THE BOIS-FRANCS EXPERIENCE: REFLECTIONS ON TWO DECADES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

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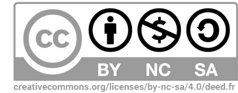

INTRODUCTION (1993)

The seeds of the Bois-Francs community development experience were not any different from those planted elsewhere in Québec. All were sown in the 1960s, the product of a multitude of intense changes occurring simultaneously in Québec's political, religious, and educational institutions and culture.

It was during those years that I moved from Ontario to Québec. The experience was actually much more than just a change of provinces — so much so that "emigrated" might be a more accurate verb. I soon discovered another world altogether, one being shaped by a variety of influences, some of which were familiar to me and others that were less so. For example, I found that the Kennedy years that I had lived through in Welland and Ottawa had also been those of the "Quiet Revolution" in Québec (1960-1966), and that both of these periods, albeit primarily the latter, brought about significant reversals of thought and perception throughout the *québécois* population. They played a major role in changing the way that the people of Québec — especially the younger generation — saw themselves, individually and collectively, as well as their relationships among themselves and with their governments.

The Second Vatican Council, which opened the way for ecumenical upheaval all over the world, also shattered the traditional structure of authority in Québec by introducing a free-thinking democratization of sorts in the rigidly hierarchic Roman Catholic Church. It might even be argued that this religious Council unwittingly fanned the flames of nationalistic fervour by recognizing the importance of one's native language in that most fundamental of all communications, making it possible for francophones here to *officially* speak to God in French. On a more secular level, while most North American campuses were preoccupied with non-violent protest to racial oppression and halting the Viet Nam war, many students in Québec took their cues instead from the more radical *soixante-huitards* in France, the national liberation struggles in Africa, and the revolutionary movements in Central and South America.

In those years, Québec's progressive elements weren't really motivated by the laid-back "flower-power" culture prevailing elsewhere. Indeed, their orientation was by far essentially political and nationalistic — one of "taking charge" instead of "dropping out" — with reforms taking place in almost all spheres, on both structural and cultural levels. I can recall one of the first times that I saw a priest facing his congregation while saying mass, his back turned towards the altar. It became readily apparent who was where to serve whom. If the almighty Church could swing around 180 degrees, couldn't other institutions be made to do the same? Other examples abound — the nationalization of hydroelectricity, the replacing of high schools with *polyvalentes* and community colleges, and the secularization of most hospitals. It is where these examples converge, however, that enables us to identify many of the factors which shaped community development during the second half of the 1960s and in the following decades: a belief that changes could be made on most levels, that the *québécois*

have the knowledge and ability to manage their own destiny, that governments exist to serve the people, that no one is going to do it for us and that we have to take control of *our* own situation. Even after the 1970 October Crisis, while some naivety was lost, resolve for change only increased. It is essentially within this context that community development flourished in Québec and nowhere are the results as striking as in the Bois-Francs.

THE BOIS-FRANCS REGION OF QUÉBEC

"Bois-Francs" refers to an area in southern Québec, north of the Appalachian foothills, about forty kilometres south of the Saint Lawrence River, east of the Eastern Townships and west of the Beauce. Its population (83,000) is dispersed among 48 villages and towns over nearly 3,200 square kilometres. Victoriaville, located about 100 miles east of Montréal, is the largest urban area with a population of about 38,200 and only two other cities in the area have over 3,000 people. Statistics indicate that 98% of the Bois-Francs' population is of French-speaking *québecois* origin, with over 85% being unilingual francophones. This homogeneity is not unique but rather consistent with the demographics of the central regions of Québec. It is also a reflection of the quasi-absence of immigration due mainly to the lack of jobs outside of major cities such as Montréal and Québec.

Jobs are decidedly scarce in the region, with close to 30% of the labour force (mostly young people and women) receiving unemployment or welfare benefits. The other 70% is strewn over a fairly wide spectrum of public and private enterprises, only a third of which however involve manufacturing and related services. Although agriculture is strategically important with the Bois-Francs leading all regions in Québec in annual milk production, actual job creation in this sector is relatively limited. By far the largest employers are in the network of health and social service establishments — the local general hospital alone employs 1,010! — and the local educational system taken as a whole: a *cégep* (community college), the public and private primary and high schools and the school boards.

There private sector includes very few large employers: less than two dozen have over 100 employees and only one has more than 300. While the large plants of the textile and wood product industries dominated the local economy up to about ten years ago — one clothing firm had 1,200 workers on its payroll and one furniture manufacturer had over 400 in the late 1970s — these now employ only about one third of the 8,700 manufacturing-sector workers as opposed to nearly two-thirds in 1981. The industrial base has diversified considerably since then, mostly into food processing and sheetmetal work, but here as elsewhere it is the service sector that has shown most rapid growth. The area is also an acknowledged leader in the recycling field, having pioneered at-source sorting over a decade ago, but only one major manufacturer has been able to venture into this new market. A critical restructuring of the local economy has thus taken place: emphasis has shifted to the entrepreneurship of the local population and to the development of smaller enterprises, most of which become subcontractors for firms located elsewhere.

Nevertheless, poverty has been and still is a serious problem in the Bois-Francs. Salary levels stagnate at 20% below the Québec average, as was always the case in the past for jobs in the "soft" sectors of the rag and wood trades, and as is presently the case in smaller companies. There has also been a

weakening of the trade-union movement in the private sector, due in good part to the growth of low-wage temporary jobs. Finally, since statistics include public sector professionals, local average manufacturing wages and directly related personal revenues (for example, unemployment insurance benefits) are even lower. The alleviation of poverty was the driving force behind the region's first community development initiatives twenty years ago. It remains a driving force today.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE BOIS-FRANCS

In the late 1960s, activists in the Bois-Francs were mainly engaged in Catholic Action organizations, especially the *Jeunesse ouvrière catholique* (JOC) whose goal was nothing less than worker empowerment to counter traditional Marxist doctrine. As was the case in the Mondragón cooperatives, where leaders also emanated from the social action committees of the Roman Catholic Church, a handful of committed people — among them, a worker priest and a couple of JOC activists — prepared the terrain for future development where cultivation was more likely to succeed, tilling the soil, as it were, hand in hand with low-wage earners, trade unionists, and the poor in general. Over the ensuing two decades, growth would take place in three relatively distinct phases, each of which is identified with the local organization which initiated, encouraged, and coordinated community development during each period.

Le CRIS

The movement took root in 1971, with the advent of the Centre de relèvement et d'information sociale (CRIS), a private not-for-profit service organization, whose mission was simply to fulfill any need that people could not tend to themselves, be it food, clothing, shelter, money, loneliness, abuse. The CRIS worked on three fronts:

- its *clinique sociale* offered help in kind (food, clothing, etc.), counseling services (legal matters, personal finances, psychological problems, etc.), and referrals to specific agencies;
- its *action collective* picked up where the clinique sociale ended, building on the areas for collective action pinpointed by the types of individual services rendered. Community organizing followed JOC guidelines, focusing on specific events (for example, a labour dispute) rather than on long term planning, and was directed towards the eventual autonomy of each new organization;
- its *prises de position publiques* in the area's weeklies and on the community television station were nothing less than open denunciations of the injustices of the political and economic system, of a complacent bureaucracy, and of privileges accorded to professionals of every ilk, and these rebukes were usually accompanied by an analysis of the causes and effects of poverty — with examples from the *clinique sociale*'s operations — and by proposals for a renewed social structure based upon participatory democracy and an undefined type of self-government.

In practical terms, by adhering to a guiding principle which, simply stated, saw collective problems as requiring collective solutions, the CRIS got its constituency involved in organizing food co-ops and

developing a number of advocacy groups. It was here that were nurtured the unusual ties between the co-ops and the other community groups in the Bois-Francs that are still present today.

The CRIS' leadership role waned near the end of the decade. One factor was its refusal to debate activists sympathetic to the Marxist-Leninist cause, which was in its heyday at the time and had rallied a number of leaders from various community groups. A split occurred between leading activists. Those who had become soft "MLers" (and who were outside of the CRIS) were seeking a more rigourous intellectual framework. But their intellectual honesty eventually conflicted with the dogmatism of the communist groups and led to their leaving them. These "MLers", however, succeeded in rivaling the CRIS' leaders and ultimately broke the CRIS' monopoly on community development. Combined with this, the CRIS often had more pressing problems: a deteriorating financial situation put its very existence on the line more than once during this period.

Le CLSC

The *CLSC Suzor-Coté* was founded in 1981 by one of the CRIS' leaders after a number of years of preparatory work. The setting up of a Local Community Service Centre (health and social services) was seen by many as a logical extension of the CRIS' practices, so much so that the CRIS' entire staff was merged into the CLSC, leaving the CRIS to function as merely a legal shell for food and similar handouts to the needy, services which the CLSC was prohibited by law in providing. It goes without saying that the CRIS' philosophy and organizing principles were also imported into this public institution, although these were quickly overshadowed by unexpected bureaucratic constraints and eventually shoved aside by more traditional values. Developing the CLSC's policies, programmes and physical infrastructure took precedence over community development and with time, relations with the area's community-based organizations became strained. Moreover, the CLSC's funding for community organizing was extremely limited, to the point where its management became involved in the setting up of a new, private organization to do this type of work. To many on the inside as well as on the outside, the overall direction being taken by the CLSC was inherently bureaucratic, and had little to do with an alternative model of service delivery which the CLSC had striven to create in its early years. Partly because of these concerns, some of the most committed practitioners actually left the CLSC to reintegrate into grass-roots organizations.

During this period, community development was haphazard at best, with new groups emanating from movements which had no ties to the CRIS or the CLSC — the women's movement, the environmental movement — and with older CBOs reeling from the double blows of the economic downturn (with its corresponding cutbacks in public funds) and the demobilization of engaged activists, nationalists and non-nationalists alike, in the years following the referendum defeat. Many people felt a need for greater cohesion and some kind of organizational support. Assisted by the CLSC's management, a few militant leaders of the community-based organizations were able to obtain funding for a pilot project from the first Regional Economic Summit in 1983, which would allow the establishment of Québec's first community development corporation[1].

La "Corpo"

Although numerous community-based organizations rapidly branched out of the CRIS' initial stem and while others took root alongside them in the early years of the CLSC, the true blossoming of the Bois-Francs' communitarian movement took some time. It took shape in the mid-1980s in form of the *Corporation de développement communautaire des Bois-Francs* (CDCBF), the "*Corpo*". Incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation in June, 1984, the "*Corpo*" is an umbrella group, offering technical assistance, training and networking services to its members as well as to other community enterprises and organizations. It also assumes an advocacy role on social issues, and community development, including local economic development.

From its inception, the CDCBF has operated concurrently on two fronts. It consolidates existing community-based organizations and cooperatives and simultaneously develops new CBOs and co-ops. In fact, it is through consulting services to existing groups that much preliminary research for future development is done: problem areas requiring advocacy or lobbying efforts are diagnosed, new markets are identified, areas ripe for joint undertakings are spotted, etc. It is in fact the same community organizing principle used by the CRIS a decade and a half before, but applied to organizations instead of individuals. Between 1985 and 1992, key events in the Bois-Francs' community development experience can, for all intents and purposes, be directly tied to the *Corpo*'s accomplishments:

- 1985: recognition of the CDCBF as a technical support group within a Québec-sponsored worker cooperative creation programme; rental of an office building and joint occupancy with six other community-based organizations; development of a technical assistance group for young entrepreneurs; opening of a not-for-profit copy centre;

- 1986: organization of Québec's first Conference on Community Development (400 participants during the three-day event); development of computer services;

- 1987: publication of the Conference Report and of a directory of Québec CBOs; feasibility study for the takeover of a vacant building slated for demolition;

- 1988: Orientation Convention of the CDCBF and reiteration of its mission to work towards social change; takeover and remodeling of the vacant building into the Place communautaire Rita-St-Pierre;

- 1989: participation in the conception of a strategic development plan for the Regional Municipality of Arthabaska; Community Futures Committee board membership; participation in the organizing of the region's second Socio-Economic Summit;

- 1990: brief to the Social Affairs Commission studying the proposed regionalization of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (health and social services); brief to the City of Victoriaville regarding its proposed master urban development plan;

- 1991: development of a permanent regional coalition of community-based organizations affected by the new health and social services legislation; second open-house at the Place communautaire Rita-St-Pierre (1,200 visitors);

- 1992: brief to the Social Affairs Commission studying the proposed new professional training infrastructures of the Ministère de la Main-d'oeuvre, de la Sécurité du revenu et de la Formation professionnelle (manpower, income security, and professional training); research project on community economic development in Québec (jointly with the Université du Québec à Hull); contracted by the Regional Health and Social Services Council to implement part of the region's mental health service delivery plan.

Throughout all of these years, the CDCBF maintained the rest of its programmed activities: consulting services, group purchases (group insurance, office supplies, etc.), newsletter, training sessions, parties and picnics, development of new CBOs including three worker co-ops, etc. It is still operating at full-tilt today.

A RECENT SNAPSHOT OF THE BOIS-FRANCS COMMUNITARIAN MOVEMENT

The term "mouvement communautaire" doesn't translate very well into English. Although it recently became "popular movement", I am reluctant to use this latter phrase because it simply doesn't seem to describe the movement very well. What *mouvement communautaire* refers to is an amalgamation of somewhat diverse democratically-controlled organizations, including cooperatives and others, many of which have recently been called community groups, alternative service organizations, community-based organizations, communitarian and popular organizations, and popular groups. In order to simplify things, for the purposes of this essay, the expression "communitarian[2] movement" will be used to designate the following organizations that collectively refer to themselves as the *mouvement communautaire des Bois-Francs*:

◊ cooperatives (consumer, housing, worker co-ops);

◊ private, not-for-profit service organizations (day-care centres, food banks, community television production facilities, etc.);

◊ private, not-for-profit social service agencies (shelters for victims of family violence, for the homeless, parenting support groups, AIDS victims support group, etc.);

◊ advocacy groups (rights of the unemployed, of tenants, of consumers, of the handicapped, etc.);

◊ women's groups (women's centre, women's employment services, etc.);

◊ community enterprises (thrift shop, used book store, self-service photocopy centre, etc.)

◊ other community-based organizations including environmental groups and Third World solidarity groups.

These organizations go beyond simple self-help (for example, chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous are not included in this movement) and none are public agencies (for example, the local Economic Development Corporation is not included because it is a structure governed by local municipalities), although some may be completely funded under a specific government programme (for example, the

local *Service externe de main-d'oeuvre* that provides job skills training is included). Social objectives must also be present in these organizations (therefore, for example, local chambers of commerce are not included). Most are incorporated as cooperatives or not-for-profit corporations and all have a democratic governance structure.

In all, there are about 90 such community-based organizations (CBOs) and co-ops in the Bois-Francs, with a little more than 50 concentrated in the Victoriaville area. It is significant to note that of the 17 initiated by the CRIS between 1972 and 1977, only a half-dozen survive. More than half of the existing groups were set up between 1984 and 1992, and the movement is still growing. Its recent evolution is illustrated in the following table which gives an indication of the communitarian movement's economic impact:

	1984	**1986**	**1988**	**1990**	**1992**
Annual Revenues ($000)					
• Public grants	n/a	2 233	3 278	4 121	4 670
• Other (sales, fees, rental income, etc.)	n/a	5 016	6 312	5 445	6 111
Total	5 600	7 249	9 590	9 566	10 781
Net Assets ($000)	2 253	3 536	6 458	9 443	9 146
Permanent Jobs					
• Full-time	n/d	151	197	178	205
• Part-time	n/d	28	63	66	97
Total	94	179	260	244	302
Annual Payroll ($000)	1 072	1 773	3 213	3 847	n/a

In 1992, these same CBOs were also managing numerous other short-term projects with 125 temporary employees (not included above). Nor do these statistics include the jobs created by various community-based organizations and subsequently taken over by the private sector. For example, when the local garbage collector took over home pick-up of goods to be recycled from an advocacy group in 1989, the community-based sector "lost" 29 jobs although these were kept in the community as a whole.

Other statistics may also be cited to gauge the movement's impact elsewhere in the community. For example, membership in all of these organizations totalled 9,267 at last count. Furthermore, 619 of these members sat on the organizations' boards of directors (not counting all of the various committees and work teams): 373 directors were women. Unfortunately, no "hard" statistical data exists to support arguments relating to empowerment and related issues although some research in this area is under way. Nonetheless, general observations of practitioners from the Bois-Francs and those who visit from the outside tend to support the notion that there is empowerment being produced.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS

One of the more useful tools to have emerged from strategic planning is the SWOT analysis. Once sufficient data about an organization or a particular situation have been gathered and compiled (overall environment, competition, organizational resources, and capabilities) and once an analysis of this information has been completed, SWOT is used to emphasize the most important strengths and weaknesses, as well as the most probable opportunities and threats: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats = SWOT. These are highlighted in outline form so that only essential information is displayed. From the environment and competition come opportunities and threats: these are essentially external factors to which the organization must adapt its strategy. From within the organization itself come strengths and weaknesses: these are essentially internal factors which the organization can build on in the case of the positive ones, or work around or correct in the case of the negative ones. Although the resulting picture is inherently incomplete, what this does is present a neat overview of key elements for strategic planning purposes.

Although there is no planning objective in this essay, I have prepared a modified SWOT analysis of the Bois-Francs communitarian movement to highlight some of the more crucial aspects of on-going community development in the area. It is "modified" in the sense that more information is given than in a strict SWOT analysis, but the procedure remains the same.

Strengths

The most fundamental factor determining the shape of any movement at any given point of time is undoubtedly the people who make it up. Although the Bois-Francs communitarian movement is made up of organizations, these in turn are led by individuals and herein lies one of its greatest strengths. A few of the JOC's committed graduates are still active, as they have been since the late 1960s and they have been joined by other, no less committed individuals over the years. One of the most notable characteristics of many of these people is their professional background: some gave up secure positions in public institutions — mainly as social workers — to join the ranks of community-based organizations. Others gave up promising business careers to do the same: a successful merchant, a credit union administrative manager, a management trainee, a plant comptroller, and a number of secretaries to name a few. They viewed their collective technical expertise and their professional training as instruments for social change rather than oppression.

"Solidarity based on shared values" could be considered the rallying cry of the Bois-Francs communitarian movement. It is the underlying foundation of another great strength and perhaps of the movement's most significant achievement. In short, not only do cooperatives, women's groups, alternative service organizations, and all of the others CBOs know each other, they also frequently work together on various committees, regularly share responsibilities on the CDCBF's board of directors, and take a couple of days each year to reflect on topical — most often, ethical — issues.

This linking of diverse progressive organizations has resulted in a cohesive, broad-based coalition of 50 grass-roots organizations through membership in the Corporation de développement communautaire des Bois-Francs. The CDCBF's governance structures have taken this diversity into consideration by

dividing its membership into electoral colleges where cooperatives and "traditional" community-based organizations are on an equal footing. The same principle applies to its board of directors where CBOs have four seats, cooperatives three, and one each for associate organizational members, associate individual members, and the "Corpo's" staff. This has enabled cooperatives and community enterprises to remain constantly aware of social issues and to integrate social objectives into their programmes and activities. As for the more socially-oriented community-based organizations, they have been kept abreast of the difficulties of maintaining operations in a market economy and have been able to learn good management practices from their quasi-commercial colleagues.

Such pragmatism is a result of efforts begun in the early 1980s to find areas of convergence within a value structure put forward by the CDCBF as opposed to a search for ideological purity which had had such devastating effects in the past. For example, instead of the phrase "community-based organizations and cooperatives", the CDCBF uses the expression "community enterprise" to designate the types of organizations that it has as members as well as the type that it wants to develop. CBOs, co-ops, and other organizations have to meet somewhere in the following definition of a community enterprise:

- it is the result of a local initiative;
- it seeks to generate useful activities for the community as a whole, while trying to reconcile social needs with economic imperatives;
- it is a collective undertaking, bringing people together around a project to be realized;
- it seeks to respond to the needs identified by its members;
- it favours a democratic governance framework and organizational structure (i.e., one person, one vote);
- it seeks to have its members participate in its management;
- it tends to promote, within its structure and practices, values of social justice which promote the elimination of discrimination and oppression;
- it seeks to collectivize its tangible and intangible assets.

This constant merging of economic and social objectives and practices is yet another strength and also the basis for an unusual brand of community economic development (CED). It should be noted that the CDCBF has always identified "community development" as its sphere of activity, not "community economic development". However, in its internal and public documents, community development is defined as an on-going political process wherein economic imperatives are wedded to social objectives, concurrently taking into account cultural, ecological, and pacifist preoccupations. CED hence becomes the economic component of community development and as such can be defined as a community-controlled process by which resources and needs are harmonized in such a way as to ensure access to social justice for each and every individual. Resource exploitation, allocation, and control — a classical definition of economics (James, 1956) — thus become other means whereby empowered marginalized constituencies obtain access, after critical and enlightened evaluation, to various avenues of personal fulfillment, on an individual as well as on a collective basis.

The distinctiveness of the CDCBF's CED initiatives lies in the CDCBF's structure (a coalition of grass-roots, community-based organizations, and cooperatives), in the type of support that it offers (value-based, comprehensive technical assistance combined with networking and advocacy), and in the

absence of direct equity or debt financing. In practical terms, this has led to the positive economic impact described earlier which, in turn, is the result of both a business-like approach to managing not-for-profit organizations and the actual creation of community enterprises. It has also meant board membership of various development institutions such as the *Comité d'aide au développement de la collectivité de la MRC d'Arthabaska* (Community Futures Committee) and the *Conseil régional de développement de la région 04* (Regional Development Council). Finally, the CDCBF also initiated a local technical-assistance organization for young entrepreneurs and supported it for five years.

Although the community enterprises set up by the CDCBF have mainly been worker cooperatives, its major endeavour occurred in 1988, when the CDCBF took over an abandoned 62,000 square foot multi-use commercial site (40% office space, 35% garage, and 25% warehouse) slated for demolition and transformed it into the Place communautaire Rita-St-Pierre[3] (PCRSP), a community service/retail centre housing over 35 community-based organizations and co-ops and providing warehousing space to a couple of traditional businesses.

Through this venture, the CDCBF has tried to handle some specific development issues:

- Job creation was directed towards selected targets (women; the jobless) and qualifications and definitions modified to "fit the people". The three "good" jobs were directly created with above-average pay rates, fringe benefits, and working conditions. Worker empowerment goals have been met by the fact that all staff are members of the CDCBF's work team (collective management).
- Indirectly, this venture made it possible to create more than a dozen new jobs through the development of new community-based organizations or the expansion of existing ones: a housekeeping services worker co-op, a shelter for the homeless, a press clipping service, and so on.
- Customer empowerment has been enhanced by a needs assessment before a new tenant is accepted (includes an evaluation of the impact of the move on the proposed tenant's operations) and by some tenant participation in the decision-making process.
- Protecting the local economic base from leakage is addressed by a formal policy of priority to purchasing locally-produced goods and services. On another level, the PCRSP exerted direct control over nearly $1,500,000 in cash receipts in its first four years of operation, most of which went to local people. These funds all go through a local *caisse populaire* (credit union).
- The PCRSP directly supports new tenant CBOs through direct financial subsidies for their first two years of operation. All tenant CBOs enjoy a "hassle-free" rental in which all services except insurance are included: utilities (heat, hydro, water), maintenance (minor repairs, sanitation supplies, light bulbs, soap, toilet paper), some housekeeping, and snow removal.
- Sharing of expensive or infrequently-used equipment is encouraged: postal scales and meters, television sets, VCRs, fax machines, computers, and the like. The same applies to the fully equipped meeting rooms (free of charge to all CDCBF members and PCRSP tenants).
- The PCRSP has a policy of encouraging the equal participation of women at all levels (staff; board; committees) and the use of non-sexist language in written materials. It has refused to rent space to the military (regular forces, reserves, cadets) and to producers/suppliers of military materials. The building was rendered 100% wheelchair accessible, inside and out, which meant installing an elevator and access ramps, modifying door widths and washrooms.

Weaknesses

Whatever social and economic gains the Bois-Francs communitarian movement has made, it has not been able to translate its strengths into a more structured economic framework for its own benefit or for that of the CDCBF. Most of the CBOs and co-ops remain woefully undercapitalized and no long-term solution has yet been found to resolve this issue. In the not-so-distant past, such financial shortcomings have led to the closing of some consumer cooperatives that were unable to meet various crises because of the lack of financial resources. A similar weakness can be found in those organizations that rely on public funding to maintain their operations. Moreover, the dearth of alternative funding sources has hampered their operations — and occasionally, their creativity — and has drained their eagerness to fight for their rights.

Some militants and practitioners have unequivocally quit the struggle — at least, for a while in order to replenish financial and academic coffers. In addition, although they have not abandoned the cause, elders of the movement are no longer on the front lines of the daily battles for a variety of personal reasons, resulting in a serious lack of hands-on, value-oriented training in the growing number of organizations. The CDCBF recently developed a training programme for future recruits but much of the wealth of experience — often transmitted orally — will inevitably be lost. Value-based expertise is not taught in schools and many new practitioners are recruited more for their professional skills than their commitment to social change, a sharp turnaround from the committed professionals who entered the movement in the previous decades.

Moreover, the newer generation of activists often seems inclined to compare their compensation packages and working conditions with those of the public service than with the poorer classes of society (as had been the case with the CRIS' staff). This is not wrong in itself as quality of life is important for everyone. However, larger salaries lead to fewer staff in an organization on a fixed budget. Similarly, more holidays and vacations inevitably mean fewer services when practitioners cannot be replaced. Although, the contradictions here are neither new nor unique to the Bois-Francs[4], it is the inability of its communitarian movement to formally address the issues that is a weakness, perhaps its true Achilles' heel in the long term.

Finally, the movement's lack of political clout might also be deemed a weakness. In the mid-1970s, attempts were made to ensure that its concerns would be present in at least a few corridors of power. Co-op members were elected to the board of one *caisse populaire* and the local MNA — Member of the National Assembly — emerged from another consumer co-op. Between then and 1990 when a CDCBF staff member was elected to City Council, no headway was made on the political front — simply because none was attempted. Even these "successes" have more to do with the individuals involved than with a concerted effort to participate in political processes.

My personal interpretation of this situation is not necessarily negative. A number of prominent activists took the opportunity offered by the events of the late 1970s to hone their ideological bases. With the twin debacles of the *indépendantiste* and Marxist-Leninist causes just before the 1982 recession, it is significant that any energy was left at all to progress any further. The founding of the CDCBF can hence be seen as a watershed in that the communitarian movement actually endowed itself a formal structure to strengthen itself and to get involved in development issues on a *local* level. Five years later, the movement directed the CDCBF to develop collective strategies and some form of political

representation[5]. But the subsequent political context in Québec has forced the CDCBF to concentrate on legislative issues — presenting briefs before parliamentary commissions — and on making inroads within the decision-making structures of various official bodies, such as the boards of the Community Futures Committee and the Regional Health and Social Service Administration, and the executive committee of the Regional Development Council A motion adopted at the CDCBF's 1993 annual meeting is also quite promising: sometime this year, the CDCBF must institute a strategic planning process for itself and its member organizations with a goal of greater cohesion among the CBOs in order to exert more power at all levels. To my mind, a certain amount of political maturity has resulted from this evolution.

Opportunities

The present social and economic conditions greatly favour intervention at the community level almost everywhere. Recent reports by institutions as diverse as the now defunct Economic Council of Canada and the *Conseil des affaires sociales* have called for local development initiatives to stimulate the economy and to combat poverty. The Bois-Francs' communitarian movement is rather well-placed to take advantage of such a climate. Indeed, the CDCBF's experience in setting up commercial enterprises (worker cooperatives) and counseling others (consumer cooperatives, day-care centres, etc.), its seat on the Community Futures Committee's board, its research into CED initiatives in Québec, and more, have paved the way for a greater role in the development of the Bois-Francs' economy.

Moreover, given the achievements of the environmental movement in the last decade, a greater emphasis on sustainable development would seem to be unavoidable, as would an eventual harmonization of environmental and community economic development concerns. Here again, the Bois-Francs' communitarian movement is strategically positioned to take advantage of any opportunities relating to these venues. The CDCBF, for example, was a founding member of the local round-table on the environment and the local recycling pressure group was a founding member of the CDCBF.

Finally, as the recent hearings of *Solidarité populaire Québec*'s *Commission populaire itinérante* demonstrated, the population of Québec is increasingly favours greater decentralization of government services and more effective local control over State programmes. Unfortunately, although present public rhetoric would seem to support such a process, policies and bureaucratic quagmires may in fact be *discouraging* the delegation of various responsibilities to lower levels of government or to community-based structures. Be that as it may, local governments have been forced to progressively take over a number of previously centralized programmes, from recreation to road maintenance to public security. These new local burdens may be opportunities in disguise for community-based organizations. Notwithstanding legitimate charges of dumping on cities and towns by higher echelons of government, the communitarian movement's grasp of grassroots dynamics, its experience in dealing with problems at a community level, and its proven ability to manage complex operations on shoe-string budgets should situate it favourably to exert some kind of influence on how such "dumped" services should be organized and delivered. It might also be able to actually administer and even operate some of the programmes instead of letting these fall into the hands of private promoters, thereby countering some of the problems involved with privatization in the public sector[6].

Threats

There is, of course, a downside to the opportunities discussed. To a large extent, community-based organizations are already responsible for service delivery in many areas: shelters for victims of family violence or for the homeless, youth centres, coordinating volunteer services including “Meals on Wheels” for the elderly, and so on. This situation has led to the assumption that, because community-based organizations do the work of public agencies, they should be evaluated as such or even integrated into government programming. This is especially true in the health and social service sector where recent legislation (Bill 120) has foreseen the direct involvement of community-based service organizations in the dispensing of social services. The threats here are those of complete co-optation and of an overwhelming dependency on single-source programme-based funding. This may not seem new to followers of the communitarian movement in Québec, but it far surpasses the chameleonish molding of activities to fit public programmes in order to secure funding and is far more worrisome than the new militant professionalism. That there is cause for concern is illustrated by the experience of shelters for battered women where, in the eyes of many, governments are simply leasing bed-space instead of recognizing an alternative resource with a specific *modus operandi*, and by the recent trial run at tripartite programming of mental health care delivery where community-based organizations were not taken very seriously. In both cases, financial resources and political recognition have not yet accompanied the use of CBOs in social service delivery.

Another threat comes from within the communitarian movement itself. The lack of Québec-wide, cross-sectoral organizations and coordinating structures has impeded its ability to counter such public strategies such as the artificial new clienteles imposed by government programmes, pigeonholed by social problems such as violence, abuse, and homelessness, or population groupings such as adolescents, women, and mentally or physically handicapped. The threat here is as much the proliferation of tiny, single-issue organizations and their draining of thinly-spread resources as it is the camouflaging of fundamental questions that must be raised in order to get to the root causes of the situations at hand. The CDCBF has recently recognized the danger here and, at its 1992 annual meeting, adopted a resolution authorizing its staff to investigate the relevance of so many disparate groups and to suggest alternatives. But the CDCBF is not a federation and its decisions are accordingly not binding on its members, and any limits set would, therefore, depend on the good faith of everyone concerned.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Through the CDCBF, the Bois-Francs communitarian movement has been involved since 1989 in local and regional development initiatives in three areas: (a) urban planning and land use; (b) strategic planning for local economic development with partners from the more traditional sectors; and (c) participation in the reorganization of various regional bodies (health and social services, regional economic development, manpower training) following a number of legislative changes that encourage local participation. Its experience here has confirmed the conviction that social and ethical concerns must be prevalent in all development initiatives, from the planning to the implementation stages. This has led to the CDCBF’s recent investigation of alternative CED strategies. Despite the fact that many of the CDCBF’s ventures have been and still are without question CED initiatives, the Bois-Francs

communitarian movement has not yet made a genuine, formal commitment to local economic development.

The problem here is twofold. On one hand, if community development adds economic imperatives to its social objectives, influenced by cultural, environmental, and peacemaking issues, the economic practices will inevitably concentrate on business development — which, in the present economy, is intrinsically market-oriented and this goes against the grain of activists who call for reduced consumption on environmental or ideological grounds and is, to some extent, contrary to the CDCBF's rejection of increased consumption to drive the economy. The challenge here is for the movement to become involved in business development by finding or innovating a model that proposes an alternative vision to neo-liberal economic development without falling into the trap of State centralization which has been no better at attaining social objectives. Within the Bois-Francs communitarian movement, there is an unexpressed acknowledgment of the necessity for some kind of enterprise which can satisfy people's needs. But so far, only the issue of control has been spoken to by implementing the cooperative model: little real progress has been made on the role of traditional business development from a community development perspective and the relationship between traditional businesses and the communitarian movement.

Assuming that the CDCBF will, of necessity, become even more involved in community economic development due to persistent economic stagnation combined with increased poverty, another challenge will be that of maintaining its specificity. Confusion about the CDCBF and its namesakes elsewhere in Québec abound, first because of its name — community development corporation — and then because of its resemblance, in name again, with other development institutions, particularly the community economic development corporations (CDECs).

The uniqueness of the CDCBF's structure lies in its membership and its priorities. Other organizations involved in community economic development initiatives have to do a lot of outreach to attain target constituencies. Such is not the case at the CDCBF since these same constituencies, more often than not, form the membership base of its own members. Thus, by consolidating its member organizations and other CBOs, the CDCBF is directly supporting the empowerment of low-income and other marginal communities. Moreover, because CDECs in Montréal are regulated by municipal policy and because there is no formal recognition of CDCs such as the one in Victoriaville, the danger stalking the Bois-Francs is the eventual import of a model which doesn't correspond to the *milieu*'s decisions.

Another challenge lies in the growing trend towards concerted action on almost all fronts and within CED initiatives in particular. The CDCBF has a long tradition of participating in coalitions and alliances of all kinds, including on-going membership in local and regional economic development agencies. However, the CDCBF has seldom initiated short or long term partnerships outside of the specific interests of its members. This is quite different from CDEC practices which are often based on the bringing together of diverse interest groups. Because CDECs see job creation as being a cornerstone of their action and even of social change, unified action is fundamental to the success of their employment strategy. To this end, representatives of business, labour, government, and community-based organizations get involved in the CDEC's programmes with the hope that each will contribute the specific know-how, connections, and perhaps even their own resources to make the efforts work. Most CDEC's have even modified their decision-making structures to institutionalize such partnerships. In most of Québec's CDCs — community development corporations based on the Bois-Francs model —

these actors are not present, either within programmes or governance structures. Indeed, the CDCBF has so far categorically refused to have outside observers — let alone partners! — at its board or annual meetings, forcefully arguing that the presence of external interests might exert undue influence during debates in the decision-making process. The CDCBF's results in mobilizing CBOs on issues of direct concern have been quite positive, but it is not clear what its precise role should be on broader questions. The challenge will be to move CBOs from representation to collective action in the larger arena. If the recent regionalization of health and social services is any indication (where the CDCBF helped set up two regional structures to represent and coordinate related CBO involvement), the communitarian movement can indeed find new partnership avenues. Perhaps a CDEC should be set up in the Bois-Francs with the CDCBF as one of the partners?

The Bois-Francs communitarian movement has never considered itself a role-model of any kind. Its fundamentally local nature has not encouraged thoughts of "exporting" the model. On the other hand, the practical results obtained testify to the endurance and tenacity of its activists, practitioners, and leaders. Its achievements are many and some may be of inspiration to others interested in developing an alternative society based on a premise of social justice and may thus be seen as a foundation for the development of new strategies and practices.

ADDENDUM (1996): DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES AND EMPOWERMENT

In the years that have passed since the previous pages were written, new knowledge has emerged about both community economic development and empowerment. Canadian research[7] has revealed the following keys to successful CED initiatives:

- participatory approaches, both within a community and within an organization, both as a central prerequisite and as an on-going effort;
- a significant amount of community organizing to furnish the social cohesiveness and collective confidence required for action;
- counting on community groups and organizations, being supportive of their economic initiatives, and targeting them as potential partners in other economic development programmes;
- in conditions of extreme poverty, specific measures, such as economic self-help groups at the primary subsistence level, to prepare the groundwork from which CED can emerge;
- nonprofit, democratically-controlled intermediary organizations, in order to allow communities to exert a degree of control over their own economic development;
- public funds to support CED intermediaries through programmes that must: recognize CED's intrinsic dual nature; be flexible and non-fragmented; acknowledge the long-term nature of both the empowerment process and the cycle of development; and include assessment procedures based on multiple bottom lines;

- the availability of training and technical assistance for the local capacity-building process as well as for practitioner development, including tailored pedagogical tools and resources;
- a certain entrepreneurial vitality at the communitarian level;
- local authorities open to change, local social actors open to new approaches, and public decision-makers open to experimentation and innovation.

The Bois-Francs experience illustrates many of these findings quite well. However, much ambiguity remains, especially about the empowerment process. Quite a bit of knowledge has been produced about some of its various components, but not all that much is known about how it operates in specific community development contexts[8]. For example, one recent study concluded that the communitarian movement is not changing the mindset of the area's most disadvantaged members, that their vision of the world, of their power, and of their capacity to better their quality of life is not significantly different from other low-income and poorly educated people in the Bois-Francs who are not members of a community organization or a cooperative[9].

There is also confusion arising from the recent use of the term "social economy" in Québec to designate a wide spectrum of local economic development and cooperative ventures that includes, with seemingly little distinction, all of the communitarian movement's initiatives alongside every cooperative imaginable and more than a few businesses that do not share the philosophy espoused by the communitarian sector although they might have some of its characteristics such as democratic decision-making and the primacy of membership and labour over capital in profit allocation. However, the debate over the social economy has focused primarily on the respective roles of the State and of the non-profit private sector in service delivery and it has created a good deal of anxiety in the communitarian movement in particular. The fear is that government downsizing will use the communitarian sector as cheap labour to replace public sector workers or that public funding will be inadequate to ensure quality control. There is also real concern that democracy will suffer as a result of reducing the satisfaction of a population's needs to a body of commercial transactions[10].

These are, in fact, some of the same issues that I identified as opportunities and threats three years ago in this very chapter. Since that time, I've struggled to understand why CED seems, at times, to promote economic values in its practices that are not consistent with those underlying the communitarian movement's actions, what the pitfalls are to local initiatives delivering services that were or could be provided by the State, and whether empowerment is as inherent to CED as common knowledge would lead us to believe. Recently, an examination of development theory has revealed some clues to answering these queries and I have come to realize that most strategies and practices can be related to at least one of three economic paradigms — grand visions of how a society should be organized in order to most efficiently manage and share its resources in order to respond to the needs of its population. Boothroyd and Davis' (1993) typology of strategic options for community economic development is useful for identifying each model — economic growth; structural change; development of new expressions of solidarity — and each one can be examined to see what type of economy that it seeks to develop as well as the type of empowerment that will probably result. This in turn can help reveal how marginalized segments of the population, such as the members of the Bois-Francs' communitarian movement, can best take their rightful place within the different social and economic systems offered by their societies.

Economic Growth

Proponents of the economic growth paradigm believe that a society's well-being increases proportionately with the wealth that it generates. They are therefore primarily concerned with the production of goods and services and they consider the market to be the most satisfactory mechanism for regulating economic activities and allocating wealth. Economic activity is generally seen as being limited to commercial and monetary transactions and facilitating such transactions thus becomes the goal of a society's institutions. The economic growth model of development sees the importing of capital investment as the most efficient way to create additional jobs. Overall, the various socioeconomic actors' responsibilities therefore need to focus on increasing competitive advantages, augmenting the efficiency of existing firms, creating new businesses, and strengthening the immediate physical environment.

This paradigm considers the community as being the geographical location for economic activity. Partnerships are encouraged among individuals and enterprises recognized as having a valid interest in the deals to be made. Social, environmental, and cultural concerns necessarily become subordinated to economic ones. The economic growth model of development espouses a liberal economy wherein traditional economic capital is exploited (land, labour, financial capital) to generate wealth by increasing consumption (demand) and corresponding production (supply).

It could be said that the general objective of this model is the self-empowerment of entrepreneurs and consumers. This vision generally negates the need for collective action, unless it has to do with the removal of barriers to self-empowerment (such as, government regulations and bureaucratic constraints), since it sees individual self-interest as being the motivating force driving relations between individuals as well as the power behind the invisible hand of the marketplace. To a great extent, "survival of the fittest" is the pragmatic principle guiding the way businesses operate as well as the way employees obtain and retain their jobs, since competition is assumed to be more efficient than cooperation in such matters.

Bearing in mind that the onus is on the individual organization or person to assure its or his/her survival, it then follows that if individuals cannot compete in the labour market and if their organizations or businesses cannot compete in a commercial market without some kind of public assistance, then they are not seen as contributing to a community's economic development but rather as draining some of its resources. In a liberal economy, such businesses and individuals become beneficiaries to be "helped" in the most economically efficient way possible. Moreover, since economic self-interest is the guiding principle for everyone, then some form of programmed supervision must be established to ensure that such people don't take undue advantage of society's benevolence. In fact, this model still seeks, as it did more than a hundred ago, to distinguish between the "worthy" and the "unworthy" poor and it usually chooses to aid the former who, for reasons beyond their power or because of a personal shortcoming, are unable to support themselves and who, through training, behavioral modification, and even occupational therapy, can be rescued from pauperization. This is, for all intents and purposes, the philosophical foundation for workfare.

Generally speaking, practitioners in the communitarian movement reject this point of view[11] and it is therefore to be expected that relations can become strained between them and private and public decision-makers who belong the economic growth school of thought. In a nutshell, in a liberal economy

based on the rules of competition, solidarity is a moral issue and thus outside the realm of economics. This kind of fragmentation of economic and social agendas is deplorably present in most of today's industrial nations.

Structural Change

While proponents of a structural change model of development do not deny the need for economic growth, they believe that the laws of supply and demand left to their own purposes inevitably produce inequalities. Market forces therefore need to be corralled lest they breed injustices that can't be corrected or abuses that can cause injury or damage to weaker, less competitive, segments of society. Believing that the movements of all forms of capital can be controlled by public bodies or legislation, advocates of structural change are thus more concerned with regulating market forces than with encouraging them. The ways to harness these and to ensure a more equitable sharing of wealth span a wide spectrum of mechanisms of redistribution that vary according to the degree of State presence to ensure the required control. Indeed, control over economic activity is needed in both macro and micro domains and this usually translates into State intervention on international and national policy levels, and less frequently in the local arena in order to bolster local power. Market and capital diversification, import substitution, broader sources of outside investments, and more local control over resources are needed to offset imbalances produced by the market and thus strengthen economies weakened by what Heilbroner and Thurow (1987) call "economic malfunctions".

A structural change paradigm recognizes legitimate economic activity in both commercial and non commercial transactions provided that these have some kind of a quantitative value for exchange purposes. The community is seen as a mixture of networks and relations that have to be molded and restructured in order to achieve social harmonization and equitable redistribution of wealth and resources. The general idea is to develop and exploit social capital along with the economic ones. The economic model which is developed is that of a social economy where benefits belong to members of a specific organization or society and are redistributed through negotiated agreements or automatic mechanisms. In recent years, universal, insurance-based models such as the Welfare State have grown in disrepute — because of abuses, bureaucratic high-handedness, or costs — and this has encouraged attempts at redefining national social contracts to tackle the problems being generated by the massive transformation of the labour market and the resulting socioeconomic exclusion of a horrific number of people all over the world. It is therefore not surprising to see new strategic options being put forward — such as the concerted action of leaders of heretofore antagonistic social groups in order to reduce sterile conflicts such as strikes and lockouts — as well as older options being resurrected — such as the development of cooperatives and kindred organizations.

Individual and collective empowerment of the members of a single community or organization is generally the end result of structural change. Empowerment of this nature is a multifaceted process whereby individuals gain control — either individually or collectively, but always through the structures or communities that they are members of — over some or all of the resources that they need to ensure their well-being. There are essentially four components to this type of an empowerment process, each of which evolves along a continuum of its own:

1) participation (outside of the realm of psychology, power is always exerted in relation with someone or something else);
2) competence and technical ability (to exert control, a person needs skills and information);
3) self-esteem (power cannot be exerted without some belief in one's own legitimacy);
4) consciousness-raising (to remove the burden of guilt for being disempowered from the individual's shoulders and to allow for social change by identifying the role of a society's political, social and economic systems and institutions).

Even though this process is played out differently for each individual and is influenced by internal and external contextual factors, a structural change approach sees empowerment as inherently collective. This leads its advocates to emphasize the need for democratic mechanisms of control based on personal membership as a constituent rather than on wealth or social standing. Since community organizers tend to promote some kind of cooperative or self-management framework, they have a great deal in common with those who believe in a structural change approach.

However, the degree of empowerment produced will vary to the extent that evolution along the continuums necessary for its process are facilitated and supported. In the field of social intervention, this has been hampered by a medical model approach to protecting a society's weaker components. Fueled by research fragmenting disempowered and oppressed segments of society into various "groups at risk", the structural change approach can take a paternalistic bent where the end result is not much different than the charity-based approach of the economic growth paradigm, since the individual is still seen as being responsible for ensuring his or her well-being. Where this does not seem possible or feasible, society — through the State — has a duty to take charge or, at the very least, to set the social parameters for those who cannot do so for themselves. It is here that many organizations of the communitarian movement have problems in dealing with public officials since their members usually require simultaneous autonomy and support, while the structural change model seems to offer them either one or the other but seldom both at the same time.

This paradox is at the heart of the debate in which the social economy is often seen in opposition to the Welfare State, and touted by some as a vital part of a quick-fix solution to the dual ills of deficit spending and massive unemployment. The concern is that public support of autonomous collective action responding to social needs from a commercial marketing perspective — for example, in the field of home health care — will be nothing more than a transfer of the State's responsibilities to private, hopefully cooperative or not-for-profit, business ventures without accompanying adequate resources and training and without adequate quality control over services rendered. Herein lies the rub for the communitarian sector: for the State to be responsible and accountable, it can only do so by setting up frames of reference — i.e., public programmes — and by ensuring that their supervision is done by knowledgeable and competent people — i.e., professionals. This creates a form of bureaucratic domination of the type that community organizations are striving to break free from. On the other hand, agreeing to the complete autonomy of action desired by community organizations makes it difficult for the State to reconcile principles of accountability in the redistribution of public funds and of collective responsibility in the maintenance of public health and welfare. It seems like a catch-22 situation: should the partial funding of a commercial courier service managed and staffed by survivors of mental illness be seen as a shirking, by the State, of its duties towards them or as exploiting them as

cheap labour, or is this the way of the future for social intervention through the support of the empowerment process of organized victims of oppression who seek to re-enter the labour market on their own terms by developing and using their own tools? The answer to this question is avowedly quite unclear.

A similar paradox is also at the heart of the debate surrounding CED. CED can generally be defined as a community-controlled institution-building process whereby empowered constituencies obtain access to resources required for individual and collective fulfillment. The underlying premise here is that communities are poor or in decline because they do not have control over the tools and economic resources that they require to ensure their well-being and that institutions under their authority will enable them to obtain and maintain the control that they need. CED practitioners believe that such institutions can only be achieved and maintained through community participation and awareness and that programmes are most effective when they address the needs of the community as articulated by a representative membership of that community. However, a community's economy is not insulated against forces outside of its control — such as technological changes affecting production processes — and efforts promoting local economic development can be seen as a sham by those who think that only macro policies and practices will have some effect on economic activity on a more global scale.

The Development of New Expressions of Solidarity

Both the contradictions noted above and the increase in ecological models of social intervention and environmental protection may explain a bit of why there is an increasing — albeit still marginal — tendency among certain people to see the preceding paradigm as being too limited in its results and the development of a social economy as an unsatisfactory solution to the problems of poverty and social exclusion. While they believe that market forces can occasionally have some merit and that many structural changes can be seen very positively, they are more preoccupied with the values underlying the way that wealth is produced, used and shared in a society, than in its quantity or in the mechanics of its redistribution. Since they see the community as being comprised of individuals who are mutually responsible for each other's well-being, they are invariably concerned with factors regarding social and economic exclusion, and believe that each individual can and should play a significant role in the development of an harmonious and just society. They have faith in reciprocity as the best mechanism for regulating economic activity and see transactions within a society as being both commercial and non commercial, monetary and non monetary in nature. Their efforts are thus directed towards promoting and collaborating in the development of policies and programmes that foster increased mutuality and cooperation among individuals and institutions with an overall objective of reducing marginality and exclusion. From their point of view, democratically-controlled, community-based organizations exemplify the type of institutions where such reciprocity can be nurtured and materialized[12]. They also have a tendency to promote non monetary exchanges and to develop ways in which all persons concerned can participate in decision-making processes at all levels.

While the proponents of the development of renewed solidarity can be thought of as promoting a subsistence economy mentality (since the only "true" examples to be found of reciprocal economic development are in the more "primitive"— i.e., non industrial — societies), or as yet another wave of utopian communists or hippie freaks, new thinking is indeed emerging in which community empowerment based on a sense of belonging and of human dignity can become a resource for

development purposes. For example, innovations such as certain comprehensive community initiatives in the United States "aim to marry human, [neighbourhood], and social capital development through the two guiding principles of comprehensiveness and community building" (Kubish, 1996). To a great extent, these are the same objectives that the Bois-Francs experience has been pursuing for more than a quarter century. In other words, every person who wants to participate in the economy should have a place to do so since everyone has something to contribute to collective well-being and the aggregate of individual contributions will ensure a decent quality of life for all people, not for just the fittest or the brightest and not just for the members of a specific organization or community. The model here is one of a reciprocal economy, in other words one based on solidarity, and thus of an economy that is embedded in a broader sociopolitical framework.

This perspective gives way to a non-fragmented social intervention that, instead of instituting completely new programmes, will be more inclined to enhance and build on existing ones. Casework methods build on strengths rather than insisting on weaknesses and community organizing is encouraged as social practice with a goal of capacity-building for all members of a community. Community empowerment thus becomes a key in transforming this vision into reality. While this phenomenon has, unfortunately, not been studied all that much from an economic development perspective, a few truisms abound. For example, it is quite probable that as empowered people act collectively on community issues and wider political concerns, communities become empowered, and in turn, empowered communities sustain the empowerment of their members. Some pieces of the community empowerment puzzle have nevertheless been identified. These include: access to participation in all of a community's systems for all, particularly for its most disenfranchised members, and increased control by their organizations over consequences that are important to them and to others in the broader community; decision-making bodies open to the participation of all members of the community, including individuals not seen as "natural" leaders; an equitable distribution of community resources and power; communication mechanisms that promote positive interaction among a diversity of viewpoints; support for and management of social change; accountability among community systems that promote both individual and collective empowerment.

This is the type of approach that the communitarian movement has promoted in the Bois-Francs and the type of economy that would most likely best suite its purposes. The problem is that it is based on an overwhelming confidence in human nature and most decision-makers are not inclined to open up public coffers to fund innovations without some form of guarantees and accountability. The communitarian movement must therefore continue insisting on the premise that member-controlled, democratic structures are most likely the best tools for ensuring that public funds will be well-spent and that such autonomy must not be seen as a by-product of financial support but as a condition for its being granted. It follows that communitarian movements everywhere need to develop alliances with individuals and organizations who are proponents of this model of development, since any change at this level will undoubtedly be political in nature.

CONCLUSION

Is there a difference between a social economy and a reciprocal one? From an empowerment perspective, the answer seems to be yes. That a social economy promotes the empowerment of its members is a giant step towards a more equitable society than what can be expected from a liberal economy, but it cannot, however, hide the limitations of its approach. Numerous studies show how "alternative" practices of management and governance have, of necessity, been replaced by more traditional, hierarchical models in order to ensure economic viability[13]. Others indicate that conventional business development approaches have been more efficient in providing economic benefits in poor inner cities[14]. The problem isn't worker cooperatives: the problem is that initiatives of a social economy operate on a playing field where market forces presently rule. To ensure full empowerment, the playing field, as well as the rules of the game, have to change.

Does this mean that a social economy is nothing more than a reformist strategy defending the status quo or opposed to social change? Actually, the answer to this question is not easy to answer because of the wide range of enterprises and organizations that comprise what is referred to as the "Third Sector" (Defourny and Monzon Campos, 1992). Many of these may not want a more equitable distribution of power and wealth if it means taking some away from their members. What can be said is that, at least in Québec, there seems to be a consensus that the expression "social economy" in many ways refers to "a mechanism for meeting people's needs which integrates market and redistributive methods with an enhanced element of reciprocity" (Macfarlane and Laville, 1992). The argument for developing such a strategy is that markets for such services already exist, that these markets are relatively impervious to the fluctuations of the global economy, and that exploiting them requires little start-up capital and can make use of local labour. On the other hand, jobs in these markets are usually low paying (especially considering the academic requirements to fill them and the responsibilities that providing services entail) and without fringe benefits. Contradictions abound, and nowhere is this truer than around the issue of where a State's responsibility ends and where the local community's as well as the individual citizen's responsibility begins. What is known through research, is that the social component of this sector's practices will never become self-financing, even though its ventures are engaged in revenue-generating practices and therefore, adopting a social economy strategy must not be interpreted as condoning the public sector's disengagement from its social responsibilities.

To a great extent, any discussion about the social economy is much more about solidarity and citizenship than about economics. The main issue goes beyond the simple economic development of a society in that it entails the search for a harmonization of allocating resources and fulfilling needs, of economic development and social development, by creating and adapting social and economic institutions, programmes and strategies in such a way that the resulting development will: a) benefit all people in society; b) comply with the community's social, cultural, and political values; and c) be concerned with and cares for the environment. In practice, this means that a person with disabilities, whether mental or physical, has to have a place within society's systems, and this includes its businesses, and this individual has to have an opportunity to influence decisions that will affect his or her well-being. This in turn means that relationships between productivity and compensation have to be looked at through new lenses and that social and economic organizations have to make room for people simply because they are people, not because they are the best and the brightest, not because

they are the most technically competent. From my point of view, this goes beyond what a social economy can offer and thus requires the emergence of — or the return to — a reciprocal economy.

One of the keys to attaining this goal may reside in seeing individual empowerment as inextricably interwoven with community empowerment and in evaluating and modifying economic and social development practices accordingly. By doing so, initiatives belonging to the social economy, such as the organizations belonging to the Bois-Francs' communitarian movement, may just be the building blocks of one based on mutuality and solidarity.

NOTES

1 The *québécois* version of the community development corporation (CDC) should not be confused with its Canadian and American namesakes which are more akin to the community economic development corporations (CDEC) in Québec. A *corporation de développement communautaire* is characterized by its origin (usually to network community groups and organizations), by its membership (mostly, when not exclusively, community groups and organizations), by a process whereby community groups and organizations get to know and recognize the relevance of each other's activities and services. For more information on CDCs outside of Québec, see Brodhead, Dal, Lamontagne, François, and Peirce, Jon, *The Local Development Organization: A Canadian Perspective*, Local Development Series Paper N° 19, Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, 1989, and on those in the U. S., see Zdenek, Robert, "Community Development Corporations" in Severyn T. Bruyn and James Meehan (Eds.), *Beyond the Market and the State,* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

2 Definition of "communitarian" in *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1985, 267): "of or relating to social organization in small cooperative partially collectivist communities".

3 This case study first appeared in an article by the author in the July, 1991, issue of *Making Waves*. Reprints of the article are available from the author at C.P. 92, Victoriaville, Québec (Canada) G6P 6S4.

4 The author's personal recollections of the *Théâtre Parminou*'s debates on a what could be considered appropriate compensation and working conditions for members of the cooperative date back to 1976. Moreover, the problem is not specific to Québec: the Mondragón worker cooperatives have been struggling with similar issues for the last decade.

5 "Dans le but de faire reconnaître et promouvoir les valeurs communes qui sont les assises d'une alternative sociale, articuler le projet communautaire dans la région des Bois-Francs par la mise en commun des connaissances, la concertation, l'élaboration de politiques communes, de stratégie et de représentation politique, ce qui confère un rôle de leadership et de pression politique à la Corporation." (*Corporation de développement communautaire des Bois-Francs*, 1992)

6 For an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of sub-contracting to the private sector, see *The Private Sector in State Service Delivery* by Joan W. Allen, et. al., Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1989.

7 The four projects funded a few years ago by the National Welfare Grants Program (Human Resource Development Canada) as well as the Symposium that it organized in 1993 are particularly interesting. See the 1993 special issue of *Making Waves*, Vol. 4, N° 4 (Westcoast Centre for Development Management, Vancouver), as well as the compilation of the papers presented at the Symposium edited by Burt Galaway and Jore Hudson,

Community Economic Development: Perspectives on Research and Policy, Toronto, Thompson Educational Publishing, 1994.

[8] Ninacs, William A., "*Empowerment* et service social : approches et enjeux", *Service social*, vol. 44, n° 1, 1995, 69-93.

[9] See Richard Leroux's masters' thesis, *L'organisation communautaire dans les Bois-Francs : de la conscience sociale à l'autopromotion*, Québec, Département de sociologie, Université Laval, 1995.

[10] The debate on the social economy has spawned reams of French-language documentation. Among these, the following stand out: Comité d'orientation et de concertation sur l'économie sociale, *Entre l'espoir et le doute*, Québec: Ministère de la Condition féminine, 1996; Rosanvallon, Pierre, *La nouvelle question sociale : repenser l'État-providence*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995; Roustang, Guy, Laville, Jean-Louis, Eme, Bernard, Mothé, Daniel, and Perret, Bernard, *Vers un nouveau contrat social*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1996.

[11] The CDCBF's definition of a "community intervention" (1992) is a good example of the universal nature of the communitarian movement's preoccupations. Community intervention possesses a global vision of the health and welfare of individuals and of society. Inherent is the conviction that the economic, political, social, cultural, and ecological context of people's lives constitutes a critical factor determining their health and well-being. Furthermore, it rejects the belief that an individual is solely responsible for his or her well-being. Community intervention takes the whole person into consideration and not just her/his immediate problem, be it medical, social, economic. It is opposed to a myopic bureaucratic attitude, the forced treatment of people, and a required participation in programmes that limit their action. Community intervention originates in an initiative of the people. It springs from their creativity, with a capacity to find alternative responses to new needs, searching for ways more respectful of people's autonomy and dignity. Community intervention promotes an egalitarian relationship between practitioners and clients. It believes that a true therapeutic intervention must be based on solidarity and sharing instead of the domination of one person or institution over another because of her/his or its knowledge or position of power. Community intervention opposes the concept of service as an end unto itself. It knows from experience, that however humane, warm, or innovative, from the moment when service becomes an end unto itself, it no longer has the same capacity to transform a situation. Community intervention is a collective undertaking, empowering people through involvement in a project to be realized. This translates into diversified practices in the use of power but always within a framework of direct participatory democracy. Community intervention promotes the creation of a more egalitarian society. This includes actively working for the abolition of poverty, sexism, racism, and other abuses of power. It rejects consumer consumption as the driving force of economic development and the standard by which quality of life is measured.

[12] Peter Drucker recently wrote that organizations fundamentally exist to perform the one function of their raison-d'être: to teach, to cure the sick, to produce goods, services, and capital… He also states that society needs these organizations "to work on the problems and challenges of the community. Together these organizations *are* the community. The emergence of a strong, independent, capable social sector — neither public sector nor private sector — is thus a central need of the society of organizations. But by itself it is not enough — the organizations of both the public and the private sector must share in the work" with this new social sector. (Drucker, Peter F., "The Age of Social Transformation", *The Atlantic Monthly*, November, 1994.)

[13] For example: Joyal, André, "Les entreprises alternatives au Québec" in Benoît Lévesque, André Joyal, and Omer Chouinard (Eds.), *L'autre économie: une économie alternative?*, Sillery (Quélbec): Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1989; Joyal, André, "Les entreprises alternatives québécoises : à l'image de leurs homologues européennes, *Coopératives et développement*, vol. 20, n° 2, 1988-1989; Lapprand, Karen, "La potote en groupe", *Femmesd'action*, vol. 22, n° 1, octobre 1992; Laville, Jean-Louis, "Les coopératives de travail en Europe. Éléments pour un bilan 1970-1990", *Coopératives et développement*, vol. 25, n° 1, 1993.

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[14] Such as Bendick, Marc Jr., and Egan, Mary Lou, *Business Development in the Inner City: Enterprise with Community Links*, New York: Community Development Research Center, Graduate School of Management and Urban Professions, New School for Social Research, 1991.

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