



Guest editorial: Co-operation between Canadian universities and the co-operative sector

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Guest Editorial

Co-operation Between Canadian Universities and the Co-operative Sector

There is a long, shared history between co-operatives and universities in Canada. This history has involved a variety of different types of collaboration, of which we might note four here.

One important form of co-operation, going back more than one hundred years, has been the provision of services by co-operatives on campuses, especially for students. The Guelph Campus Co-op, located at Guelph University in Ontario and the oldest campus co-operative in Canada, was founded in 1913 as a bookstore. It subsequently also developed a large student housing co-operative, one of five in the province of Ontario. In Quebec, there is also a long tradition of co-operative activity on campuses, going back nearly eighty years. These co-operatives organised under the Fédération des coopératives en milieu scolaire, and known by the brand name Coopsco, number 60 separate co-operatives operating in 90 universities, colleges, and high schools spread across more than 200 different locations. In addition to operating bookstores, some of these co-operatives also run the catering and food services on their campuses. There have been a variety of other campus co-operative initiatives across the country as well.

At the core of the university mission is research and teaching. Universities and the co-operative sector have partnered around both of these functions. With regard to research, there are a variety of research centres on different campuses across Canada focusing on co-operatives, including: The Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives located at the University of Saskatchewan; the Institut de recherche et d'éducation pour les coopératives et les mutuelles de l'Université de Sherbrooke (IRECUS); the Chaire de coopération Guy-Bernier at the Université du Québec à Montréal; the Institut international des coopératives Alphonse-et-Dorimène-Desjardins based at HEC Montréal, and the International Center for Co-operative Management at St. Mary's University. All of these centres have been supported by local co-operatives and/or credit unions. Their financial support and guidance have been essential in the production of relevant, up-to-date research on (and for) the co-operative sector.

Teaching about co-operatives has been undertaken in many forms and locations across Canada throughout the years. In naming a few, one needs to highlight the role of St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia which, starting in the 1920s, provided technical and professional education and training based on co-operative principles and models through its extension programme. Today, the Coady International Institute continues this tradition by providing programmes promoting community-based organisations. Co-operatives are the subject of education programmes at a variety of other institutions of higher education. For example, St. Mary's University offers a master programme and graduate diploma on co-operative and credit union management, programmes popular among executives of the co-operative sector around the world. IRECUS has offered, through the years, a master programme and a specialised Master of Business Administration (MBA) on co-operative management and governance. Cape Breton University currently offers an MBA in community economic development, with a strong emphasis on co-operative enterprises.

Finally, collaboration between universities, local communities, and co-operatives has contributed substantially to economic and social development through the promotion of collective entrepreneurship and support for newly incubated and fledgling co-operatives. Here the role of St. Francis Xavier in fostering the Antigonish Movement in the 1920s is perhaps the best-known case. Others would include the role of the Co-operative College of Canada (and its predecessor organisations) in Saskatoon, collaboration between New Dawn Enterprises and Cape Breton University in Nova Scotia, and various initiatives in Quebec.

This tradition of co-operation between universities, the co-operative sector and communities continues today, across a variety of forms. This special issue of the *Journal of Co-operative*

Studies examines four contemporary cases of co-operation between Canadian universities and the co-operative sector. The first article highlights how a university campus can foster collective entrepreneurial initiatives. Darryl Reed examines the potential of the university as a site of place-based entrepreneurship through a particular case dedicated to the incorporation of students in co-operative entrepreneurship. The Green Campus Co-op incubates and operates different sustainable business activities, illustrating how co-operative entrepreneurship can align closely with the mission and goals of universities.

The second paper illustrates how co-operative principles can strengthen mutual benefit in partnerships involving co-operatives and university actors. More specifically, it examines the partnerships between a healthcare co-operative, the Saskatoon Community Clinic and several colleges, schools, departments, and divisions at the University of Saskatchewan. The author, Victoria Taras, suggests that mutual benefit can act as a governance mechanism for partnerships, promoting co-operation and co-ordination among the partners.

Co-operative education, as a key principle and a concrete function in the modus operandi of co-operatives, is illustrated by Judith Harris and her colleague Tam Le from the University of Winnipeg in the third article. The authors explain how the University of Winnipeg began teaching courses on co-operatives at correctional facilities in the surrounding areas of Winnipeg. The paper supports the claim that education on co-operatives in prison can shift the prison culture from a “maintenance mode” to a “community correctional mode” and can facilitate the development of co-operatives that support people inside the prison and in the community, post-release.

Finding spaces and vehicles to teach about co-operatives on campuses has often been a challenge, especially in business schools, where it is frequently referred to as the “hidden alternative”. Myriam Michaud and Luc Audebrand, from Université Laval, describe the process of elaborating new (audio-visual) pedagogical materials about worker co-operatives and their potential for furthering co-operative education. The article describes the different steps and actors involved in creating such materials, and argues that the collaboration between the academic and co-operative business communities achieves several important goals, including providing professors with materials that can be more readily incorporated (and received) in the business curriculum, facilitating a wider range of business models being presented to students, and stimulating new insights into important issues in businesses (especially the role of co-operation).

The cases in this special issue help to illustrate how the potential for co-operation between universities and the co-operative sector has an extremely broad scope that can extend across different aspects of the missions of institutions of higher education (teaching, research, and community engagement), different forms of co-operative enterprise (user, worker, marketing, as well as social and multi-stakeholder) and different business sectors (food services, housing, medical care, professional services, merchandise, etc.). They also demonstrate the long-standing practice of innovation in the co-operative sector, which has regularly pioneered novel approaches to collaboration for mutual benefit with universities and other actors.

The special issue is completed with a short article from Erin Hancock on the establishment of an online hub to provide educational resources and materials for teaching and learning about co-operatives, followed by a book review on the life and work of Cape Breton based social entrepreneur, Fr. Greg MacLeod.

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Guest Editors

The Guest Editors

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