seeking to partner with a First Nation to research the functional usefulness of the social economy within its community. Aboriginal people might wish to adapt and incorporate the most useful aspects of the social economy into their community planning processes in accord with traditional values that may be seen as complementary to some of its aspects.

The social economy is a product of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, gaining popularity in North America later in the nineteenth century and seeing a renewal in the latter part of the twentieth century in Canada, particularly in Quebec.⁸ Its incorporation into the state did not reflect its original niche in European society, as it was first designed "to escape competitive individualism and state authoritarianism alike."⁹ So what is the social economy and how can we understand it without getting mired in the specialist debates of academic discourse? Mendell, Laville, and Levèsque identify three major sectors that exist alongside the social economy — co-operatives, mutual societies, and associations.¹⁰ Restakis expands this list to include co-operatives and credit unions, mutuals, non-profits, volunteer and charitable organizations, social service organizations, foundations, social enterprises, and

5. Ibid.

6. Institute of Wellbeing, "How Are Canadians Really Doing? A Closer Look at Select Groups," prepared by Caryl Arundel and Associates (London, UK: Institute of Wellbeing, 2009).

7. Restakis, 2.

8. Marguerite Mendell, Jean-Louis Laville, and Benoît Levèsque, "The Social Economy: Diverse Approaches and Practices in Europe and Canada, in *The Social Economy: Building Inclusive Economies*, ed. A. Noya and E. Clarence (France: OECD Publications, 2007), 2.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

trade unions.¹¹ Quarter, Mook, and Richmond group the social economy more generally into public-sector non-profits, market-based social organizations, and civil society organizations.¹²

Mike Lewis divides the overall economy into three sectors:

- private enterprise, whose main purpose is profit and whose capital and decision-making processes are mainly individually held
- the public sector, the realms of governments that are primarily interested in the distribution of resources, regulation, and taxation
- the social economy, which includes self-help organizations, mutuals, non-profits, etc., which have a social purpose¹³

For Lewis “the values of mutuality, self-help, caring for people and the environment, are given higher priority than maximising profits,”¹⁴ and reciprocity is a key principle that animates this sector of the economy and society.¹⁵ Restakis also highlights reciprocity as a core principle of the social economy, in addition to social or collective control over capital.¹⁶ He explains the reciprocity principle as “essentially a social transaction that also has economic ramifications. A reciprocal exchange may have either a social or an economic intent as the primary motivation, and often embodies both.”¹⁷ In Restakis and throughout the literature on the social economy, the reciprocity principle and the entire social aim of the organizations has been based on the concept of solidarity,¹⁸ which emerged in mid-nineteenth-century France and was articulated by Leroux: “Nature did not create a single being for itself... It created all beings for each other and gave them a relationship of reciprocal solidarity.”¹⁹ One can hear traditional Elders’ words in these statements, for an Indigenous world-view,

11. Restakis, 3.

12. Jack Quarter, Laurie Mook, and Betty Jane Richmond. “What Is the Social Economy?” (Toronto: Centre for Urban Community Studies, University of Toronto, Research Bulletin #13, March 2003), 1–5.

13. Mike Lewis, *Building Community Wealth: A Resource for Social Enterprise Development* (Port Alberni, BC: The Centre for Community Enterprise, 2006), 11.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Restakis, 9.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 11; and Nancy Neamtan, “The Social and Solidarity Economy: Towards an ‘Alternative’ Globalisation,” background paper for the symposium titled *Citizenship and Globalization: Exploring Participation and Democracy in a Global Context* (Vancouver: The Carold Institute for the Advancement of Citizenship in Social Change, 2002), 1–15.

19. In 1851, cited by Mendell, Laville, and Lévesque, 2.

if anything can be categorized as such, espouses the interdependence of the natural world.²⁰ For Neamtan, the social economy is “characterized by enterprises and organisations which are autonomous and private in nature, but where capital and the means of production are collective.”²¹ Solidarity is a key concept, especially in the process of partnering with a First Nations community to develop a social economy. It involves a recognition of universally held material, social, and spiritual needs, while acknowledging that the process of decolonization involves communities regaining autonomy and First Nations people recovering a strong political voice.

Lewis and Lockhart point out that the development of social economies is often hampered by a mistaken emphasis solely on business development, even if the business is structurally a social enterprise. “The Development Wheel” offers a means of truly building capacity — part of the process of decolonization and creating a set of skills and experience to help move people from paternalistic government policies towards self-sufficiency. The wheel presents the diverse elements a community needs to consider in the pursuit of long-term economic stability.²² The various stages of community economic development revolve around the collective goal of organizational capacity and include pre-planning, organizational development, venture development, community participation and strategic networking, technical assistance, and organizational prerequisites.²³ The analysis of a project that met many insurmountable challenges in the Yukon highlighted the fact that \$10.5 million out of a four-year budget of \$12.5 million was spent on venture development, too high a ratio relative to the other aspects of development needed to satisfy the goals of social enterprise in achieving community engagement and empowerment. Where Lewis and Lockhart take a pragmatic approach, Simpson, Storm, and Sullivan, while echoing some of the same concerns, highlight the political aspects of development. They comment that the “standard model of development” in Canada and the USA, which views development as primarily an economic problem,²⁴ fails insofar as it is “short-term and non-strategic; views development

20. See Michael Angel, *Preserving the Sacred: Historical Perspectives on the Ojibwa Midewiwin* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002), and Winona Laduke, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005).

21. Neamtan, 3.

22. Lewis and Lockhart, 8.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Leanne Simpson, Sandra Storm, and Don Sullivan, *Closing the Economic Gap in Northern Manitoba: Sustained Economic Development for Manitoba's First Nation Communities* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2005), 36.

as primarily an economic problem; has outsiders set the development agenda; and views Indigenous culture as an obstacle to development. Typical results of the standard model are: failed enterprises; a politics of spoil; and outside perceptions of incompetence and chaos that undermine the defence of sovereignty.”²⁵

Key to not replicating these failed dominant developmental models is an awareness of the historic and political processes of subjugation within which they operate and which emancipator models will seek to transcend, transform, and subvert. As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) notes, Aboriginal economies have been “disrupted over time, marginalized, and largely stripped of their land and natural resource base.”²⁶ Business as usual will not suffice.

Modes of Production, the Informal Economy, and Social Formation

Picking up on the RCAP analysis, it is important to clearly understand the disruptions of historic Euro-Canadian interventions upon Aboriginal economies. One commonly hears it said that Aboriginal peoples “cannot go back” to a completely subsistence or land-based economy, but these words emerge from a system that sought the destruction of that way of life. Regardless of what is practically possible, ignoring the history of the Aboriginal economies in North America is to dismiss Aboriginal culture, which is inextricably bound with its material situation. A large part of the historical dispossession of Aboriginal peoples in Canada has been a direct result of policies imposed on those at the periphery of Canadian life by power seats at the centre — national and provincial capitals located generally in the Canadian south.²⁷

Peter Usher discusses the contrasting modes of production of northern Canada: the Native/traditional economy and the industrial/modern economy.²⁸ He shows the two to be vastly different, both in terms of the basic unit of participation and the values embodied by

25. Ibid., citing the Native Nations Institute, 15.

26. Cited in Lou Hammond Ketilson and Ian MacPherson, *A Report on Aboriginal Co-operatives in Canada: Current Situation and Potential for Growth* (Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, 2001), 15.

27. For a detailed discussion of the mechanics of execution of federal policy, see Hugh Shewell, *Enough to Keep Them Alive: Indian Social Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

28. Peter Usher, *A Northern Perspective on the Informal Economy* (Ottawa: Vanier Institute of the Family — Task Force on the Familial/Human Economy, 1980), 1.

each economic form. In the case of the traditional Native, subsistence-based but exchange-supplemented economy, the basic unit is the household and sometimes the whole community.²⁹ By contrast, the industrial economy favours individualistic mobility, which undermines the traditional Aboriginal values of family solidarity, sense of place and community, stability, and tradition.³⁰ Kulchyski's study of Inuit communities yields a similar observation regarding the breakdown of traditional Inuit social structures through the advance of capital-oriented economics.

The possibility remains that this Inuit mirror of dominant structure, the separation of the political and economic as embodied in the State and private capital that is a foundation of capitalist modernism, will be enlisted to support social relations markedly different from those that predominate. It is a dangerous game, though, and the degree to which it depends upon capital accumulation will determine the degree of possessive individualism that can come to predominate, leading in turn to political and economic forms that may wholly undermine Inuit traditions, values, and culture.³¹

That the social and cultural formation of a community is completely bound up with the economic mode of production underlies both Kulchyski and Usher's analyses, and is not to be taken lightly even when prescribing a social economy approach as the best tool to safeguard and honour the changing yet historically rooted cultural forms of a people. Kulchyski highlights a key example of their intertwined nature in a discussion of Marshall Sahlins's notion of "the original affluent society." In the formal, industrial society, Usher points out that "time ... is much more carefully accounted for, exchanges are much more precisely calculated, and there is often a sense of alienation and lack of control."³² Sahlins shows more specifically how the economic and the cultural are intertwined within the hunter's day, the lines between work and leisure blurred.³³ Both Kulchyski and Usher note the devaluation of traditional women's work — that of the domestic sphere — in our society. Caring for home or for children, even within the industrial mode of production, is akin to the informal

29. *Ibid.*, 3.

30. *Ibid.*, 4.

31. Peter Kulchyski, *Like the Sound of a Drum: Aboriginal Cultural Politics in Denendeh and Nunavut* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005), 94.

32. Usher, 17.

33. Cited in Kulchyski, 51.

economy of hunting and gathering. The informal economy of the home and the provision of subsistence needs for children and other dependants such as Elders is qualitative and not easily measured numerically. Informal economics, generated from within a community or a household and not from an “outsider” political centre, is key to the social formation of Aboriginal peoples. The social formation allows for the situation of the mode of production “in history, with all its contingencies, necessities, and particularities.”³⁴

While the gathering and hunting mode of production may be past its peak in efficiency — with modern communities concentrating too many people for the surrounding lands to feed and with the residential school legacy having fragmented the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge — the social formation that arose from this mode of production may still be culturally relevant and thus inform economic decisions. For instance, there may yet be a strong sense of collective accountability — or reciprocity, in social economy language — a fact ignored by Tom Flanagan’s articulation of a need for privately held lands on Native reserves.³⁵ An important example emerged from a conversation I had with former Bloodvein First Nation Chief Louis Young. Given that Aboriginal rights and land holdings are collective, embodying traditional values of co-operative living and collective social concern, it is important to recall that one of the original intents of the social economy was to work beyond competitive individualism. Young articulated to me his understanding of how collective interests tend to be undermined by corporations seeking to get individual support and bestow individual benefit upon First Nations members, whose agreement with a project becomes the corporation’s justification — and how a community-led process resists this individualization and renews collective interests:

When some of these companies come in there, like Tembec, they will look for individuals who will agree with them, and speak for them, and then they’ll go to the province and say “look we talked with this individual, with *these people*, they’ll say, and look they agreed to support us,” but they’re taking one person at a time and of course there will be people who, and I think it’s always been that way throughout history, that there will be individuals all in support, but if you go to the community and you collect the elders and even the youth and you talk

34. Kulchyski, 52.

35. Tom Flanagan, “First Nations Property Rights: Going Beyond the Indian Act,” *Globe and Mail*, 22 March 2010. Online at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/first-nations-property-rights-going-beyond-the-indian-act/article1508574/>

about the resources, you talk about the fur bearing animals, the plant life and all that, and that group will say “yeah, we have to make sure that this is protected for future generations.”³⁶

While affirming the underlying presence of a collective land ethos in his community, Louis earlier decried the shift away from the collective decision-making spirit inherent in the traditional Anishinaabek social formation. In response to my asking whether community members used their collective purchasing power to reduce the cost of groceries, he told me that “they’re all individual. I mean it wasn’t that way before, you know. People operated as a collective at one time, you know, but then that started to fall apart.”³⁷ Louis seems to be telling us that although collective decision making is in crisis, it remains beneath the surface, rising and being given voice when cued by someone articulating the collectively held but not necessarily daily practised traditional ethos. One must not underestimate the endurance of a social formation that arises from a mode of production practised over thousands of years by people in relationship with the land, nor fail to see smaller patterns of economic change within the larger patterns of social and cultural change. There is a cautionary tale in this for those pushing for what is considered progressive social economic development, as Usher describes the failed northern economic policies of the third quarter of the twentieth century through government interventions.

Administrations of all political persuasions adopted a more or less common approach to the socio-economic development of northern Native peoples, in line with new possibilities and perceptions of the northern frontier. It was concluded that the traditional way of life was dying or dead, and that the only avenue for Native people was to join the white man’s world.... Historically, the industrial mode has been operated by transient or resident whites on the frontier in response to metropolitan demands. The traditional mode has by and large been left in the hands of Native or other long-standing inhabitants, to function autonomously so long as it does not interfere with the industrial mode.³⁸

There is a delicate balance between the pragmatic economic decisions that need to be

36. Louis Young, interview by the author, 24 March 2010, University of Winnipeg.

37. Ibid.

38. Usher, 6.

taken to move a community forward when its modes of production have been drastically altered and the cultural concerns by which the social formation of a people is historically understood, honoured, and worked with. These are nuanced steps that most governments have failed or been unwilling to grasp, lest the traditional mode “interfere with the industrial mode.” Thus, development involving the logic and goals of a social economy must be driven by an Aboriginal community’s members, leaving the outsider less as policy expert and more as technical assistant able to leverage funds and navigate bureaucracies if and when a community chooses to take further steps into the formal economy.

The Social Economy and Community Economic Development in Brief

Neamtan further distinguishes between the old and new social economies, the latter emergent over the last thirty years and comprised primarily of what she distinguishes as the distinct fields of community economic development, worker and producer co-operatives, and community organizations.³⁹ It is of interest in the Manitoba context, where the language of social economy has yet to become prevalent,⁴⁰ to note that the preferred focus on community economic development is seen as a mere subset of the new social economy. Writes Eugene Kostyra of the Manitoba government: “In Manitoba, CED has focused on communities that are historically marginalized from the mainstream economy, in order for these communities to share more equally in the benefits of economic growth.”⁴¹ One assumes that Kostyra would be including, if not emphasizing, Aboriginal communities in Manitoba, which clearly have not been the prime beneficiaries in Manitoba’s economic history. On the surface there seem to be two main differences between community economic development and the more broad principles and discourse of the social economy. The first is in the *purpose* of economic development, as Kostyra does not specify that economic growth in and of itself has a social purpose. Furthermore, *growth* is a quantitative term, whereas a social economy perspective would be more likely to consider quality-of-life improvements ahead of growth economics. Working for the “second sector” of the economy — i.e., government —

39. Neamtan, 3.

40. E. Kostyra, “Made in Manitoba: Community Economic Development Provincial Policy Framework and Lens,” *Horizons* 8, no. 2 (February 2006): 22. See also S. MacKinnon, “The Social Economy in Manitoba: Designing Policy for Public Inclusion,” *Horizons* 8, no. 2 (February 2006): 26.

41. Kostyra, 22.

Kostyra seems more concerned with the distribution of the revenue generated by economic growth. In the case of Manitoba, the notion of growth highlights the second difference between the language of CED and that of the social economy, namely the blurring of the second and third sectors (as articulated in Lewis's model), as the government itself, through crown corporations such as Manitoba Hydro, becomes an engine of economic growth.

This point returns us to the articulated original intention of the social economy, to find a niche free from state authoritarianism and competitive individualism.⁴² Could a social economy approach turn Manitoba Hydro into a citizen- or worker-owned co-operative? One might argue that offering collective ownership of upcoming dams to First Nations is in itself a co-operative venture on Hydro's part. The question ultimately rests with the purpose of the business development of hydroelectric dams and the degree of democracy and interactive decision making embodied in the governance of their ownership structures. This is a topic worthy of a further study that looks at how government policy, resources, and direct investment in the social economy affects its political and social functions. As Findlay and Wuttunee point out, despite a more progressive CED language from governments, "traditional policy frames have proven hard to dislodge ... and practices have often continued to emphasize traditional economic development while claiming benefits for local communities."⁴³ Can a better description of Manitoba Hydro's continued insistence on building dams and flooding land be made? Can the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation's referendum to approve joint minimum-partner ownership of the Wuskwatim Dam be considered an example of direct democracy, when the vote was on a twelve-hundred-page Project Development Agreement written and circulated only in English, and legalese English at that?

The Social Economy and Aboriginal Communities in Canada

Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson have highlighted the four broad categorical choices that Aboriginal communities and their members have in making decisions about their economic futures:

- individual entrepreneurship — self-employment
- alliances made with corporate Canada — i.e., revenue-sharing agreements for

42. Restakis, 2.

43. I. Findlay and W. Wuttunee, "Aboriginal Women's Community Economic Development: Measuring and Promoting Success," *IRPP Choices* 13, no. 4 (August 2007): 1–26.

co-ownership of resource extractive projects, usually on or around their traditional territories

- an increase in band capacities for economic development — i.e., development led by First Nations' chiefs and councils
- marketplace oriented co-operatives such as Neechi Foods in Winnipeg⁴⁴

They highlight the last category as having the most positive effect on overall community development, highlighting the economic and social capacity building that co-operatives provide. Findlay and Wuttunee see the role of co-operatives as vital to Aboriginal peoples' lives, suggesting that they are more likely than most Canadians to be part of co-operatives.⁴⁵ They furthermore highlight the importance of co-operative enterprises in Arctic life, noting that more than half of the Nunavut legislators have been through co-operative enterprise training.⁴⁶ An overly zealous intervention can, however, be damaging. Mitchell describes some Arctic development as having removed people from intimate connection with the land.⁴⁷ Findlay and Wuttunee and Kostyra cite Neechi Foods as a co-operative that provides meaningful employment and skills capacity building for members of its community, while both serving the community and looking after its own interests.⁴⁸ Community processes thus become the keys to understanding the success and overall function of social enterprises in Aboriginal communities, rural or urban.

Successful Examples of Aboriginal-Owned Social Enterprises

Whether described as social enterprises within the social economy framework or as community economic development, there are many examples of successful, collectively owned Aboriginal businesses in Canada. One example is the Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership created by the Lac La Ronge Indian Band in Saskatchewan. Mike Lewis calls the organization a “social enterprise hybrid”⁴⁹ characterized by tightly networked community

44. Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson, 12.

45. Findlay and Wuttunee, 10.

46. Ibid.

47. See Marybelle Mitchell's analysis of the rise of the Arctic co-operative movement in Marybelle Mitchell, *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Élite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism among Canadian Inuit* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996).

48. Findlay and Wuttunee, 14.

49. Lewis, *Building Community Wealth*, 4.

ownership and private enterprise. Kitsaki has direct ownership of a wide range of enterprises and has created more than five hundred jobs, 70 percent of which are held by Aboriginal people.⁵⁰ This hybrid model of networked private and collectively owned enterprise towards a common social goal mirrors the Emilian model of Emilia-Romagna in Italy, a hotbed of socialist thought that is home to many small businesses that are intricately linked in local economic development and employment.⁵¹ Lewis also highlights the role of co-operatives in the Arctic, in particular artists' co-operatives,⁵² and their long history of both connecting producers to distant southern markets and nurturing cultural development as part of, not in opposition to, economic development.

Another example that could be instructive for boreal communities in eastern Manitoba is that of West Chilcotin Forest Products in BC, which brought together the Ulkatcho First Nation, Carrier Lumber, and the mainly resource-dependent and heavily unemployed non-native community after both of Carrier's mills were shut down in the late 1980s.⁵³ Though the project did not follow a strictly co-operative model but was rather a band-driven partnership, rescuing the local economy was effectively a co-operative venture that helped build capacity in the First Nation community. It also put many in the local non-native community back to work and succeeded in bridging social and cultural gaps between the First Nation and non-First Nation people through the recognition of common material needs.

Problems of Resource Mismanagement and Possibilities in Manitoba

This model could be especially useful in the area of eastern Lake Winnipeg still accessible by roads — the First Nations of Sagkeeng, Little Black River, and Hollow Water — along with the community of Bloodvein, soon to be accessible by year-round roads. Pine Falls, Manitoba, adjoining Sagkeeng First Nation along the mouth of the Winnipeg River, has recently been going through the social and economic shock of Tembec's closure of the pulp and paper mill.

50. Ibid.

51. M. Lewis, *The Emilian Model: Profile of a Co-operative Economy* (Vancouver: Canadian Co-operative Association, BC Region (now BC Co-operative Association, 2000).

52. Lewis, *Building Community Wealth*, 7.

53. M. Julian, "West Chilcotin Forest Products: A Joint Venture Defies the Odds in B.C.'s Troubled Forest Industry," *Making Waves* 13, no.1 (2002).

I drove up to this area two plus hours from Winnipeg to interview, among others, Ernest McPherson of Little Black River First Nation, located between Sagkeeng and Hollow Water.⁵⁴ Ernest, a community Elder and practising minister, showed me some of the most wanton examples of Tembec's mishandling of their forest management license. The first area was near the community of Little Black River, where Tembec had clear-cut three years previously, against the community's wishes. It had been the community's trap-line area and was also used for lumber and to pick berries and medicines. Later, when Tembec was burning the balsam wood they had cut, claiming it was infested — the rationale for cutting that area — the winds changed and the kerosene fumes drifted into the community, forcing Ernest and his oxygen-dependent wife to flee the community for a week. "They smoked us out. You couldn't see nothing in the reserve."⁵⁵ The balsam,



Ernest McPherson stands before a tiny fraction of the wood abandoned by Tembec when it shut down its pulp and paper mill at Pine Falls, Manitoba. He worries the wood will rot before a plan is made to allow First Nations access to the wood to make lumber, which could supply many communities with houses, whether in Sagkeeng, Little Black River, or Hollow Water, all communities from whose traditional territories Tembec has been taking wood for years.

Ernest explained, are traditional medicine trees for his people, compounding the hurt he felt that Tembec had razed the area without giving the community a chance to deal with the small infestation which they had offered to do. He could not even understand how Tembec had been given this traditional area under their forest management license, and he is an individual who keeps a close watch on what's happening with the land, including the corporations' behaviour.

54. I interviewed Ernest as a board member of the emerging Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Centre to be built at Hollow Water. Ernest was keen to share his knowledge of the closure of the mill and Tembec's questionable practices.

55. Interview with Ernest McPherson, August 2010, in the bush off highway PR 304 near Little Black River First Nation, Manitoba.

Ernest has many years of experience working in logging camps, fishing, and later mining and winter-road construction. He understands resource management, describing to me how when he logged — selectively, using horses, as opposed to clear-cutting with heavy machinery — crews were forbidden to take trees smaller than eight inches in diameter in order to leave something for the next generation. Tembec, however, took trees of all sizes, all for pulp. The tragedy of this type of logging was in full evidence further down the road towards Pine Falls, where Ernest toured me around a massive yard of logs piled twenty or more feet high at the side of the road behind the first line of bush. With the mill shut down, it was not clear what would happen with all these logs; it was only a matter of time before they rotted. The trees were large enough to be used for lumber, and, with a shortage of housing on First Nations across Canada — the east side communities being no exception — those trees could have been useful to the First Nations people from whose traditional lands they had been taken. At this point it was uncertain who owned the logs, and in an effort to keep peace in the area, the First Nations had not gone in and simply taken them. Local First Nations communities and Tembec, with the encouragement of the Manitoba government, could create a formal co-operative or joint management plan to set up a sawmill and generate value-added employment for their members, perhaps including non-native people from Pine Falls in a model similar to that of West

Chilcotin Forest Products. People like Ernest illustrate the vast amount of untapped knowledge and capacity in the east side boreal communities, and the commitment to manage the land and its natural resources in a responsible manner.

I also discussed responsible forest-based economic development with Louis Young of Bloodvein First Nation, a community soon to be accessible by year-round road, as



Elder resident of Little Black River Ernest McPherson points out logs that had been slated to be pulped for newsprint, logs large enough to be cut for lumber to build homes and other products. For McPherson, that trees of this size are being taken for pulp is a sign of forest mismanagement and a wasteful use of natural resources.

PR 304 is pushed north across the Bloodvein River to his community. A former chief, Louis understood what a sustainable paradigm of development could look like, benefitting both labour and the environment: “selective cut logging, say, to build ... palettes, or caskets, or furniture — the more people that are employed using the natural products before it leaves, the more people it benefits. But if you only go there and cut trees, there’s only five loggers and then the trees are gone, but if you do value-added, you might double or triple the number of people working.”⁵⁶

... but now all this destruction that has been going on here. That scares me with these people up north. If they put a road in through there. I don’t like to see being done what’s being done to us here ... and we warned them over there.

— Ernest McPherson, August 2010, on the impending roads opening up greater industrial access to communities north of the Bloodvein River

With any large-scale resource extraction, it is difficult to imagine harmony between economic and cultural matters, especially when ecological damage occurs with the economic development. I discussed Aboriginal people’s use of the land with Wesley Moneyas of Hollow Water, who, in addition to being an active member of the Hollow Water Fisher’s Co-operative, used to do contract cutting for Tembec in the forest. He had problems getting paid when the job was done and also reported vast drops of logs abandoned when the mill shut down in Pine Falls. We discussed ecological stewardship of the land in the context of the people’s economic needs. The conversation turned to mining in the area. Companies have staked many mining claims and the government has issued numerous mineral exploration licenses,⁵⁷ but they have yet to be acted upon due to transportation access issues, which will soon change when the roads are paved east of Lake Winnipeg. Mooneyes exhibited a pragmatism not uncommon among people I interviewed, understanding the balance between economics and ecology that would be necessary for First Nations to feel good about joining a large industrial project:

Well, there’s a key word, it’s always been said, it’s sustainability.... The First Nations must have been doing something right all these years.... If you’re governing the area as a self-governing entity, you can control what goes in your ter-

56. Interview with Louis Young, March 2010, Winnipeg.

57. See Waabanong Nakaygum Okimawin, “East Side Planning Initiative,” online at http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/wno/pdf/wno_council_minutes_nov_30_dec_1_2005.pdf, 12–29, esp. 21–22.

ritory. By you practicing self-government — which you always had — you make sure that what’s going to happen in your territory is beneficial to your community.⁵⁸

Although ecological mistakes may be made in development processes, Moneyas claims that self-government, or at least greater control of the resources in their traditional territories, will make it easier for Anishinaabek communities to manage their resources so as not to harm the lands and waters on which they are living. That same ecological self-interest might have changed the outsider-driven developments of Tembec and Manitoba Hydro. But the self-interest of simply growing their operations, not the welfare of the community, has been driving these and most other industries in the boreal region. And the Manitoba Government has fallen behind on the promise of CED by not stepping in and extending the model to include capacity building combined with easier, less bureaucratic resource access for First Nations on the east side, especially when the resources could also help solve the housing crisis on reserves.

The Importance of Process in Social Economic Development and in This Research

One might be tempted — especially in dealing with the social economy and Aboriginal communities on the theoretical level — to see positive examples of the social economy at work in Aboriginal communities and to suggest a sweeping model for how to put an end to Aboriginal poverty in Canada, and to Indigenous poverty globally. There is a danger, however, of replicating the paternalistic, colonial, and centrist manner of setting agendas from the outside, something of which both governments and researchers need to be aware. Cynthia Chataway, in her article titled “Aboriginal Development: The Process Is Critical to Success,” outlines a methodology for Aboriginal development which stresses “that the cohesiveness of the social system is essential to successful development.”⁵⁹ Chataway writes of a process that aims to support long-term development by increasing social cohesion, beginning with a community collectively defining cultural values for itself. This

58. Interview with Wesley Moneyas, 15 August 2010, Hollow Water, Manitoba.

59. C. Chataway, “Aboriginal Development: The Process Is Critical to Success,” in *Aboriginal Policy Research: Setting the Agenda for Change*, vol. II, ed. J. White, P. Maxim, and D. Beavon (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2004), 65.

process, she adds, needs to be “consistent with cultural values, focussed initially on building working relationships across groups, and actively inclusive,”⁶⁰ the last especially in light of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples’s recommendation that “rebuilding a sense of trust and connectedness”⁶¹ is vital for Aboriginal community development — social, political, and economic. Chataway describes the interconnectedness between social vitality, economic viability, and political efficacy, citing a study of eight northern communities that looked at these factors. Social vitality, defined in terms of a reciprocal relationship process for solving problems and sharing information, was found to be the most crucial for an enduring outcome of all three factors.

In terms of political efficacy, Chataway describes a delicate balance that outsiders need to acknowledge, respecting the band council’s authority on one hand while also listening to and integrating some of the many other voices and interests in a community.⁶² It is a great challenge to recognize a band council’s authority, while remembering that the system of electing band councils is a colonial invention instituted by the Indian Act that often embodies the patriarchal structures of Euro-Canadian society. By way of example, Nisichiwayasihk Cree Nation and Tataskweyak Cree Nation have both recently put forward a small number of people with whom Manitoba Hydro will negotiate complex legal agreements towards partial ownership of future hydro dams on the Churchill-Nelson river system. That leaves the majority of the people outside the elite inner circle, left at best as industrial workers, usually to the low-skilled and short-lived construction jobs. This left many workers both unhappy and clamouring for better hours and wages at an Aboriginal workers’ blockade of the Wuskwatim Dam construction site in August 2009.⁶³ Within a social economy framework and according to the participatory process that Chataway proposes, the process being employed by Manitoba Hydro in northern Manitoba would fail to meet the test.

Maximizing profit as an end, not a tool, is clearly not compatible with Aboriginal cultural values nor with the current structure of Aboriginal communities and traditional lands. The model conceives of the human being as an instrument and thus continues to dehumanize those involved, a process that Aboriginal people over the centuries of contact have re-

60. *Ibid.*, 66.

61. *Ibid.*, 67.

62. Chataway, 68.

63. See <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/nisichawayasihk-cree-blockade-wuskwatim-hydroelectric-dam-jobs-canada-2009>.

sisted, on the strength of their own informal economy. The social economy was meant to guard against state authoritarianism through self-organizing, autonomous, and participatory social economic structures. Given the state's history of paternalism, embodied in the welfare system, the coercive and assimilation-oriented residential schools policy, and the top-down control of Aboriginal governance, one can see how swinging away from the pole of intense state control might be a priority for Aboriginal peoples. The social economy seems to find a happy medium between individualism and top-down state control, as exemplified by Neechi Foods or by following processes such as those proposed by Chataway. Clearly the navigation of internal Aboriginal politics by an outside researcher will require nuanced consideration.

Conclusion

Development cannot be seen through an economic lens alone, through which enterprise loses sight of its social purpose and profit becomes an end in itself rather than a means to a social end. Furthermore, a praxis must be found wherein Aboriginal people are the initiators and decision makers in any development project, not acted upon or reduced “to objects of policy discussion rather than enabling them as active participants.”⁶⁴ Peter Puxley has written that “no healthy human being opposes *his* [or her] *own* development. On the contrary, all human beings by nature, seek to develop,”⁶⁵ clarifying, if one agrees with his assessment, that *how* development takes place is as important as *what* constitutes its substance. Democratic and progressive development thus will also not be top down, but grassroots, participatory, and emancipatory, recognizing that

men develop themselves. They are not developed, or subject to development, by others. The word “development” can only describe that *process* through which men develop. For example, a man cannot, as the saying goes, “develop economically.” A corporation can, a mine can, but a man cannot be regarded as an *object* in the same sense without destroying what makes him a man, uniquely human. Men, rather than “developing economically,” can meet their material needs in a

64. Findlay and Wuttunee, 19.

65. P. Puxley, “The Colonial Experience,” in *Dene Nation: The Colony Within*, ed. Mel Watkins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 107.

manner which contributes to their development as men or in a manner which dehumanizes them.⁶⁶

I hope this research will contribute to challenging the dehumanizing logic of colonialism and that as an outsider I can learn as I contribute, respond to community needs rather than suggest ways forward, and build relationships rather than implement abstract models. Governments need to implement capacity-building partnerships with First Nations on the east side of Lake Winnipeg as all-weather roads are constructed. When implementing policies and funding agreements, they would do best to take the lead from the people regarding the type of development they pursue. They need to be sensitive to the historic transformation that social economic enterprises can embody, more than simply starting a business or two, for social enterprises can be a means to a much greater, transformative end — emancipation from colonialism and self-determination built upon cultural capital and strengths. Implementing the best ideas of the social economy has the potential to be an expression of community culture, its values, needs, and pursuits. The outcome will be positive if the process honours, empowers and meets the needs of those involved, while looking after the land that is the ultimate source of sustainable, living cultures.

66. Puxley, 107.

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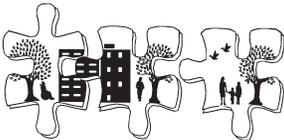


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