Community-university research partnerships

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Learning from the Social Economy
Community-University Research Partnerships

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The National Hub
The Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships

Canadians and their communities face considerable economic, social and ecological challenges. In urban Canada, great wealth exists alongside exclusion: new labour market entrants, often immigrants and urban aboriginals, find it hard to secure stable employment; low income families cannot find affordable housing and childcare; and the social safety net fails many with acute and chronic health problems. Much of rural Canada is still subject to the boom-bust cycles of the resource economy, facing doctor and housing shortages in one period and youth out-migration in the next. Many aboriginal and First Nations communities are bypassed by the developments that do occur, but they are still left to bear the ecological burdens of the same. These challenges are not a temporary feature of the Great Recession. While some challenges are very old, others are quite new, such as those resulting from man-made climate change. What marks the contemporary challenges is the great unevenness in their distribution, alongside a great unwillingness on the part of governments to raise the taxes needed to address inequality through strengthened social programs.

The promise of the Social Economy is that it provides a set of principles, practices, relationships and organizations that will allow individuals and communities to negotiate the new context more successfully, to ameliorate and begin to reverse its worst effects, and to propose and experiment with alternative ways of regulation, organization and delivery. Some of the principles, practices, relationships and organizations of the Social Economy are very old, found for example in the co-operative movement, amongst First Nations and in the charitable and voluntary sectors. Others are much newer, found for example in the co-construction of supportive housing and childcare policies, and in the emerging social enterprise movement.

Research has a vital role to play in supporting the elaboration and expansion of these principles, practices, relationships and organizations. The idea of developing a major initiative into researching the Social Economy and into fostering its greater development in Canada, particularly in English-speaking Canada (the concept already being well understood in Québécois), began
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primarily among “practitioners.” During the last months of the federal Liberal administration of Paul Martin (2003-2006), the leadership of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network and Le Chantier de l’économie sociale successfully promoted the allocation of a $132,000,000 investment for the development of the Social Economy in Canada, including funds for capacity building in the Social Economy.

One aspect of this programme was an investment of $15,000,000 in the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to further research into the Social Economy. The general programme was cancelled in all provinces except Quebec (where agreements were already in place) by the Conservative administration that took office in 2006. The funding for capacity building within the sector was also cancelled, a decision that undermined the ability of many organizations to engage fully in, and benefit from, the ongoing research. The funding for the research programme continued, although discretionary funds to be used for emerging research activities identified during the life of the research programme were cancelled.

These research funds were used to initiate the call for proposals for what became the six regional Nodes and the national Hub (see Table 1.1), also known as the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships (CSERPs). The model chosen by SSHRC for these research partnerships was by then the well-established model of Community-University Research Alliances (CURAs). Through “a process of ongoing collaboration and mutual learning,” community-university research alliances are intended to “foster innovative research, training and the creation of new knowledge in areas of importance for the social, cultural or economic development of Canadian communities” (SSHRC, 2008). The funding provided an unprecedented level of resources and pan-Canadian experimentation within this collaborative model of engagement, knowledge creation, sectoral (self-)definition and policy development through research.

Each of the Nodes and the Hub were awarded funding as the result of a peer-reviewed process, the same kind of process SSHRC employs in making all its awards. Research partnerships, as opposed to projects or even collaborations, imply an ongoing relationship. The CSERP are ongoing in the sense that half of them built directly on pre-existing relationships and networks of academics and practitioners, and as they end, many have morphed, or are morphing, into new research partnerships to ensure that an institutional and practical legacy remains. Each Node developed its own research programme, reflecting regional priorities and aspirations, while complicating the task of creating subsequent national initiatives. The Nodes were understandably very concerned about developing consensuses among participants working together, sometimes for the first time, about the specific needs of their developing research programmes. The cancellation of the discretionary funds also significantly limited the flexibility for
implementing the programme originally, and wisely, contemplated by SSHRC for the development of the programme.

Each of the partnerships grappled with long-established questions about the division of labour in knowledge production; the different regional, institutional, cultural and organizational contexts of practitioners, academics and other participants; and the challenges of establishing priorities and allocating resources in multi-partner collaborations. In addition to these questions, several characteristics of the Social Economy render it a particularly challenging, and also fertile, field in which to build community-university partnerships. The Social Economy is highly diverse; while some parts are professionalized and have formalized organizational structures that interact well with the university sector, other important parts are emergent, informal and highly localized. Such partnerships include community organizations, as well as their broader publics, while the university component includes faculty and students. Funding agencies and governments are also important stakeholders in these partnerships. These characteristics raise significant challenges for building and sustaining community-university partnerships.

The CSERP’s have generated a great deal of valuable research and sector-wide reflection; but, it is not our goal to review those research outputs here. Instead, they also provide an opportunity to draw out additional insights on the process and challenges of forging (and maintaining) practitioner-university engagement. This eBook explores such lessons in the practice of engaged research.

This chapter starts with a more general discussion of the notions of partnership and engagement in research, drawing on literature from OECD countries. We argue that engagement is a qualitatively distinct form of partnership. Whereas partnership entails sharing within existing institutional arrangements, engagement necessarily implies attention to changing institutional arrangements when appropriate. With this distinction in mind, we propose a set of eight categories for understanding “engaged research partnerships.” The chapters that follow illustrate that innovative research practices are to be found in the Social Economy partnerships, confirming for us that engagement can and did indeed happen within the CURA research format. At the same time, our criteria and the chapters also highlight some of the ways that engagement was frustrated by the institutional context of the partners. The chapter concludes with some observations about the role that the particular institutional contexts governing SSHRC, academics and practitioners played in shaping the research partnerships described in the subsequent chapters.
Perspectives on Research Partnership and Engagement

The issues of university-community partnership and engagement have become progressively more prominent in both national and international forums of higher education. Indeed, “the changing nature of knowledge production, global issues and the role of education is affecting the intellectual strategies, relationships, societal roles and expectations that we attribute to our universities,” (Holland & Ramaley 2008, p. 33). Increasingly, universities are asserting themselves as researchers, teachers, collaborators and active citizens in communities across the globe. The objectives of this involvement are both to serve and to create support from the public by connecting research, teaching and service to help solve community problems, while contributing to capacity-building, sustainability, and economic, environmental and social development (Prins, 2006; Toof, 2006; Ramaley, 2002; Boyte & Kari, 2000; Kellogg, 1999; Lerner & Simon, 1998).

As societal issues have grown in number and become more complex and “as higher education costs have increased, external constituents … have begun to pressure institutions of higher education to become more accountable and to work towards the common good,” (Reinke & Walker 2005, p. 2). Harkavy (1998) argues that given this context universities are under increasing pressure to be “relevant” in solving today’s complex challenges. Many universities have responded to these increased demands by adopting a community-oriented lens toward research activities and forming partnership and engagement relationships with communities.

The rhetoric alone of community-based engagement and partnership is not enough to constitute “genuine” research partnership and engagement; simply including engagement and partnership with communities as part of a university’s mission statement or mandate, or on a research proposal (Stoecker, 2009), is not sufficient. Although “personnel involved in community work popularly espouse a community-driven approach to public engagement, their actions may support and/or contradict this philosophy,” (Prins, 2006, p. 3). Our goal in this section is to elaborate on the notions of “research engagement” and “partnership” and to explore the question of what constitutes “genuine” or “authentic” engagement and partnership in research.

University-Community Partnership in Research

University-community partnership in research is essentially about making the most of research, ensuring it is relevant and useful while working within existing institutional arrangements. It represents a joint-working arrangement between two or more organizations, where at least one partner is representative of the university and at least one partner is from a community. At the centre
of genuine university-community partnership is the view that universities can and should be working with communities to produce research, that the research process should be collaborative and that research findings should be developed jointly with communities rather than communicated to them (Toof, 2006). Partnerships can deliver very useful and efficient results that are legitimate, and the act of partnership-making has itself become valued in our society. Partnerships (in this context) are intended to solve community problems and to build additional capacity, new ideas, management skills and technologies, while extending current, and examining new, areas of research.

At their best, partnerships exemplify the concept of “power with” as they enable individuals and institutions to accomplish more together than they could alone. Often, however, “hierarchies (i.e., disparities rooted in class, race, gender, status and institutional power) also shape, often unconsciously, routine interactions between and among university and community representatives,” (Prins, 2006, p. 2). The institutional power and status of “expert” that university researchers hold, allows them both intentionally and unintentionally to influence the research agenda. Researchers may proceed “to make demands of community residents, to limit community partners’ decision-making authority, to control and distribute resources inequitably, to use the community as a ‘living laboratory’ without improving conditions, and to expect community partners to adopt their suggestions,” (Prins, 2006, p. 3). Therefore, at their worst partnerships can result in universities exerting and extending “power over” their community “partners” by acting as detached experts and/or by treating the community as a “laboratory,” thereby leaving community members angry, distrustful and dissatisfied with the partnership (Reinke & Walker, 2005, p. 7).

Hence partnerships are not inherently transformative, in the sense that they do not necessarily endeavor to alter or transform institutional structures, norms and rules within universities, societal systems or communities of practice. Stoecker (2008) describes how university budget policies for charging overheads, course scheduling timelines, quality control, ethics review processes and hiring practices create barriers to more robust and empowering community-university research partnerships. From the standpoint of the community this can make the behaviour of universities appear paternalistic. Universities lack an easily discernable, coherent structure that can make it difficult for communities and community leaders to determine who to go to with problems and concerns and how to approach universities to partner in research, resulting in universities most often being the initiators and animators of partnerships rather than the other way round (Brisbin & Hunter, 2003; Mauresse, 2001).

Again, this highlights the importance of considering the institutional context or framework in which partnerships originate. An exploration into the funding mechanisms of a specific partnership can often provide particularly good
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insights into the institutional context with respect to where funds originated, the process for awarding funds, and any rules and regulations around what funds can be used for, as well as who they can be used by. Such questions speak to issues of authority and legitimacy in research partnerships. In some cases community partners can be forced to conform to traditional conceptions of what constitutes research and to follow the accepted norms of the university in order for the research to go forward due to the fact that grant requirements may be embedded in the university structure. It should also be noted that community partners may seek to enter into certain research partnerships in order to push forward their own agendas. Universities, despite their best intentions are further constrained in the types of research partnerships that they can pursue due to the requirements of other governmental, funding, community and practitioner organizations.

Given these realities, research partnerships may go no further than agreement on a particular research problem followed by specialization into areas where it is deemed that “researchers” and “practitioners” or community members can most contribute. For partnerships to fulfill their promise, there is a “need for the university to be more conscious of the community’s interest in them and for universities to develop a common language of mutual relevance and respect for each other’s needs,” (Temple, Story & Delaforce, 2005, p. 4). Similarly, communities and practitioners must also be sensitive to the demands on their university colleagues such as the pressure to publish in academic journals, requirements of the tenure process, faculty evaluations and formal rules around conducting research (e.g., ethics).

Why is Partnership a Good Thing?

Undertaking university-community partnerships can bring to the research “table” an expanded pool of diverse resources, skills, ideas and creativity. Partnerships can, thus, enable research to be conducted efficiently and effectively through the active involvement of community members.

This is significant given the fact that “the agenda has moved on from a desire to simply increase the general education of the population and the output of scientific research; there is now a greater concern to harness university education and research to specific economic and social objectives,” (OECD, 1999, p. 9). Furthermore, in the “new model” of research “outcomes are articulated for teaching and research that are responsive to emerging issues,” (Temple, Story, & Delaforce, 2005, p. 2). Partnerships provide avenues for researchers to respond to the inherently emergent properties of many of today’s global concerns. They help in framing the scope of research by ensuring that the “right” (most relevant, useful and pressing) questions are addressed through the research partnership.

In his work Ridley (2001) notes that partnerships imply a commitment on the part of the university and community partners to reach a common goal(s)
through the joint provision of complementary resources and expertise. Even though specialization can limit the degree of joint collaboration and cross-sectoral communication in a partnership it can also be a positive aspect of partnership by seeking to involve those with the specific skills and expertise in the areas of research in which they can most significantly contribute. Likewise, as partnerships usually contain a defined and set research agenda, they can help to deliver a focused and realizable “package” of deliverables to communities. This can help the community to better, or more effectively, “tackle” multifaceted and complex issues within the community; identify priority “at-risk” areas; address diverse community needs and challenges; and conduct needs and issue assessments (McNall, Reed, Brown, & Allen, 2008).

Finally, partnerships can also “provide opportunities for students to learn about urban [and/or rural] problems first-hand, while at the same time developing leadership, communication, problem-solving and research skills,” (Reinke & Walker, 2005, p. 7). Students are able to develop an enhanced sense of civic activism and responsibility in addition to the skills they garner that can carry forward into all aspects of their lives, including future employment and participation within their own communities. The opportunity to prepare students to be engaged and active citizens is a factor in explaining why partnerships are considered so favourably due to the perceived positive “spill-over” effects of such exercises.

**University-Community Engagement in Research**

Engagement is a distinctive approach to research in that it “recognizes that some learning or discovery outcomes require access to external entities with distinctive knowledge and expertise. The hallmark of engagement is the development of partnerships that ensure a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge between the university and the community,” (Holland & Ramaley, 2008, p. 33). Therefore, at its core, engagement goes further than partnering, seeking a deeper relationship between the university and communities, by building long-term capacities and legacies that go beyond the purview of the research.

Engaging communities and practitioners in research is about much more than whether or not the university employs a “participatory action research” (PAR) method or espouses a commitment to university-community engagement and partnership in its mandate. Indeed, the literature on PAR itself calls attention to the importance of all aspects of the research process. Cunningham (1993) describes PAR as “a continuous process of research and learning in the researcher’s long-term relationship with a problem” (p. 4). PAR is about engagement: (1) engaging research subjects (participants) as equal partners at all stages of research; (2) enabling community ownership over the research process.
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and its outcomes; and (3) adopting an advocacy and empowerment component that is transformative in nature (e.g., PAR is purposefully undertaken to achieve some specific social change or reform) (Balcazar et al., 2004; Taylor, 2004; Barnsley & Ellis, 1992; Stoecker, 2009).

In other words, engagement through research is one piece of a potentially much wider engagement between university and community. Engagement includes community-based research, but also adult and continuing education which extend university capacities into communities and experiential and service learning which extends the classroom into the community (see Jackson, 2008). Indeed, at a more general level, Hall (2009, p. 13) has made the argument that true community-university engagement entails a repositioning of the university as an active asset in communities: “In communities where institutions of higher education exist, the collective resources of these universities and colleges (students, academic staff, facilities, research funding, knowledge, skills and capacities to facilitate learning) represent our largest accessible, available and underutilized resource for community change and sustainability.”

Hence, university-community engagement “describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity,” (Carnegie 2006, n.p.). The emphasis placed on mutuality and reciprocity can be considered as core elements of engagement as it requires academic members to become a part of the community and community members to become a part of the research team. This helps to foster a unique working and learning environment before, during and after the research.

It is useful to conceive of engagement as comprising a spectrum or continuum of processes for communication, collaboration and relationship-building of which formal partnership-type arrangements are but one particular form. Underlying the notions of engagement are also a number of less-formal vehicles for carrying out research, including: networking, consultation, outreach, civic engagement, collaborative decision-making, working groups and community-university councils to name a few. Engagement forms, such as “network structures, are highly interdependent” and, thus, create highly interconnected forms of interaction that move “outside of traditional functional specialities to create new ways of working” (Muirhead & Woolcock, 2008, p. 19). Engagement is, thus, a broad, overarching framework that provides many avenues for rich university-community collaboration and cross-sectoral information exchange (Toof, 2006, p. 4).

Engagement “is the result of conscious choices made by the university” to get at, and alter, the underlying institutional culture of the university and how it functions (Reinke & Walker, 2005, p. 4). An “engaged university” must recognize and respect their community partners as equals, and faculty “must seek
to understand, respect and accept the community as it exists,” (Reinke & Walker, 2005, p. 5). Engagement should, therefore, be viewed as an interactive process that builds relationships, promotes reciprocal learning processes, and, where appropriate, creates systematic change to facilitate well-being in communities.

These factors along with mutuality and reciprocity can be considered the “building blocks” of authentic engagement. From this perspective, “a key challenge in university-community engagement is to find ways of linking the new ideas generated by a university into a broader, more complex social system,” (Low, 2008, p. 123). We propose to view the act of university-community engagement as a process-based and emergent form of inquiry and institutional transformation rather than a collection of research “problems” and/or projects that can be identified and solved.

Why is Engagement a Good Thing?

Academic-practitioner engagement is a process that requires power sharing, maintenance of equity, and flexibility in pursuing research goals and methods to fit the priorities, needs and capacities within the cultural context of communities and universities. Engagement endeavors to go further than partnership in relationship-building through its emphasis on mutual benefits, knowledge exchange and concern with empowering research participants in the research process. Recognizing that “power is embedded in all social relationships, individuals’ actions, no matter how well-intentioned, both reflect and alter the power relations among partnership members” (Prins, 2006, p. 3). Engagement attempts to address power imbalances between the university and community.

It does so through the “respectful recognition of the goals, expectations, wisdom and knowledge we all bring to the table to address any particular issues … community members are positioned as ‘knowers’ and experts, and academics act as learners and listeners,” (Holland & Ramaley, 2008, p. 34). Engagement processes, therefore, are concerned with conducting research that contains an action-oriented and transformative agenda for change and/or reform of some aspect of the issue, area, system or institution that is under investigation. They consciously and explicitly devote attention toward altering institutional arrangements when appropriate. Developing this capacity for reciprocal joint relationships expands all participants’ learning and knowledge-building in ways that have broad applicability across academic and community settings.

Engaged research on the Social Economy also challenges disciplinary boundaries within the university. Within the academy, this kind of research brings together different research approaches across faculties and disciplines that do not customarily work closely together (for example, the Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law). This can be very productive – and usually is – but there is a need to understand the nature of participatory action research and
community-based research, approaches that are unfamiliar to some academic researchers. Academic researchers who are not accustomed to this type of research may find it challenging, even frustrating, to deal with the length of time needed to reach consensus on the purpose and methodologies of a project. At the same time, participatory approaches can also frustrate those Social Economy organizations that wish to employ research to meet specific and limited objectives, and do not want to tie themselves to ongoing research programmes.

The engaged institution is “committed to direct interaction with external constituencies and communities through the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration and application of knowledge expertise and information” (Holland, 2001, p. 7). These interactions enrich and expand learning and research enquiry within the academic institution, while also enhancing community capacity. They create “better” knowledge in the sense that understandings are fuller or more complete, and they are more widely shared. The “work of the engaged institution is responsive to community-identified needs, opportunities and goals in ways that are appropriate to the universities’ mission and academic strengths. The interaction also builds greater public understanding of the role of the university as a knowledge asset and a resource” (Holland, 2001, p. 7). This mutually beneficial interaction helps to build legacy in research that goes beyond the knowledge created. In improving the capacity of a community to provide better services to its members and by preparing students, youth and “new” researchers to be engaged in community-based research and become active citizens in their communities, engagement helps build a lasting legacy.

Categories, Keywords and Questions for Understanding Engaged Research Partnerships

In this section we present a series of categories, keywords and questions that operationalize the concept of “engaged research” discussed above. Based on the assertion that engagement and partnership are not one and the same, and that rhetoric alone is not enough to demonstrate genuine and authentic partnership and engagement in research, we have developed a list of conceptual categories, keywords and questions to help understand the engagement fostered in partnership research. The categories of analysis are (see Table 1.2 for detailed coding scheme):

1. Governance (e.g., who decides which research projects?)
2. Networking (e.g., are they building on and/or building new networks?)
3. Definition of the sector (e.g., was the sector pre-defined?)
4. Content of research (e.g., what topics, how do new topics get included?)
5. Process (methods) of research (e.g., participatory content of actual research?)
6. Capacity-building (e.g., university capacity to reach out, student and community training)
7. Evaluation (e.g., who evaluates, when, to what effect?)
8. Knowledge mobilization (e.g., what dissemination formats are employed?)

In what follows, we briefly discuss each category in turn, highlighting when examples of these dimensions of engaged partnership research may be found in chapters in this volume.

**Governance**

The governance category asks us to consider who decides which research projects go forward within a research partnership; are both academics and practitioners involved in decision-making, and do their decisions hold equal weight, or is there a clear lead? We have focused on the structural dimensions of governance: a key indicator is the extent and basis of decentralization within the governing and decision-making structures of each of the CSERPs projects. The CSERPs were all large, complicated projects involving multiple advisory boards, committees and research teams. Such large structures take a great deal of time and money to manage and coordinate; there is a fine balance to be achieved between devoting resources to process and co-ordination and implementation of research. Chapter 10, written by the coordinators of the Hub and the Nodes, emphasizes the difficult and important juggling act that each of these incumbents faced. One factor that aided the CSERPs is that there was no turnover of coordinators during the life of the partnerships; this provided a measure of stability and continuity.

Decentralization may occur through thematic and/or regional governance structures, or through horizontal forms of management and decision-making. Chapters 3, 6 and 7 by participants in the Atlantic and Northern Ontario / Manitoba / Saskatchewan (NOMS) Nodes illustrate governance structures that are regionally and thematically decentralized. The Atlantic Node’s decentralized governance structure, for example, allowed the project to “evolve” over time through welcoming and linking new community and research partners. Resources were also applied to translate day-to-day administrative documents of the partnership to help ensure accountability.

Chapters 5 and 9 illustrate more centralized governance structures in which a central body may review project proposals, work-plans and outputs, and allocate resources accordingly. A key consideration in the more centralized partnerships is the nature of organizational partners; this model seems to work best when the partnership comprises representative structures with strong capacity and clear mandates. Conversely, the governance structure of the BC-Alberta Node (BALTA) was thematically, but not regionally, decentralized (Chapter 8). A high priority was...
placed on moving governing control out of the hands of academia, with the belief that the resulting governance structure would help facilitate engagement and build partnerships between universities and communities involved in the research. One challenge with thematic decentralization was ensuring a balance in the participation of academics and practitioners in different themes; Rural Revitalization and Development attracted more academics, Analysis, Evaluation and Infrastructure Development attracted more practitioners, requiring attention to re-balancing.

A final point of contrast is provided by the Québec Node, organized so as to create a close relationship between the research and practice environments. There were eight regional networks whose co-directors represent someone from academia and an “acteur” or practitioner from the community (see ARUC/RPRQ, 2008b; Chapter 4). Resources are mobilized from both academia and practitioner organizations reflecting a model of “coresponsabilité.”

Networking

Networking involves developing and using relationships, acquaintances and contacts made in any number of different settings for (often unforeseen) purposes beyond the reason for the initial contact. Many of the CSERP projects “built on” previously existing networks; and most CSERPs consciously established networks intended to enhance their research capacity. However, engaged research implies that network-building is more than an enabler of research. It is also a valid undertaking in its own right, and could be considered to be a goal (“deliverable”) of the project itself.

Chapter 8 shows that the BALTA projects identified networking as a core value and an equally important element of the project to that of research production itself; as such, the goal was to build (create) a network rather than “building on” a previously existing one. Similarly, with respect to the Atlantic Node (Chapter 3) and Northern Node (Chapter 9), their aim was also to build new research networks where none existed before.

In contrast, the NOMS Node built upon previously existing research networks in forming their Node, although as noted by Findlay, Ray and Basualdo (see Chapter 7), new relationships and partnerships outside of Saskatoon and southern Saskatchewan had to be created for some research projects. Long-standing personal relationships, often overlapping, multi-layered and deeply personal, are also central to the action research projects that Broad describes in Chapter 6. Academics do bring research resources that would not otherwise be available to communities, but her argument is that these resources are rendered more effective through the web of relationships that surround them.

The Southern Ontario Node built on existing research relationships, and contributed to the creation of two new organizations. The Association for
Nonprofit and Social Economy Research is an academic organization with a high level of involvement by non-academic participants, while the Ontario Social Economy Roundtable represents a new alliance of co-operatives and non-profits (see Chapter 5). The foundation for the Québec Node’s networks and involvement of practitioner organizations was also based on a previous CURA.

Definition of the Sector

Research is, amongst other things, an act of definition with political consequences; in this sense, self- or mutual- definition may be an important pre-condition for practitioner-academic engagement. It is thus important to ask: To what extent is a definition of the sector (or domain) pre-determined in a research partnership prior to undertaking any research? Was exploring definitions of the Social Economy considered a valid area of research and inquiry in itself?

The CSERPs studied the Social Economy, a sector that is often ill-defined and subject to various competing and potentially incompatible definitions. The initial call for proposals issued by SSHRC in 2005 recognized this definitional diversity, referencing a paper by Benoît Lévesque and Marguerite Mendell titled “The Social Economy: Diverse Approaches and Practices.” However, one of the axes along which definitions of what constitute the Social Economy differ is regional; this is a consequence of the different socio-economic and political-policy contexts across Canada. A challenge for the CSERPs, and indeed for this reflection on research practice, has been how to compare research partnerships that may not share the same understanding of what is being studied, and hence may be employing different methods and engaging different partners in the process.

Throughout the world there are vigorous debates about the meaning of the term “Social Economy.” There is general agreement that it includes the following main organizational types – co-operatives, mutuals, non-profits, charities and voluntary associations. This is the definition that is widely applied and frequently used as a basis for legislation. There is general agreement within the Partnerships that this understanding can apply in Canada. However, debates do continue, and a series of research activities in the Nodes explored the nature and relationships of organizations of these types.

Definitions are important in the real world of regulation, government support and education, but the demand for definitional purity can be unevenly applied to limit access to resources and opportunities. In his chapter reflecting on the achievements and challenges that faced the Hub, Ian MacPherson notes that matters of definition often matter more to academic administrators and governments than they do to direct participants in the Social Economy (Chapter 2).
The Québec Node used a broad definition of the Social Economy based on previous works by academics and practitioners; this suggests that definitional matters were already (largely?) settled in the well-established research relationships underpinning this partnership. In contrast, the Hub (Chapter 2) gave particular prominence and recognition to the diverse definitions of the Social Economy, and was also open to the possibility of conducting research activities around definitional issues. Likewise, the Southern Ontario Node (Chapter 5) conducted further conceptual work on definitional matters. The Atlantic Node paid particular attention to the use of language, encouraging the use of the “Social Economy” as a framing concept in the region as one of four partnership goals (Chapter 3).

Content of Research

The area of “content of research” pertains to the topics examined within the research projects and the process for how new topics get included (if they do). Are topics, key themes and areas of research focus, explicitly shaped by community research interests or do they pay special attention to marginal groups? At what stage in the project was specific research content established (i.e., in the proposal or ongoing over the course of the research)? Were there opportunities to revisit and redefine research content as the project itself progressed and as the partnership developed?

These are difficult questions in today’s research funding environment. While all research undertakings should be open to surprise discoveries and new avenues of inquiry, such openness seems especially important in the case of engaged partnership research. The challenge, however, for funding organizations, and arguably, for too many career academics, is that they seek tractable projects with a low risk of non-delivery.

The Atlantic Node (Chapter 3) developed criteria for adding new members, and as the partnership expanded, new themes, projects and activities were added. Other nodes also refined their research questions, with the mid-term review providing an important moment for reflection and redirection. However, openness in agenda-setting has its downsides. The BALTA partnership, for example, devoted its first years to building relationships. Many of these relationships have taken on a life of their own that will survive beyond the end of the CSERPs, yet in the mid-term review, concerns were raised about the published output of the research partnership (Chapter 8).

Research Process

We use the term “research process” to describe the methods and methodologies employed for carrying out the different research projects. Of particular interest is the question of whether, and to what degree, there is
Evidence of participatory methods and content within the actual research (i.e., rhetoric versus action). Also important in a consideration of process are issues around: research ethics and their impact on various partners within the research, who is leading the different research projects, and whether there is evidence of attempts to make the research process accessible to community partners (i.e., during proposal development, hiring of researchers and students, ethics approval, and project implementation).

The funding context plays a crucial role here since this will determine who can be involved in particular research activities (see Stoecker, 2008). SSHRC grants customarily expect researchers within the academy to undertake research activities as part of their academic workloads (with the exception of time release stipends, generally not a significant factor within the CSERP). Practitioner researchers, on the other hand, need to have incomes while they undertake research, funding that is rarely possible from their organizations. This creates an imbalance in research that needs to be considered in future similar projects.

The coordinators also highlight a limitation of SSHRC funding regulations on active research participation by paid project employees (see Chapter 10). They recommend that in order to play their coordinating role more effectively, and indeed to recruit suitable candidates, the research contribution of coordinators should be acknowledged and accepted.

The more decentralized (Atlantic, NOMS) and community-led (BALTA) CSERP partnerships appear to have put more emphasis on participatory action research methodologies. At the same time, these Nodes also note the frustrations experienced by community groups with university ethics processes and administrative procedures and the importance of efforts to address these issues. In contrast, partnerships such as the Southern Ontario Node and the National Hub, which were built around representative organizations, appear to have been more concerned with dissemination methods that reached a wider, often policy-oriented, audience than with direct engagement of partners in the research process itself. However, the Southern Ontario Node also showed the value of matching research expertise of academics to the changing needs of community organizations. This was important for both community-based and umbrella organizations, especially when some of these lost funding after the change in government in 2006 (Chapter 5).

Capacity-Building

The category of capacity-building focuses on three dimensions. First, the capacity of university partners to reach out to students and communities (i.e., mechanisms and resources to support, employ and/or engage practitioners and community members in the research). Second, whether capacity building (both within the university and community) is explicitly included in the research
proposal and activities. And third, we are also interested in issues around the potential for capacity-building activities to alter or transform institutional structures and rules through the research; for example, to allow the hiring of young people from communities and recognizing them as researchers.

Explicit attention to capacity-building can be found in the NOMS and Atlantic Nodes’ decentralized models, which included resources to enhance capacity of community partners to participate within the project and commitment to attempts to alter institutional structures within the university. Chapter 7 describes one research project which was initiated by the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association responding to the Node’s call for proposals. Young people were trained and employed through this project to record and relate the experiences of elders, so together they built a new co-operative for trappers. These efforts to reach out through capacity building recognized the community members as “legitimate” researchers within the project. Student training – both in a formal academic sense and in other ways – are another important dimension of capacity-building.

It is also important to recognize that capacity building does not come only from the process of research, but also from the outputs. The Southern Ontario node in particular focused on developing a series of specific measurement tools for community organizations (Chapter 5), while all across the CSERP’s, mapping and impact studies provided widely understood quantitative indicators that were invaluable in communicating the contribution of the sector to the public and to decision-makers.

Evaluation

This category explores questions surrounding who evaluates the research project, when, and to what effect. Is there evidence of self-reflection within the project, so that evaluation outcomes might lead to changes in direction of the research? Importantly, is reflection about the nature of the partnership and engagement within the project included as part of evaluation activities? The notion of ongoing learning is a significant concept pertaining to evaluation.

As a category required by SSHRC in both proposals and mid-term reviews, evaluation activities were noted as centrally important by most CSERP projects. Several partnerships noted changes in their activity based on these interim evaluations. The BALTA Node in particular was willing to engage in self-reflection/evaluation within the research project and to evaluate outcomes with an eye to the possibility that this reflection can lead to changes in the direction of and methods utilized to conduct the research. The evaluation process was designed as integral to the program of relationship-building and research (see Chapter 8, Table 8.1).
Research informs social change processes in a variety of ways, but research should not be conflated with change itself. In their contribution to this book, Bussières and Fontan from the Quebec Node present a framework for evaluating community-university research partnerships (Chapter 4) which recognizes the distinction between the evaluation of research partnerships themselves, and of the social change processes in which they take place. Their framework emphasizes how mapping the needs and perspectives of community partners can result in a simple tool that allows for a graphical depiction of an assessment of the research phases. This can serve as a basis for discussion and reflection.

Knowledge Mobilization

The final category, knowledge mobilization, explores the various methods, means, formats and resources put aside for dissemination activities. This includes both research dissemination (i.e., results, findings) and promotion of the Social Economy as a concept and a sector. As a category of analysis it considers whether project partners have made a conscious effort to include diverse partners and audiences in dissemination activities. Is there any evidence of cross-over dissemination (i.e., academics publishing for practitioners and vice versa) and are there mechanisms for reporting, reviewing and discussing findings with practitioners? What attention has been given to reviewing, studying and advocating policies and to curriculum and training development?

One example of engagement around knowledge mobilization comes from the “ground-truthing” practice developed by the Québec Node. Here, researchers meet with practitioners to discuss findings in a workshop format. This Node has also published a Guide for Knowledge Mobilization in the Context of Research Partnerships (ARUC/RQRP, 2008a). Because of the research licensing system in many northern communities, the Northern Node demonstrated commitment to knowledge mobilization activities, going so far as to require evidence of reportbacks and discussion of research plans with communities in order to receive funding (Chapter 9). As a final example, Broad (Chapter 6) describes how engagement in research lead academics to make fundamental changes in their university course curriculum.

Reflection and Discussion

This eBook proceeds from the perspective that the CSERPs provided a unique and important opportunity for reflecting upon and learning about how to build better research partnerships that achieve active university-practitioner engagement. The eight categories, keywords and questions presented above were developed to help clarify what is distinctive about engaged research. Partnership and engagement in research are not the same thing, and failure to recognize this distinction potentially results in mismatched expectations. Partnership may be
Community-University Research Partnerships

no more than agreements on goals followed by functional specialization, while engagement implies participation in research decision-making that extends beyond the collection and analysis of data.

The chapters that follow show that engagement did indeed happen within the CURA research format, and it is encouraging that SSHRC’s recent programming changes have been informed by the CSERP experience, as well as that of other CURAs. Innovative practices can be seen in all the categories of understanding presented here, confirming for us the value of reflecting on this remarkable pan-Canadian experiment in research partnership and engagement. At the same time, it is also clear that engagement beyond partnership is frustrated by the institutional context of the partners. Beyond the well-known factors, such as the funding and capacity constraints facing community-based practitioners, the rigidity of disciplinary and institutional norms in the university, and the restrictions placed by funding agencies on the use of funding, we conclude by highlighting two particular considerations in moving beyond partnership to engagement.

First, some CSERP partnerships may have been locked into their initial project proposals in a way that precluded ongoing learning and development that is essential for full engagement. The SSHRC application and award process understandably gives weight and legitimacy to the initial research proposal, but we might ask what else can be done to create space for deepening engagement? In large, complex and resource-intensive undertakings, the traditional model of waiting to see the outcomes of the research before casting judgment seems especially inappropriate. The SSHRC mid-term review and requirements for evaluation were important mechanisms to deal with this challenge, but more attention might be given to follow-through. The mid-term review could, for example, be extended to include responses to the initial proposal reviewers, as well as the comments of the adjudication committee. Related to this, although there is also a case to be made for fresh perspectives, apparently there was not enough continuity between the initial and reviewing panels. In fairness to the research funder, the Letter of Intent mechanism, and especially the new SSHRC Partnership Development Grants, go far in addressing this concern.

Second, we find it significant to what extent the type of engagement achieved by the various partnerships was shaped by the nature of the regions to which they were matched. Two of the multi-province partnerships had decentralized governance structures; this structural device appears to have assisted the NOMS and Atlantic Nodes in achieving deep local engagement. The Québec Node, created in a distinct policy context and built on a long history of university-community partnership, also employed a regionalized structure to deepen engagement. For the Southern Ontario Node engagement was through a partnership amongst representative organizations, appropriate in a metropolitan
context. The Northern Node also displayed features of a more centralized partnership, with engagement achieved through the involvement of various territorial organizations and representatives. The one community-led partnership, BALTA, strove to exert a transformative influence on its university partners. These different experiences suggest that the design of the CSERPs mattered; initial structuring decisions, and even the nature of the existing partnerships on which research projects were built, exerted considerable influence on the nature of engagement that followed.

In the remainder of this volume, participants in the CSERPs reflect on their efforts to create engaged research partnerships to support and build the Social Economy in all its manifestations. We are delighted that the authors represented here include academics, practitioner-researchers, community members, students and research coordinators. They share details about the challenges they faced and overcame, about their achievements in generating research outputs that range from the traditional and the tangible to the unconventional and tacit, and about tasks as yet unfinished. We thank them for their openness, and for all their works.


### TABLE 1.1: Funded Social Economy CURAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Home Organization</th>
<th>Partner Organizations</th>
<th>Leads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Hub</strong></td>
<td>Canadian Social Economy: Understandings and potential</td>
<td>University of Victoria</td>
<td>MacPherson, Ian &amp; Downing, Rupert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Nodes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atlantic</strong></td>
<td>The Social Economy and sustainability: Innovations in bridging, bonding, and capacity building</td>
<td>Mount Saint Vincent University</td>
<td>Brown, Leslie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Québec</strong></td>
<td>Réseau québécois de la recherche partenariale en économie sociale</td>
<td>Université du Québec à Montréal</td>
<td>Fontan, Jean-Marc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Ontario</strong></td>
<td>A community-university research alliance for Southern Ontario's Social Economy</td>
<td>University of Toronto</td>
<td>Quarter, Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan</strong></td>
<td>Linking, learning and leveraging: social enterprises, knowledgeable economies and sustainable communities</td>
<td>University of Saskatchewan, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives</td>
<td>Hammond Ketilson, Lou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>British Columbia and Alberta</strong></td>
<td>The Social Economy in British Columbia and Alberta: Strengthening the foundations for growth</td>
<td>Canadian Centre for Community Renewal</td>
<td>Lewis, Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The North</strong></td>
<td>Proposal for a Northern regional Social Economy node</td>
<td>Yukon College</td>
<td>Southcott, Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partner Organizations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Hub</strong></td>
<td>CCEDNet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Nodes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atlantic</strong></td>
<td>Community Services Council - Newfoundland &amp; Labrador</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Québec</strong></td>
<td>Le Chantier de l’économie sociale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Ontario</strong></td>
<td>Imagine Canada, Ontario Co-op Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan</strong></td>
<td>Community University Institute for Social Research, Winnipeg Inner-City Research Alliance, Community Economic &amp; Social Development Department</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>British Columbia and Alberta</strong></td>
<td>Royal Roads University (administrator), with a collective model for academic leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The North</strong></td>
<td>Nunavut Research Institute; Aurora Research Institute; Labrador Institute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE 1.2: Categories, Keywords and Questions for Understanding Engaged Research Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories:</th>
<th>Keyword Indicators (manifest coding):</th>
<th>Question Indicators (latent coding):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Research partnership Community Lead / Director / Co-director / Steering Committee Budget Structure Decision-making Orientation Operating practices</td>
<td>Who is in the research partnership? Who is the lead? (Academic, community org. etc.) Who makes budgetary decisions? Can/does the governance structure evolve? How? Structure – centralized or decentralized by geography, theme, host? Is there evidence of specific steps to ensure access to decision-making by community and other stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network-building (networking)</td>
<td>Existing networks Previous partnerships Network prior to / will build Core values Assumptions Research capacity Community partners</td>
<td>Does the CURA build on previous partnerships (network, CURA etc.?) Have built network … prior to engaging in research or will build? Distinction between network-building as … core value (i.e., valid in its own right) or to further research capacity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions (of sector)</td>
<td>“SE defined as …” Core values Assumptions Impact (on partners…)</td>
<td>How is Social Economy definition framed? Is there agreement on a definition? What is the content of agreement? Is definition of SE an area of research itself? Any future partner affected by previously decided upon definition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories:</td>
<td>Keyword Indicators (manifest coding):</td>
<td>Question Indicators (latent coding):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Content (of research)** | Motivation  
Themes  
Community research interests  
When research decided  
Redefining projects  
Project approval  
Specific projects (titles etc.)  
Cluster areas – Sub-nodes | What are the themes?  
Is content shaped around partnership?  
When is content decided (How specific is the proposal? How much do mid-term and proposal correspond? Were any new projects approved after the award?)  
Is there a process for redefining projects? How, by whom?  
Is there any explicit consideration of minorities or disadvantaged populations? |
| **Process and Methods of Research** | Mapping  
Conceptualizing  
Methodology  
Participatory action research  
Action-oriented research  
Self-design  
Ethics  
Leads  
Student hiring | What attention is given to mapping of nodes? How and by whom?  
What attention is given to research ethics?  
Is there evidence of participatory methods? In the proposal and carried forward to mid-term?  
Who are project leads?  
Is there evidence of conscious steps to make research processes accessible to community partner? In matters such as:  
proposal development  
student hiring  
ethics approval  
project implementation |
| **Capacity-building** | Student research assistants  
Employment – students  
Employment – community  
Practitioners  
“Capacity-building”  
University / institutional capacity  
Resources / support / allocation  
Potential outcome | Are there identified mechanisms to draw students from all levels and backgrounds?  
Bringing in youth working in community etc.?  
Do projects explicitly reference capacity-building?  
What mechanisms and resources exist to support, employ or engage practitioners and community partners?  
Is university capacity for engagement addressed and changed in any way? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories:</th>
<th>Keyword Indicators (manifest coding):</th>
<th>Question Indicators (latent coding):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Participants Community partners Reflection Social Auditing Stakeholders Indicators Self-evaluation Research shift Partnerships</td>
<td>Do they evaluate? What themes / topics are evaluated? Is there evidence that evaluation will lead to reflection / changing direction? Who leads, who participates in the evaluation? Is there any evidence of evaluation having an impact on research? Is there explicit reflection on engagement and the partnership itself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge Mobilization</strong></td>
<td>Applied material (Deliverables) Dissemination Publications Policy “Policy” Advocacy Curriculum Training Targets</td>
<td>Is there evidence for conscious inclusion of diverse partners and audiences in dissemination? Is there evidence of cross-over dissemination of knowledge? (i.e., where academics publish for practitioners and vice versa?) Are there mechanisms of ground-truthing findings with practitioners? What attention is given to reviewing / studying / advocating policies? What attention is given to curriculum / training?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>