



Social Enterprises  
Knowledgeable Economies  
and Sustainable Communities

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Relying on Their Own Resources  
Building an Anishinaabek-Run, Sustainable Economy  
in the East Side Boreal — *Waabanong* — of Lake Winnipeg

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



## Relying on Their Own Resources

Heartfelt thanks to Louis Young of Bloodvein and Winnipeg for taking so much time to share his perspectives, history, and stories with me, and later introducing me to people in Bloodvein who hosted and welcomed me into their homes and community.

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of Lake Winnipeg

ALON WEINBERG



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Centre for the Study of Co-operatives  
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Editor's note: The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy mentioned in this paper was discontinued in March 2013. And Bill 6, also mentioned in this paper, has since been passed into law as The East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Areas Act.

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*Dedicated to the memory of Garry Raven of Hollow Water  
for all his work and dedication to bringing awareness to the boreal forest ecosystem  
and the rich cultural traditions practised on the land.  
Also for hosting and teaching so many of us over so many years  
in so open and inviting a manner  
on his land at Raven's Creek before his sudden passing.  
You are sorely missed.*

## PREFACE

I HAVE NEVER SPENT SIGNIFICANT TIME deep inside what is commonly called “the bush” in northern Manitoba, getting to know the land with the intimacy of a trapper or a hunter. A non-Native urbanite, I am illiterate in the text of the land that is the boreal forest, unable to read the rivers and lakes as roads, the snowmobile trails as pathways to other communities and to traps, the pathways near communities as medicine and berry trails. When I have been paddling along the Maskwa River out of sight of roads and well beyond the incessant humming of machines, the experiences have been marked by the temporality of tourism, fully dependent upon the imported goods I have brought in with me for sustenance. Not only have I never shot an animal for food, but I have never even so much as held a gun. Not only have I never fished my dinner, but my first and only attempt at it as a child ended with the rod cracking, a crack that marked the end of my fishing practice and a deepening of my colonized alienation from the land in which I was born. At the end of each trip into the bush, idyllic in its peacefulness so long as one has packed lunch, I always return to urban civilization the way I arrived, with the benefit of paved highways, the combustion engine and its petroleum-based fuel, and usually according to a date on the calendar marking the continuation of regularly scheduled programming. Never long enough to even begin to lay down a pattern of living that can be sustained; it is the repeated unsustainable nature of my relationship to the land of my birth — my home but not quite my “native land” in a historic sense but rather a place of crisis and of questioning — that has led me to consider what sustainable living looks like on the edge of the prairie and the boreal, and how life can be sustained here going into the future. The only place to turn to even begin to answer these questions is the local Indigenous culture, with all its complexity and colonially conditioned social disjunction.

The intersection of a people and a land over time produces knowledge and culture that are delicately woven with and completely dependent upon the abundance that the land has to offer. Animals, plants, medicines, places, ceremonies, seasons, all form the tapestry of culture that is at once ecological and particular, and at the same time part of a deeper human semantic of being alive on this planet. Such a deep pattern takes centuries to form and yet, as recent history has shown, outside interference can break this pattern down more quickly than it was formed. The colonial period of the fur trade and later the post-Confederation period of the Indian agent and the Indian Residential Schools, followed by government paternalism, post-residential-school abuse trauma and self-medication, and the shift towards a resource-exploitative economy are all layered over top of the older pattern — sometimes replacing it and often contradicting it. While it may seem natural to know the story of the land on which one lives, to participate in the ecology and culture of place, from the perspective of Winnipeg — a cultural, urban centre amidst a sparsely populated prairie and adjacent to an even more sparsely populated boreal region — the area beyond the perimeter is most often associated with holidays or vacations by a lake. What is not apparent to the dominant society is inherent in the being of Indigenous people still connected with place and with the stories that have survived, against all odds, until today. I speak as a settler, albeit a late-comer, the first generation of my family born here. I come from a family of survivors, grandparents trapped in the Nazi prisons of World War II. Born free in a vast land of plenty, I have discovered another population of survivors, the First Nations people, whose very existence is a reminder of Canada's efforts to destroy their culture. This project is one of my efforts to make sense of the place where I was born, raised, and hope to stay — only, however, if another story can be heard, if a new future can be fashioned from the rubble of the cruel, misguided policies imposed upon Canada's Indigenous peoples by the dominant population. This story is one of contradictions, contradictions that belong to all of us but which, sadly, too few have awoken of. This story is about Manitoba, and it is one small part mine to hear and to help tell. The very name describes a sacred place, where the Creator sits or dwells (*Manitou apee*), and I feel the words shared with me and the relationships formed through this journey of discovery are also sacred.

## INTRODUCTION

The east side of Lake Winnipeg — *Waabanong* — or “east” in the Anishinaabek or Ojibway tongue, is one such place of contradictions. Comprised of perhaps the world’s largest contiguous tract of boreal forest without large-scale industrial development,<sup>1</sup> with a dearth of year-round highways, the Manitoba east side as included in the Manitoba Government’s East Side Planning Initiative covers 82,000 square kilometres, one eighth of the province’s land mass, and is the homeland of sixteen First Nation communities:<sup>2</sup> Anishinaabek (Ojibway), Cree, and Oji-Cree, in addition to Métis settlements. This study will look at development of the southwest region of this area, home to the boreal forest Anishinaabek in Manitoba, which comprises the border between First Nation communities with and without year-round road access. As such, it is undergoing social, economic, and cultural transition ahead of areas buffered from southern Manitoba civilization by many more acres of forest, by rivers, and by lakes. Buffered on one hand, and isolated at times on the other, the more northern and eastern parts of this area still support the traditional gathering and hunting lifestyle, but at the same time challenge those living off southern goods, from whose perspective the area is remote and the cost of living high. The general boundary, based on year-round vehicular access — where Provincial Road (PR) 304 veers east and ends — is the Bloodvein River, separating the community of Bloodvein to the north from Hollow Water, Little Black River, and Sagkeeng First Nations, along with the rest of southern Manitoba.

1. See the following maps: <http://www.globalforestwatch.org/english/interactive.maps/canada.htm>; <http://www.heartoftheboreal.ca/see-the-east-side/planning-area-map>; <http://www.wildernesscommittee.mb.ca/graphics/heart-of-boreal/globalforestwatch-let-to-leg-10-04.pdf>.
2. Government of Manitoba, “‘Promises to Keep’: Towards a Broad Area Plan for the East Side of Lake Winnipeg” (Winnipeg: Government of Manitoba, 2004).

This area is currently in acute focus, with the Government of Manitoba forging ahead with plans to pave the old Rice River logging road, to build a bridge over the Bloodvein River, and to extend PR 304 north to the communities of Bloodvein and Beren's River, laying down the early grid-marks for a matrix of industrial development that could eventually open up the entire east side of Lake Winnipeg to further development. What the development will look like will be determined by a nuanced dance of policies and wills among First Nations, the Government of Manitoba, industries with claim to timber and minerals in the area, and environmental groups seeking to protect this massive, intact boreal forest. The development plans on the east side are comprised of the material and the political. The latter will be examined in terms of the large file of bureaucratic documentation — policies, agreements, legislation, and reports of various kinds — that has been produced by and for the Government of Manitoba over the last ten years. The former will be articulated through the voices of community members I have interviewed who are seeking a better future for their people. The trajectory of development, which will be examined through the Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Centre currently being designed, is also fundamentally a cultural matter based on a colonized history and efforts at cultural reclamation and renewal taking place in Canada's Aboriginal communities.

## THE TWO MATRICES OF WAABANONG

THIS PAPER WILL TRACE THE HISTORY of the development plans for the east side of Lake Winnipeg over the last decade or so, considering local Anishinaabek responses to a primarily government-initiated planning process. I will compare two visions for Waabanong: that of the Government of Manitoba and that of board members of the Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Centre, a cultural centre to be constructed at Hollow Water over the coming two years. I interviewed the latter — members of Little Black River, Hollow Water, and Bloodvein First Nations — in the summer of 2010. Understanding the process of creating the centre will serve as an example of social economic development based on Anishinaabek culture and values — that rich matrix of people, land use, memory, and cultural transmission that highlights and seeks to heal and restore some of the traditional cultural patterns of the boreal Anishinaabek people. Examining the creation of the cultural interpretive centre is a case study in restoring traditional knowledge to a community; establishing self-determination through the process is vital, especially as the east side becomes more vulnerable to layers of external interference. Whether the government is assisting and protecting the First Nations and the boreal on the east side or is furthering the colonization of Aboriginal lands will be evaluated *vis-a-vis* the government's policies on the east side and how they are being disseminated as well as how local First Nations involved in the cultural centre are responding to them.<sup>3</sup>

3. The nature of various development models is questioned more at length in another paper on this topic: see Alon Weinberg, *The Reality of the Social Economy and Its Empowering Potential for Boreal Anishinaabek Communities in Eastern Manitoba* (Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, 2014).

### **From the COSDI Report to the WNO Accord: A Long Road of Papers**

**T**O UNDERSTAND HOW DEVELOPMENT for the area is being framed, it is important to examine the process the Manitoba Government has used to address First Nations' issues on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, and also to look at what other vested interests are driving the development agenda. The entire framework needs to be evaluated in terms of prospects for the development of a truly social economy on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

The COSDI — Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation — process occurred in Manitoba between autumn 1997 and spring 1999, and resulted in a report that was adopted by the Manitoba Government in October 2000.<sup>4</sup> The report recommended that the government undertake broad area planning (BAP), defined as “integrated and coordinated planning that is based on the sustainability of the ecosystem. Such a planning process ensures that future land, resource and development decisions address the environmental, social, health, cultural and economic needs of the public, local communities, First Nations and various stakeholders and interest groups.”<sup>5</sup>

It is important to compare this framework for sustainable development with Anishinaabek perspectives — those working on the ground to develop their communities and protect the boreal in relationship with the land. *Sustainable development* has become the buzz-word of environmentally conscious economic development, emerging out of the document “Our Common Future” — also known as *The Bruntland Report*<sup>6</sup> — and put forward as an international paradigm for economic development during the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>7</sup> The International Institute for Sustainable Development was founded in Winnipeg during those years of environmental optimism by both provincial and federal Progressive Conservative governments, and when the new millennium rolled around,

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4. “Promises to Keep,” 11.

5. Ibid.

6. International Institute for Sustainable Development, “What is Sustainable Development?”  
<http://www.iisd.org/sd/>.

7. <http://sdgateway.net/introsd/definitions.htm>.

Manitoba's ministries of Environment and Natural Resources were folded into a new ministry called Conservation. This change is key for understanding the context of the COSDI report and the initiation of the first broad area planning process — the East Side Planning Initiative (ESPI) — designed to bring all stakeholders together to make plans for the development of the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Understanding the multistakeholder process is vital to analyzing the government's agenda(s). The final report of the ESPI, "Promises to Keep," reflects the multiple interests in the east side: "Although its population is largely situated in 16 First Nations communities, each with its own aspirations, there is a significant interest in the area by other Manitobans because it represents to some an area of pristine beauty and to others, exciting economic development potential."<sup>8</sup>

Embedded in this conceptualization are several major flaws associated with both the dominant growth economics paradigm and its "environmental" extension — sustainable development. First, the fact that some find the east side an area of pristine beauty while others see its economic development potential creates an unhealthy schism reflecting how the environment and the economy are framed as either/or perspectives, pitted against each other in major disputes such as the clear-cut-logging camps in the early 1990s in Clayoquot Sound, BC. As David Suzuki and countless others have pointed out, "economics" and "ecology" share a common root — "eco" — from the Greek *oikos*, meaning "home."<sup>9</sup> Several First Nations members expressed a similar perspective, understanding the economy to be dependent upon the land, a perspective that will be addressed further in the description of local solutions to social economic development based on real sustainability. While the paradigm of sustainable development is meant to bridge the schism between ecology and economy, it seems from the language being used that the schism is only being reified, that the ecological and economic interests remain distinct at the table but must compromise with each other.

Second, the report places the interests of the sixteen First Nations whose homelands comprise the territory under discussion alongside the interests of "other Manitobans." Situating these broad interests on the same plane represents the Government of Manitoba's failure to recognize the inherent Aboriginal rights to the land and treaty rights to self-governance. It also ignores the foundational character of Aboriginal and treaty rights to the very existence of both Canada and Manitoba, and their subsequent trampling-upon through the

8. "Promises to Keep," 11.

9. David Suzuki, Public Lecture at event titled Eco-Shift: Shift Your Thinking, Live Better, Shaarey Zedek Synagogue, 26 September 2010, Winnipeg.

Indian Act. This pattern of placing Aboriginal interests on a level with environmental concerns and the interests of industry and the government is a hallmark of sustainable development methodology. Insofar as all interests are fused into one process — often called a “round table” — there is no singular priority. Sustainable development as a policy lever lacks the historic and ecological understanding that no process begins from a neutral point, but rather is based on a history, almost always political. In this case, the dispossession of First Nations peoples and the global context of the ecological crisis — in terms of both climate change and loss of biodiversity — ought to be prioritized over the resource-extractive economics associated with “growth.”

The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) is even more direct in trying to bring Aboriginal communities into non-renewable resource development rather than questioning its pursuit in an age marked by depletion and economic boom/bust cycles. The 2001 NRTEE report entitled *Aboriginal Communities and Non-Renewable Resource Development* does not disguise its agenda of switching Aboriginal communities’ modes of production from traditional to industrial, stating in its executive summary on capacity building that “life skills in areas such as money management, career planning and cross-cultural communication are also required as Aboriginal peoples make the transition to the wage economy.”<sup>10</sup> The assumption that Aboriginal peoples are inevitably going to transition to the wage economy reflects the rhetoric of a society that has already tried to separate Indigenous peoples from their land-based culture.<sup>11</sup> Rather than assuming economic growth is virtuous, researchers should employ a more qualitative measurement of progress to determine how the east side communities can benefit from development and increase their well-being. Qualitative measuring indexes such as the Canadian Wellbeing Index<sup>12</sup> or the Genuine Progress Indicator might provide a better model to analyse social conditions in First Nation communities, but even these quantitative formulae differ from a self-determining, inside-out model of development from within the community. If development is to be part of the decolonization process, then these indexes should be complementary tools to and situated within a much larger political project of self-governance and self-determination.

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10. Government of Canada, National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, *Aboriginal Communities and Non-Renewable Resource Development* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2001), xxi.

11. For a further discussion of modes of production, the informal economy, and social formation, see Weinberg, *The Reality of the Social Economy*.

12. For one approach, see “How Are Canadians Really Doing? A Closer Look at Select Groups” (Waterloo: Canadian Index of Wellbeing, University of Waterloo, December 2009).

### **Insiders' Perspectives and the Formation of the Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Centre**

A SHIFT FROM A TRAPPING AND HUNTING ECONOMY to a more exchange-dependent social economy can only take place if the government reworks its relationship with the Anishinaabek people and their traditional lands. This shift is being presumed by both the government and some community leaders to be a *fait accompli*. Historically, the division of Aboriginal lands — those “traditional territories” beyond the official treaty reserve boundaries — in the boreal regions has been along the traplines, a freezing of territorial definition according to a moment in trapping tradition within a much longer presence on the land. The East Side Planning Initiative was about hearing the voices of community members along with the other interests “around the table”; once the process reached a formal level, I wanted to hear more directly the perspectives of some of the more “traditional”<sup>13</sup> community members from Little Black River, Hollow Water, and Bloodvein First Nations. The first two are communities already accessed by Manitoba’s PR-304 highway, while the third is on the verge of being connected by newly paved highways and a bridge across the Bloodvein River. Louis Young, former chief of Bloodvein and an outspoken defender of the land, pointed out early in our four-and-a-half hours of discussion the problem of how government definitions of traditional Anishinaabe lands hinder community self-development and economic initiative:

The provincial government seems to think that in order for us to maintain rights to those traplines, that we have to be trapping. That’s not my view. Those traditional territories — even though they’ve been divided into family traplines — Delgamuukw and Donald Marshall Supreme Court cases say that First Nations have first rights to those resources. So if we want to change how we use those traplines — let’s say that we want to do cultural tourism — then we do that. And they can’t come and say, “You’re no longer trapping,

13. For the theoretical problems associated with the term “traditional,” I interviewed people with a sense of their people’s histories, who feel strongly about their Anishinaabek identity, who are concerned with the general and collective futures of their people, and who are engaged and actively working for it. These individuals are members of the advisory board to the Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Centre, about which I will speak later.

we're going to take those traplines away." We're just using that traditional territory in a different way.<sup>14</sup>

This bureaucratic demarcation of the land is a typical practice of colonialism, a limitation to self-determination and social economic development that needs to be addressed if Waabanong First Nations are to fulfill their desires for economic self-sufficiency without being frustrated by bureaucratic stumbling blocks.

Louis has been one of the leading visionaries behind the collective enterprise called the Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Learning Centre, an educational centre for locals and visitors alike, to be housed in the community of Hollow Water near where the current Highway PR-304 curves east towards the mining community of Bissett, along the Wanipigow River at a site called English Brook.<sup>15</sup> "Waabanong" means "east" in Ojibway; it is a term repeated in the provincial government's recent WNO (Waabanong Nakaygum Okimawin) Accord with east side communities, the result of the ESPI and the broad area planning, to be discussed in more detail later. It is important to understand some of the background to the formation of the centre in order to appreciate the self-directed quality of development that is possible on the east side, and especially to see that the vision of this centre is ultimately based on cultural and spiritual renewal. That is not to say that the founders of the centre do not have economics in mind; they are highly sensitive to moving forward economically, socially, culturally, and spiritually at the same time, believing that economics cannot be divorced from either the past or from efforts to retain and transmit Anishinaabek cultural values to youth and to the outer world. The project's initiators feel that before people can be motivated to participate in broad economic planning, they need to be spiritually inspired through cultural connections. And yet with pressing material needs, economic development cannot simply be put off. The Centre, they told me, is intended to help people feel pride in and connection to their traditional culture. It is also hoped that it will provide an exemplary model for economic development on the east side once it has been opened up by year-round roads.

The vision for the interpretive centre began at Raven's Creek with the late Elder Garry

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

15. See "Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Centre Development Plan," prepared for Waabanong Anishinaabe Elders Group Inc. by WILD International in association with Economic Growth Solutions, September 2009, for the official report outlining the development prospects of the centre.

Raven of Hollow Water. Raven's Creek, situated on the Wanipigow River and accessed by road on Hollow Water First Nation, served as an incubating grounds for the centre. Garry's tipi village had long hosted educational sessions on Anishinaabek boreal culture. Garry taught in the local school and invited students to the land of which he was caretaker; the University of Manitoba held Native Studies courses in the tipi village; environmental NGOs such as the Wilderness Committee and the Boreal Forest Network have held gatherings there; visitors from around the world came to learn from Garry; and Garry himself traveled to meet other peoples of the boreal — called "taiga" in Europe — in his visit to Russia. Featured in the June 2002 *National Geographic* issue on the boreal forest, Garry became a recognized voice for protecting the land, studying the medicines, and being a living embodiment of Anishinaabek culture. In 2007, he held a pipe ceremony for the protection of the east side of Lake Winnipeg at the Thunderbird House in Winnipeg. Garry passed away suddenly in January 2010, leaving behind a cultural void and a vast, diverse community of knowledge-bearing family, friends, and students. It was during the last five years of his life that he began to bring many people together to realize his vision for the centre, creating an advisory board that is carrying the project through in concert with representatives of the Manitoba Government.

Louis Young, close friend of Garry's and someone who partook regularly in gatherings at Raven's Creek, outlined the three main goals of the interpretive centre as he saw them:

- to educate Anishinaabek students about their own culture and traditions
- to provide opportunities for non-Native students to learn about culture and traditions associated with the Indigenous culture of the boreal region
- to create employment for people in the community of Hollow Water<sup>16</sup>

While the third goal most relates to the conventional aims of the social economy insofar as the results are tangible and can be measured, it is the first two goals that are crucial for the larger cultural project envisioned by Garry and Louis and others, namely, to decolonize their community members' relationships with each other, with the land, and with the dominant society.

Wesley Moneyas lives in Hollow Water and, like many other First Nations people, has made a diverse living from various natural resources. Once a logger for Tembec's pulp and

16. Interview with Louis Young, August 2010, Winnipeg.

paper mill at Pine Falls, an hour's drive south of Hollow Water, Wesley now works seasonally as a fisherman and is a board member of the Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Learning Centre. Wesley understands the value of the social economic and co-operative models, himself president of the Hollow Water Fishers' Co-operative, which was recently formed to fill the void left by the dissolution of the embattled Wanipigow Fisher's Co-operative. He also understands the legalities and technicalities of functioning under the Manitoba Co-operatives Act. During our lengthy interview one Sunday afternoon in August amidst a three-day rain and windstorm, Wesley outlined how he, a long-time friend of Garry and also a bearer of his people's cultural legacy, saw the interpretive centre contributing to the local economy. First, he brought up the cultural motivation he shared with Garry:

We're losing our teachings and our way of how our people used to conduct themselves, and they put together an idea that it should be preserved to help future generations with the teachings, and their way was to put together something building-wise and offer educational programs for people that want to know about the east side and the people that live on the east side, and that's how it came about.<sup>17</sup>

He outlined for me how he saw the educational centre tying into the economic aspect, as a hub is related to the spokes of the wheel. While the interpretive centre would not have accommodation at first on site, members of the community would be able to host people to provide small amounts of income. This vision resonated with Robert Raven, who moved back to Hollow Water after a near-decade absence to manage Raven's Creek with his brother. Raven envisioned modernizing the centre to include showers, better toilets, and more comfortable accommodations within the tipis, as well as offering people guided access to the Wanipigow River.<sup>18</sup> Mooniyas imagined various cultural activities at the centre — making bannock, making moccasins, teaching other arts and crafts, working with traditional medicines, harvesting and processing wild rice, and participating in sweat lodges and other hallmark Anishinaabek cultural practices that would get youth interested in their heritage. Honoraria would be given to individuals who shared knowledge, crafts, and teachings at the centre, acknowledgement and confirmation of what was so devastatingly devalued by the Indian Residential Schools policy.

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17. Interview with Wesley Moneyas, Hollow Water, August 2010.

18. Interview with Robert Raven, Raven's Creek, Hollow Water, August 2010.

Garry Raven had a vast knowledge of traditional medicines. In September 2009 — the last time I saw Garry — the group gathered at Raven’s Creek to discuss the interpretive centre, the upcoming construction of roads through the boreal, and the protection of the land in general. During those sunny late September days, we went out onto the land and into the water to harvest medicines, which we then learned how to process. Sacred ceremonies blended with community discussion and traditional land-based practices, illustrating how the interpretive centre can function as a model for renewing the many interconnections of traditional culture.

Building birch-bark canoes is another example of a traditional Indigenous practice that could be revived. While nobody at Hollow Water has built such a canoe in recent years, the task was recently undertaken at Sagkeeng First Nation. Mooniyas felt that the collective pooling of traditional knowledge from various communities, including those on the east side that will eventually have road access to the south, would help the Anishinaabek Nation retrieve their traditional knowledge and practices and preserve them for future generations — as long as the land base is relatively intact. People like Ernest McPherson of Little Black Water, the oldest interpretive centre board member, saw the potential of the Hollow Water model to spark a renaissance in interest in their Anishinaabek culture among the youth, as a source not only of pride but also as a basis for cultural and ecological tourism. According to Ernest, “The Elders know a lot of knowledge, and they’re still around.”<sup>19</sup>

I asked Mooniyas about other land-based, resource-driven economic development, such as the collection and sale of non-timber forest products through a co-operative. He claimed that the regulatory framework limited these types of initiatives, rendering them not economically worthwhile:

The biggest thing we have now is government controls what we do, whether it’s on reserve or off reserve. And based on the treaties, basically we signed away our future to sit on the reserve and be poor, because we cannot do that to make profit.<sup>20</sup>

The presence of Robert Raven on the board of the interpretive centre is significant in two respects: first, as the son of Garry Raven, he is continuing the direct involvement in the

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19. Interview with Ernest McPherson, Little Black River, August 2010.

20. Mooniyas interview, August 2010.

evolution of the project, and second, he represents the generation gap the interpretive centre is intending to address by engaging more youth in hands-on education and economic opportunities emerging from the local culture.

“There’s a lot of people who walk around and wish they had something to do on a daily basis,”<sup>21</sup> Robert tells me, reflecting on how he hopes this centre will become a focal point for community life. Although he sees government policies as possible bureaucratic obstacles to progress, he also recognizes that his generation can better access funds for economic development than less system-savvy Elders.<sup>22</sup> Robert, about thirty years old, typifies many of his generation, disconnected from their traditions on a day-to-day level. In his case, however, he was exposed to traditional teachings as his father reclaimed lost Anishinaabek cultural practices and ceremonies. Thus, the cultural interpretive centre is acting as a catalyst for him, just as a wind rekindles a dwindling campfire: “It’s going to be a place where I can grow into, follow my culture again, pick up my bundle and follow that way of life.”<sup>23</sup> Without the fire of traditional awareness and practice burning within the youth in the area, the development of the east side will not serve the needs of the Anishinaabe Nation and may result in the further imposition of Euro-Canadian values.

### **Economic Development as Capacity Building and Social Transformation**

**M**OST, IF NOT ALL, of the sixteen First Nations in the east side face similar social and economic conditions, the product of a collapsed subsistence and later trade economy (the fur trade), followed by decades of rule by outsiders and the residential school policy, which disrupted the organic transmission of cultural knowledge. There was a diminished practice of hunting-gathering, a partial loss of language, and a significant loss of spiritual ceremony. Louis Young refers to the paternalistic cycle of dependency and the passivity and inability of the people to control their individual and collective futures as “Indian Agent Syndrome.”

I sometimes call it Indian Agent Syndrome. I remember the days the Indian Agent used to come into our reserve — and it wasn’t until years later actually

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21. Raven interview, August 2010.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

when I began to look at this, that I realized the Indian Agent used to make all the decisions. I'm sure he had people he consulted with, but he made decisions. If decisions were made while he was gone and he didn't like them, he would overrule them and then make a new decision. And when that happens over a number of years, people begin to think, "What's the use in my making decisions, it's going to be overruled anyway?" So over a period of years, I guess people just wait for someone else to make the decision.<sup>24</sup>

One might ask how the Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Learning Centre will break out of this paternalistic model, build community capacity, and become self-sufficient over time, with the initial funding for its construction and operating budget coming from the Government of Manitoba, with INAC playing no role at all to date.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the general social economy approach of "placing social and human concerns at the centre of economics,"<sup>26</sup> historic questions around Aboriginal self-government and control of their land base must be taken into account. Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson cite an observation made in a study by Robert Anderson,<sup>27</sup> that Aboriginal communities

exhibit a predominantly collective approach to economic development that is closely tied to each group's traditional lands, its identity as a nation, and its desire to be self-governing. This collective development approach is intended to serve three purposes: the attainment of economic self-sufficiency, the improvement of socio-economic circumstance, and the preservation and strengthening of traditional culture, values and languages.<sup>28</sup>

Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson cite the innovative social and economic development strategies employed by the Cree community of Oujé-Bougoumou in Quebec. Aiming for self-determination, band members are rebuilding their community with local labour and

24. Young interview, March 2010.

25. Mooniyas interview, August 2010.

26. John Restakis, "Defining the Social Economy — The BC Context" (Vancouver: British Columbia Co-operative Association, prepared for the BC Social Economy Round Table, January 2006), 2.

27. Robert Brent Anderson, *Economic Development among the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: The Hope for the Future* (North York: Captus Press, 1999), 13–14.

28. 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), 19.

developing their own community services, a model they compare to the Israeli kibbutz.<sup>29</sup> Economic development is thus seen as fundamentally tied to a political process of moving towards self-governance, serving a collective social goal, the essential definition of a social economy model. The Aboriginal struggle for self-governance makes all economic development decisions — especially those around a process as large as the East Side Planning Initiative — fundamentally political, and thus the question of process needs to be considered.

### **Other Important Contexts on the East Side**

#### *World Heritage Site and Pimachiowin Aki*

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS to come out of the East Side Planning Initiative is the attempt to create a World Heritage Site covering approximately forty thousand square kilometres of traditional Anishinaabe territory, Atikaki and Woodland Caribou provincial parks in Manitoba and Ontario, and other crown lands.<sup>30</sup> Five First Nations — Poplar River, Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids, and Bloodvein in Manitoba and Pikangikum in Ontario — are leading the application to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization to gain recognition of Waabanong's distinct ecological and cultural traits. The project is being sponsored by the governments of Manitoba and Ontario. The proposed site is to be called *Pimachiowin Aki*, which means "The Land that Gives Life." The process has led to communities engaging in traditional land-use area planning and Poplar River First Nation community member Sophia Rabliauskas was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in 2007 for her efforts.<sup>31, 32</sup> Community-led land-use planning efforts were also featured in the Manitoba Government's 2008 legislation titled Bill 6: The East Side Traditional Lands Planning Act and Special Protected Areas Act. Creating a World Heritage Site in the area would draw international attention, affording the First Nations an opportunity to develop ecological

29. Ibid., 20.

30. See <http://www.pimachiowinaki.org>.

31. See <http://www.goldmanprize.org/node/607>.

32. See also Agnieszka Pawlowska, "Using the Global to Support the Local: Community Development at Poplar River and the Establishment of a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Northern Manitoba," unpublished MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 2009.

tourism. The interpretive centre is the first effort to develop a model based on Anishinaabe culture and an initial draw to an area hitherto underrated for its harmony between culture and ecology.

### *Bill 6*

BILL 6 WAS INTRODUCED INTO THE THIRD SESSION of the Government of Manitoba's thirty-ninth legislature in 2008. It is one of several keys in the government's strategy for both developing and protecting the east side boreal region of Lake Winnipeg. The thrust of the legislation is to prevent any development on the east side of Lake Winnipeg before the First Nations and Aboriginal communities have developed their own land-use and resource-management plans.<sup>33</sup> Section 3(1) of the act states that "One or more First Nations or aboriginal communities may request that an area of Crown land in the east side management area that they have traditionally used be designated as a traditional use planning area."<sup>34</sup> It goes on to describe the procedures for the designation. While a bureaucratic document written in government language that many community members may never bother to decipher, Bill 6 is nonetheless a progressive step towards acknowledging Aboriginal self-determination in their traditional lands in the eastern boreal region. It remains to be seen how the act is implemented, if First Nations will use the opportunity it provides, whether it will adequately protect their interests in the face of competing concerns, and how the legislation might fare under a different government.

### *The Waabanong Nakaygum Okimawin Accord*

CLOSELY RELATED TO THE MOTIVATION BEHIND BILL 6 is the government-to-government agreement created between the Government of Manitoba and the east side First Nation's Council of Chiefs. Known as the Waabanong Nakaygum Okimawin (WNO) Council of Chiefs Accord, the agreement acknowledges the First Nations to be the original inhabitants of the area<sup>35</sup> and sets out a protocol by which "the parties agree to work

33. Bill 6: The East Side Traditional Lands Planning Act and Special Protected Areas Act, 39th legislature, 3rd session (Winnipeg: Government of Manitoba, 2008).

34. *Ibid.*

35. "Waabanong Nakaygum Okimawin Council of Chiefs Accord between the Signatory First Nations Located within the East Side Planning Area of the First Part and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of the Province of Manitoba As Represented by the Premier of Manitoba of the Second Part" (WNO Accord). Available at [www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/wno/pdf/accord\\_april\\_3\\_2007.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/wno/pdf/accord_april_3_2007.pdf).

together in a spirit of mutual recognition, respect and reconciliation to achieve the objectives and goals of the East Side Broad Area Land Use Planning Initiative.”<sup>36</sup> Included in the WNO Accord, the language of which makes it resemble the basis for a new treaty,<sup>37</sup> is a funding agreement that provides the communities with a pool of monies to carry out traditional land-use surveys and planning processes. The accord acknowledges that First Nations need to demarcate their boundaries before any development in the area occurs, a situation that will be far more likely once the area is opened by year-round road access. This strategy is prescient in seeking to avoid conflicts between First Nations and industry over access to land, waters, and subsurface minerals. While the current Manitoba Government has created so much documentation that it would be difficult for another government to easily undo it, these plans have not yet been sold adequately to the First Nations people with whom I spoke, primarily those involved in the more grassroots interpretive centre at Hollow Water.

While the statements that follow do not necessarily align with the letter of the accord, they are important to consider as what Lewis and Lockhart refer to as “perceptual indicators.”<sup>38</sup> Compared to “footprint indicators,” which measure hard data on the delivery of programs, perceptual indicators tell a more subjective story of how local community members perceive a project, or in this case, a broad framework agreement. The perceptions are important in building capacity, as grassroots engagement and popular support for development will offer hope to community members and thus begin the process of rebuilding social capital. In this regard, the WNO Accord has yet to inspire confidence in the people. On the WNO Accord, Wesley Moneyas told me:

What I’ve seen in the last year, two years, with that east side Waabanong Initiative that the province has gotten the First Nations involved in — it’s basically a farce. All you’re doing is, you’re signing on, you’re giving away your treaty rights to that area, to practise self-government, for a lousy \$40,000 one payment, to be part of that WNO — that’s the biggest rip-off I’ve seen. And a lot of these FNs don’t read the whole booklet or the whole document ...<sup>39</sup>

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36. WNO Accord, 1.

37. The document also acknowledges the supremacy of the original treaties and of constitutionally guaranteed Aboriginal rights.

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

39. Interview with Wesley Moneyas, Hollow Water, August 2010.

Louis Young, having once been a chief at Bloodvein First Nation, understands the importance of community initiatives and appreciates the sometimes complex process of dealing with other governments. Louis's statement on the WNO Accord could be taken as reflective of the Manitoba Government's entire approach to the east side, regardless of the progressive legal frameworks laid out in Bill 6 or in the Accord. He did not react positively to mention of the WNO Accord, describing it as "outside people making rules and regulations about Indian lands."<sup>40</sup> In this case, the government's heavy-handed intervention, while it may yield a UNESCO World Heritage Site and open up new possibilities (including cottage developments — both First Nation and provincial-government-controlled), may also undermine collective Aboriginal efforts at self-governance based on building social capital and democratic, local structures. A history of mistrust between First Nations and Euro-Canadian-led governments cannot easily be forgotten or overcome, something members of the Manitoba Government will have to continue to work on regardless of documents, legislation, and agreements already made.

### *Bi-Pole III*

ALTHOUGH MANY MANITOBANS will know little to nothing of the WNO Accord, and even less about Bill 6, most Manitobans are likely aware of the debate around Bi-Pole III in the province. Manitoba Hydro's plans to build new hydroelectricity dams on Cree lands along the Nelson River waterway will also require the construction of new direct-current power lines. These lines will move electricity quickly from north to south — from source to market — likely to Hydro customers in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Near the end of discussions on the East Side Planning Initiative, talks began publicly about whether Hydro would build their lines through the most direct route, the boreal forest Anishinaabe homeland on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. However, with various environmental NGOs supporting the Aboriginal-led World Heritage Site proposal, the Manitoba Government decided to instruct Manitoba Hydro not to build lines through the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Some commentators, including the well-respected Elijah Harper, argued that the power lines should go through the east side boreal and that communities could be compensated for rights-of-way.<sup>41</sup> More traditional people I spoke with, like Garry Raven and Louis Young,

40. Interview with Louis Young, Winnipeg, August 2010.

41. See <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2008/03/03/east-side.html>.

believed the hydro lines would not benefit the ecology of the east side, and people from the NGOs saw hydro lines as impediments to naming the east side as a World Heritage Site. The Manitoba Government agreed, pursuing a longer route through the west of the province, a decision that the official opposition tried to push as the main ballot question in the next provincial election.

### **The East Side Road Authority**

**T**HE MANITOBA GOVERNMENT created the East Side Road Authority<sup>42</sup> (ESRA) to award contracts for road construction and for the crushing of rock that would be used in the roads through the Anishinaabe boreal. At the time of writing, agreements had been made between the ESRA and several First Nations such as Bloodvein and Berens River, to ensure that First Nations people would be employed in the building of all-weather roads to their communities. If roads are to be built, the jobs should go to local people, but unfortunately, this economic model was all-too-similar to the temporary construction jobs that Manitoba Hydro offered Cree people under dam-ownership agreements.<sup>43</sup> From a capacity-building point of view, can the skills learned by building roads sustain people long-term? Can the work be sustained beyond the construction of the roads? Or are the jobs merely temporary make-work efforts? While this model is better than non-engagement with the First Nations of the east side, one has to ask if it fills a void that otherwise, with the right skills training and co-ordination, could support the development of local co-operatives?

First Nations members could form a food-purchasing co-operative to help reduce the cost of food. Co-operatives could be formed to support eco-tourism, promoting the region collectively rather than depending on Tourism Manitoba to brand the area from the central perspective of Winnipeg. One such venture has already been set up — Eastside Aboriginal Sustainable Tourism.<sup>44</sup> Though not a co-operative, it is well within the rubric of the social economy by virtue of its non-profit status. While I did not speak with any of its key members, learning more about its goals and organizational capacities could help create models for communities that will eventually be connected by the year-round roads, making them more accessible to the “outside” world and its much-needed eco-tourism dollars.

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42. See <http://www.eastsideroadauthority.mb.ca/>.

43. For example, the Wuskwatim Dam partial-ownership agreement with the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation.

44. See <http://www.eastinc.ca/>.

## Conclusion

OVER THE LAST DECADE, Manitoba's east side boreal has received worldwide attention — from conservationists for the quality of its wilderness, from climate activists for its intact forests, from industrialists for the potential timber and mineral resources, and from governments eager to develop the area according to the finest principles of sustainable development. This model means exploiting some of the land, thus satisfying some of industry's needs while also raising a new tax base. The model also protects some of the land, thus appeasing the environmental groups and respecting First Nations sensitivities. Unfortunately lost in this model of sustainable development that seeks to be all things to all people is a deeper awareness of the underlying cultural patterns embodied in the post-residential school, post-fur trade communities on the east side. This includes a material history of gathering and hunting that is too often assumed dead and by-passed in favour of more pragmatic options that envision First Nations members joining the southern industrial civilization, often as bottom-of-the-line wage labourers. Not to be forgotten, however, are statistics from 2001, which showed that 40 percent of First Nations people in boreal communities still hunted, fished, or gathered wild plants for food.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, in the Northwest Territories, 30 percent of household income among First Nations was shown to be from non-timber uses of the boreal,<sup>46</sup> a sign that the boreal still is and can again be a source of life and income. Governments are almost certain to repeat past mistakes if they pursue development according to theoretical models and do not consider First Nations' lived histories and understandings of the land. Such an approach is also bound to interfere with First Nations' development of self-governance.

The Government of Manitoba does seem to be developing an understanding of the unique cultural and ecological matrix that makes up the east side of Lake Winnipeg. It has designed special protective legislation that favours the First Nations communities living there, relying on the communities themselves to map out their traditional land use areas.

45. Bryan Bogdanski, *Canada's Boreal Economy: Economic and Socio-Economic Issues and Research Opportunities* (Victoria: Natural Resources Canada, 2008), 10.

46. *Ibid.*

There are two concerns, however, about so greatly formalized a process. On the one hand, once communities map out their traditional territories, one fears that the government, seeking to recover the costs of building and maintaining year-round roads on land that is often muskeg and watery boreal forests, may open up many of the non-claimed areas to cottage development, logging, or mining. On the other hand, if the WNO Accord is seen as a major first step towards self-governance, then First Nations' governments will have to be lobbied like any other jurisdiction, and development is much more likely to embody the cultural history of the Anishinaabe People and protect the land. The creation of social enterprises such as the Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Centre could really help people take pride in and reclaim their traditional culture, while at the same time generating much-needed revenue within the community, revenue that, in turn, could actually help sustain traditional land-based activities not currently supported by government policy. The east side of Lake Winnipeg holds great potential for both people living inside it and also for outsiders. As the boreal forest is understood to comprise the northern lungs of the planet — a treasure to be protected — so should we recognize that each ecosystem contains a unique living culture to be celebrated and supported. There is a concern about economic formalization, particularly the ecotourism that would result from the area becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Does the culture run the risk of becoming an imitation of its former self under the gaze of outsiders? On the other hand, if Elders are directing the cultural teachings, and if they do it with the insider-outsider consciousness, sophistication, and nuance of someone like late Elder Garry Raven, then the development of the east side of Lake Winnipeg will honour the idea of Waabanong, not as the name of a governmental agreement, but as a homeland to a people. Development along these lines would promote and sustain much-needed resources within the region, from outside money to knowledge, skills, and stories. Equally important, a social economy on the east side would also allow for and strengthen cultural continuity in the area. Culture and land are true sources of wealth for any people, and because of the critical environmental impact of the boreal forest, this is particularly true of the Anishinaabek homelands of eastern Manitoba and Ontario.

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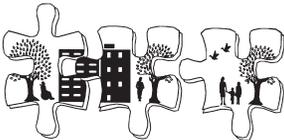


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