

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A FORCE FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD RESILIENCE

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Complex challenges such as income inequality, poverty, social exclusion, and urban decline persist in Winnipeg (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – MB, 2009). These challenges result from human constructs—the legacy of how society has chosen to structure our social and economic relations and models. However, they can be effectively addressed with comprehensive, long-term, multifaceted, and integrated approaches that are community led—a development methodology that is often referred to as Community Economic Development (CED; Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2009; Bernas & Reimer, 2011). CED organisations have become a force for neighbourhood resilience, reducing poverty, and building human capacity and hope, while creating more sustainable livelihoods and communities for many in our city.

While CED terminology emerged in the last few decades, the practice has been around for a very long time. Indeed, the values guiding First Nations communities and economies aligned closely with modern CED principles, as did the cooperative movement that emerged in Manitoba over the last century as a response to poverty and market inequalities (Cabaj, 2004; Reimer, Bernas, & Adeler, forthcoming). For just as long, non-profits and other civil society organisations have used various strategies to achieve outcomes in line with modern CED principles (Reimer, Bernas, & Adeler, forthcoming).

CED is not easy to describe, as it is not a particular legal structure or practitioner template, and it may be practiced in any type of activity and sector. The fact that community may refer to a

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geographic neighbourhood, a demographic within a neighbourhood or region, or a community of interest further diversifies the potential models of CED. As a community-led model, CED will reflect the priorities of each community, and no two communities are precisely the same. The intrinsic distinctive features of any collection of people will result in their own characteristics, vision, priorities, and chosen path to achieve that vision—even when guided by the same principles. Externalities such as public policy, market and economic trends, social innovation, historical context, the generation of knowledge, and many other factors will also mean that particular models receive greater attention in given time periods than others.

Winnipeg's development path is no different. As a snapshot in time, the last three decades of CED in this city make for an interesting story of how CED is manifested in different contexts. While many of the approaches and models have appeared over the last century, there were particular areas of emphasis that demonstrated the morphing of development priorities in response to the dynamics and externalities mentioned above.

In the 1990s, there was coalescence around the principles and terminology of CED (Loxley, Silver, & Sexsmith, 2007). The goal was to find solutions to poverty—making sure that root causes were identified and that interventions dealt with systemic and deep-seated barriers. It was about creating change, not charity. CED addresses the reasons poverty exists by breaking down institutional barriers so that people can access opportunities rather than tacitly reinforcing the systems and institutions causing marginalisation with charitable acts of poverty alleviation. Many CED organisations were created in Winnipeg with these outcomes as their mission. Opportunities for Employment addresses labour market barriers by linking job seekers with good jobs in partnership with business owners. Jubilee Loan Fund addresses access to capital barriers by mobilizing capital to provide loan guarantees to CED projects that traditional financial institutions would not support. SEED Winnipeg addresses income barriers and gaps in entrepreneurship supports by assisting low-income people in starting their own businesses. Neechi Foods Co-op addresses employability barriers for Aboriginal people through worker-ownership as well as the market failure that created inner-city food deserts.

In addition to creating community-based CED initiatives and organisations, there was also an organising movement to influence key institutions with this development paradigm, including the Assiniboine Credit Union, the United Way, and the Winnipeg Foundation. These actors were also instrumental in political efforts that shaped and then populated the new Provincial government at the end of this decade (Loxley & Simpson, 2007).

With conservative governments at the provincial and municipal levels during the time period, this burst of CED activity is hardly attributable to a supportive policy environment. More appropriately, the urgency to create community solutions would have been driven by public policies that generated greater inequities, poverty, and desperate circumstances for so many people in Winnipeg. However, there was some support from governments for a few of these CED initiatives, which may have been aided by the fact that these were 'market-based solutions to poverty' that focused on labour market and enterprise development.

CED Principles as developed by Neechi Foods Worker Co-op

- **Use of locally produced goods and services**
Purchases of goods and services produced locally • Circulation of income within the local community; less income drain • Stronger economic linkages within the local community • Less dependency on outside markets • Greater community self-reliance
- **Production of goods and services for local use**
Creation of goods and services for use in the local community • Circulation of income within the local community, less income drain • Stronger economic linkages within the local community • Greater community self-reliance • Restoration of balance in the local economy
- **Local re-investment of profits**
Use of profits to expand local economic activity • Stop profit drainage • Investment that increases community self-reliance and cooperation
- **Long-term employment of local residents**
Long-term jobs in areas which have experienced chronic unemployment or under-employment • Reduction of dependency on welfare and food banks • Opportunities to live more socially productive lives • Personal and community self-esteem • More wages and salaries spent in the local community
- **Local skill development**
Training of local residents • Training geared to community development needs • Higher labour productivity • Greater employability in communities which have historically experienced high unemployment • Greater productive capability of economically depressed areas
- **Local decision-making**
Local ownership and control • Cooperative forms of ownership and control • Grassroots involvement • Community self-determination • People working together to meet community needs
- **Public health**
Physical and mental health of community residents • Healthier families • More effective schooling • More productive workforce
- **Physical environment**
Healthy neighbourhoods • Safe neighbourhoods • Attractive neighbourhoods • Ecological sensitivity
- **Neighbourhood stability**
Dependable housing • Long-term residency • Base for long-term community development
- **Human dignity**
Self-respect • Community spirit • Gender equality • Respect for seniors • Respect for children • Social dignity regardless of physical, intellectual, or psychological differences • Social dignity regardless of national or ethnic background, colour or creed • Aboriginal pride
- **Support for other CED initiatives**
Mutually supportive trade among organizations with similar community development goals in Winnipeg and elsewhere

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw a new CED model emerge and gain traction in Winnipeg. Based on successful initiatives in Cape Breton and Montreal, the North End Community Renewal Corporation was the first in Winnipeg to move from a focus on creating economic opportunities for individuals to addressing a very specific geographic territory (Colussi, Perry, Lewis, & Loewen, 2003). This Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation (NRC) model was created in 1998 by a coalition of community organisations, but the model achieved scale with the newly elected provincial government when it created Neighbourhoods Alive! as a program to implement their newly created CED Policy Framework (Bernas & Reimer, 2011). By the end of this decade, there were five NRCs in Winnipeg's inner-city, and another seven in smaller urban communities throughout Manitoba, with a mandate to pursue comprehensive community renewal through strategies designed by the very people who lived in those neighbourhoods. Community leadership and social innovation created the first NRC, but the growth of the model is strongly tied to the development of a supportive public policy and program as they were resourced with 5-year core funding from the Province and supported with additional project funds (Reimer, Bernas & Adeler, forthcoming).

The vision for the NRC model was that it would engage those with the greatest vested interest in community renewal in determining their own future in a way that built their own knowledge, leadership, and skills. Grounded in the knowledge that development determined from the 'outside' or 'top-down' usually does not reflect local priorities, contexts, and certainly does not get local actors involved in the process, this model sought to maximise the long-term capacity of the community for the greatest outcomes and impact (Kliewer, 2010). Even if the priorities identified by the community seem obvious and align with what outsiders would prioritise (safety, housing, employment, etc.), dynamics of identity, leadership, ownership, and pride are greatly improved when developed through this model—leading to greater results (Amyot, Downing, & Tremblay, 2010; EKOS Research Associates, 2010).

The second decade of this century brought another CED model to the forefront—social enterprise. The 1990s focused on economic opportunities for individuals, the first decade of the 2000s were about geographic neighbourhoods, and this new shift has emphasized a particular organisational model to achieve a variety of objectives. Social enterprises are businesses usually owned by non-profit organisations that act in the market for the purpose of achieving a social impact (Enterprising Non-Profits, 2010). Some, such as Salvation Army and Mennonite Central Committee Thrift Stores as well as Habitat for Humanity's Re-Store, generate profit through sales in order to support the work of the charities that own them. Some, such as the St. Norbert Farmers' Market, are created to meet community needs where the market fails. Others, such as Fort Whyte Alive, use a business model to advance a non-profit's mission—environmental education in this case. Many more have a mission to reduce poverty and social exclusion by creating jobs for people with barriers to employment, such as BUILD, Diversity Foods, L'Arche Café, Mother Earth Recycling, Imaginability, Manitoba Green Retrofit, and Inner City Renovation. Even some social enterprises that have been around a long time, such as Goodwill Industries created to provide jobs for people with barriers to employment in 1930s, have been transformed based on the social enterprise model. This decade saw a new energy and focus on the social enterprise model

The recent interest in the social enterprise model is being driven by the potential it has to achieve results that other models may not be able to, but also in part by public policy dynamics. Non-profits are often tasked with tackling complex societal challenges such as poverty, social exclusion, and environmental sustainability that are inadequately addressed by, and in fact sometimes created by, governments and the market economy. As funding in this decade, particularly from the federal government, has been reduced for programs and organisations that deal with these challenges, communities and non-profits are desperately trying to figure out how to generate the required resources to continue providing essential services and achieving their social missions. In this negative public policy context, the potential to create a business model that generates revenues from the market to sustain the mission brings hope. At the same time, particularly with governments that see the market as the solution to all societal challenges, there is growing public policy support across the country for social enterprise—albeit sometimes with an unfortunate motivation of offloading government responsibilities to non-profits (Loxley & Simpson, 2007). From another perspective, governments also see that a social enterprise model will leverage public investments to generate additional market resources for a larger aggregate investment in that particular mission than the government alone could have provided, and for a greater net impact. Non-profits also see this potential for net resource gain as well as increased autonomy from government if sufficient market-based strength is gained.



Over 500 people attended CCEDNet's 2014 Gathering: Manitoba's Community Development and Community Economic Development Conference – www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/mbgathering

One of the catalysts for the emergence of social enterprise development in Manitoba has been The Canadian CED Network – Manitoba (Ekos Research Associates, 2011). Its membership consists of the leading social enterprises in Manitoba addressing labour market opportunities, as well as most of the organisations that support social enterprise development. CCEDNet – Manitoba’s Spark program brings resources to social enterprise development through consultation and assessment services, referrals to necessary resources, and matching organisations with pro bono volunteers who complete specialised technical tasks to support social enterprises. CCEDNet – Manitoba’s Enterprising Non-Profits program provides business planning workshops and development grants, and has become a resource hub for social enterprise development. Partners and members of the Network have formed a Solutions Table (CCEDNet – Manitoba, SEED Winnipeg, Assiniboine Credit Union, United Way of Winnipeg, Jubilee Loan Fund, and the Manitoba Co-operative Association) that make decisions on the grants as well as provide additional supports and resources for social enterprise development. In 2011, CCEDNet – Manitoba conducted research on the sector to ascertain the scale and scope of the sector, and it is now in the process of conducting this research again to begin building a longitudinal base of knowledge about the development and needs of the sector (O’Connor, Elson, & Reimer, 2012). As well, the members of CCEDNet – Manitoba successfully convinced the Province of Manitoba to work in partnership toward the creation of a comprehensive Manitoba Social Enterprise Strategy in 2014 (Province of Manitoba, 2014).

Poverty affects us all, and the reduction of poverty makes Winnipeg a better place to live for everyone. As a human construct, poverty is solvable—particularly in a country as wealthy as ours. The values of CED—community leadership, systemic change, as well as comprehensive and integrated solutions—are woven throughout the practice of CED regardless of the shifts in focus and models. The visionary and courageous leaders who dedicate their lives and careers to the creation of these important community solutions deserve our admiration and gratitude. But as a society, we need to demand that our public policy leaders sufficiently invest in these important, long-term solutions. The legacy of their impacts will ripple throughout our city for decades to come, making it a more equitable and just city for all of us.

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