Seikatsu Consumer Coop: Scaling up food system transformation?

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Outline

- Context and Rationale
- Seikatsu Consumer Coop
- Preliminary Conclusions
- Relevance for BC and Alberta Food System Transformation?
CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

> Sustainable Community Development (SCD), Social Economy (SE)
> Diversity in approaches
  > Strong vs. weak, Deep vs. shallow,
> Criticized for lack of social justice, lack of scale, and sector-based approaches
Weakest of the Weak: Hybrid Warship Saves 1 Million Gallons of Fuel
CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

> Sustainable Community Development (SCD), Social Economy (SE)
> Diversity in approaches
>   > Weak vs. strong, shallow vs. deep
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Context and Rationale

> Convergence
  > Strong sustainability and deep social economy
    > Values of reciprocity, trust, participation, equity, democratic control

> What about Local Food?
  > Similar spectrum for local food – alternative vs. conventional
  > Great potential → value based and system wide transformation
Seikatsu Consumers Coop

> 1965 → 60 women concerned about access to healthy milk – “better milk at better prices”
> 2009 → value-based consumer coop with over 320,000 members ~$800M in sales, 90% food
> Proactive, ethical consumption as approach to changing food system

Photo: Yvon Poirier
Seikatsu Consumer Coop

> Rapid growth – oil crisis of 1970s – bulk buying was only way to access goods, steady growth since

> Han system → neighbourhood organizing, local management
  > Community-based active citizenship
  > Self-management = considerable savings
  > Consumer intervention in market
  > Producer / Consumer relationships
Seikatsu Consumer Coop

> How does it work?

> Dual membership coop – SCC union and ~30 local SCC
> $60 membership fee for each + voluntary monthly payment of $11 until investment of $3500 is reached
> Pre-order monthly purchases average $300
> SCC owns depots, trucks for distribution, 160 staff
> SCC joint owners of 3 milk factories, 1 poultry farm

Photo: Yvon Poirier
Seikatsu Consumer Coop

> Self-management
  > Han System, autonomous local coops, SCC union
  > Various committees

> Uniform and limited products
  > Supermarket sells 300,000 goods, SCC offers 150-200 items per month
  > Maximize buying power

> Limited number of producers
  > Personal relationships with SCC union
Evolution of SCC

> Changes to society
  > Membership in Hans system declining
> Reconciling SCC values and local food
  > New desire for personal relationships with farmers, involving farmers in SCC union
> SCC available beyond middle-class, beyond food
  > Workers cooperatives, wind power investments, elderly care, health coops, redevelopment of depots for housing
Preliminary Lessons?

> Clear catalyst / motivation for transformation
  > Preservation of Japanese heritage food products

> Place-based organizing
  > Thick version of community

> Citizen-based consumption
Relevance for Vancouver and Edmonton?

> Local Food First – network of organizations in Vancouver committed to just and sustainable local food system
  > Local food hub and precincts visioning
> Edmonton Good Food Box CSA
  > Pilot project oversubscribed,
> How do these initiatives engage in value-based food system transformation?
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