

Draft Mandate For The Community-Based Research - Research Cluster (CBR)
BALTA 2 Partnership Development Project
Scaling Innovation for Sustainability (SIS)
(December 4th, 2012)
LED by Noel Keough and Ana Maria Peredo

1. Background

Social economy practitioners, researchers and organizations have been for a long time responding to local and global challenges such as poverty, inequality, economic crisis and climate change. Previous work of the BC Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA) identified and examined a number of social economy innovations including community investments, housing cooperatives, car share cooperatives, local food and farmers markets, land trusts, green energy, community and social finance, etc. The next step in social economy research is the systematic examination and understanding of how successful innovations can be replicated and scaled out or up. What are the conditions that inhibit or foster processes of scaling out and up. We want to focus our inquiry around the emerging field of practice of the social economy contribution to community resilience and the process of community transition to sustainability. As a prelude to this next phase of research, the present Partnership Development Grant will enhance the academic-practitioner partnership that emerged in BALTA – the vehicle for the next phase of social economy research.

2.0 Overall Goal and Objectives

The **Overall Goal** of this Partnership Development Grant is to develop a new community-university research partnership and program – building upon the BALTA framework but engaging significant new partners and participants – that will focus expertise on developing a theoretical and methodological framework for studying the scaling up and scaling out of innovations that re-localize the economy and strengthen the resilience and sustainability of communities and regions. (PDG Goal and Project Description)

Objectives

Objective 1 – To *engage prospective partners*, researchers and practitioners in a structured analysis of existing theory, practices and research findings – by BALTA and other researchers – as a basis for working towards development of a framework for the new research program.

Objective 2 – To *synthesize research findings* focused on mezzo- and micro-levels with macro-level modelling of transitioning to a steady state economy by leading ecological economists from the UK and Canada.

Objective 3 – To *identify and select regions and communities*, both urban and rural, to become partners in the future action research program that will be an outcome of this PDG process. This action research will focus on adapting, applying and evaluating key micro-mezzo level innovations in several basic needs sectors with a view to identifying systemic factors, including policy, that enable or inhibit the scaling up and scaling out of innovations which can contribute to the overall goal.

Objective 4 – To *synthesize the work of the research clusters* working on the first three objectives and develop their outputs into a comprehensive longer term partnership and research plan, including the development of relevant proposals and grant applications to support the future research program.

Objective 5 – To engage key stakeholders in *dialogue on findings related to a low carbon economy transition*¹, to explore what resonates and to identify strategic opportunities for collaboration in the research program.

3.0 Approach to Partnership

In the SSHRC proposal we articulated what we mean by partnership. “Critical to building an effective long term partnership and an ‘owned’ research agenda is an approach that embeds co-construction at all steps of the research development, implementation and mobilization process”, including visioning, development of policy and parameters, management, research methodological design, approval of research methodology, implementation of community-based research plan, analysis/synthesis of research results, dissemination and mobilization of research and evaluation.

4.0 The Community-Based Research Cluster

Taking a page from the original BALTA, the PDG has been organized around three research clusters. Our cluster, the Community-based Research Cluster is focused on the elaboration of the research framework that will guide the work of the CBR cluster – the philosophical approach, methodologies, methods and implementation strategies that will allow us to understand how social economy innovation can be scaled out and up. Community based participatory action research is the core research philosophy. We also describe our research approach as applied research in that, in collaboration with communities, we will accompany the implementation of successful social economy innovations and build an understanding of the process of scaling out and scaling up those innovations. The CBR cluster will be co-led by Noel Keough and Ana Maria Peredo.

As established in this PDG our research focus will be on the following sectors: food, housing, energy & finance. Within the CBR cluster our focus will be the examination of efforts to scale out and up social innovation at the micro (local grassroots) and mezzo (local/regional) scales.

4.1 CBR Cluster Objectives

We are proposing 5 objectives for the work of our research cluster.

Objective 1: Establish a shared understanding of how the CBR partners will work together to complete the work of the cluster.

Objective 2: Build a strong, durable and effective CBR research cluster partnership team.

Objective 3: Identify methodologies and methods as a basis for the development of a methodological framework for the CBR clusters research program that investigates scaling out and scaling up of social innovation. We will examine what methodologies and methods have been employed in the past and their efficacy, and what new methods we might employ.

Objective 4: Develop criteria to identify and select communities, whether they be urban or rural, local or regional, to become partners in the proposed scaling up and out applied research program that will be an outcome of this PDG process. In doing so we need to ask what social economy

¹ A significant additional mobilization impact from this project will be achieved through wider promotion of research results emerging from the earlier SSHRC funded BALTA research that will only be published at the beginning of this project.

innovations are most strategic to focus on. What are the innovations that have inherently greater potential than others in releasing and mobilizing resources for local/regional application? We need to ask which actors do we need to engage?

Objective 5 – Articulate the process by which we will work with the selected communities including respective roles in the research team, decision-making structure and protocols, etc.

4.2 Participatory Action Research – The Philosophical Foundation

Community based *participatory action research* (CBPR) is a philosophical foundation for our research partnership. Cresswell (2013) refers to PAR as a transformative framework. PAR is a form of collective research wherein the researcher joins forces with the community, laypersons, and other partners to conceive of, design and carry out *applied research*. As a methodological and philosophical approach, in the context of our research partnership, PAR requires the tripartite collaboration of communities, practitioners and academic researchers in shaping the research program. All project participants are considered co-researchers with each bringing unique knowledge, insights, and experiences to the table. Many of the practitioners and researchers of this CBR cluster have extensive experience doing participatory action research in a diversity of contexts. Though we start with a general agreement of PAR as a foundation of our research, part of the work of the CBR cluster will be to come to consensus on how we define PAR in more precise terms, and from there to investigate and define what research strategies, methodologies and methods are most appropriate and effective for the research task at hand. Our research program will likely span a range of qualitative and quantitative methods.

We would like to propose the term "*acompañamiento*" to describe our research process. *Acompañamiento* comes from the Latin American context of social struggle where outsiders, whether researchers or others, accompany communities on their journey of empowerment, discovery and change-making. As we engage with the communities where the scaling out and up of social innovation is tested, we do so by walking alongside and in support of these community change processes. We do so as co-creators and co-learners.

4.3 Engaging Communities/ Regions (Objective 3)

At this point the ‘communities’ that we would engage as research collaborators could be place-based communities at a neighbourhood, community, city/town or regional scale; affinity-based communities; or institutional networks. The common denominator of all the ‘communities’ will be an interest in adapting innovations. As a starting point the following description of the process was written into the PDG proposal:

The communities “would be invited to engage in introductory seminars. If they are interested in further exploration, they will be asked to identify their priorities, potential sponsoring organizations and possible partners. Initial screening would narrow the field to up to 15 possible sites in Canada. Further discussions would clarify the context, sector interests, key challenges, objectives and benefits sought through their collaboration, and what human, organizational and financial resources they could contribute and/or help mobilize. The BALTA partners will determine a final means of selection of 5-8 communities. Face-to-face workshops involving key participants in each site would determine the action research focus, basic design and sponsoring organizations. This would then be incorporated into the proposed future research program.”

An important component of the work of the CBR cluster is to ratify, adapt, revamp and elaborate this community selection and engagement strategy.

4.4 Research Methodologies, Methods and Strategies

To reiterate, our research program will likely span a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. And as stated in our PDG proposal “with regard to developing multi-stakeholder partnerships, a mix of methods will be important (Poteete, Janssen & Ostrom, 2010; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Sustainable Development Research Network, 2011).

Qualitative research methodologies might include narrative, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, actor network analysis and case study. A task of the CBR cluster will be to gather our experience and knowledge of the range of proven and potential qualitative approaches to social economy scaling up and out.

Narrative methods could be employed if we want to understand the story of how an initiative emerged and developed. It might be the story, through a life course, of key individuals in the formation of a social enterprise, or it might be a collective story of the enterprise itself.

Ethnographic approaches might be employed if we want to understand the cultural factors at play in the emergence of a social economy initiative or if we want to understand the meaning people attach to the social economy initiative or the process of building a social economy organization. We might ask whether there is a shared culture that identified with successful social economy scaling. Ethnographic approaches might imply that researchers are ‘embedded’ in the social economy process.

Phenomenological methods might be employed if we wish to understand the common meaning a community of people attach to a phenomenon (e.g. the emergence of a social enterprise or the place of the social enterprise in the community). Perhaps the discovery of meaning might provide a clue to successful scaling of social economy innovation.

Grounded Theory, as the name implies, moves beyond description and individual or group meaning-making. The objective is to discover some theoretical explanation of a phenomenon. In our case, grounded theory might allow us to construct a theory of what makes for successful social economy innovation scaling.

In each of these methodologies we might employ a variety of methods – observation, interviewing, focus groups, etc.

4.5 Case Studies

One of the most obvious research approaches is the case study - including prospective and multimodal case studies.

Key references to case study methodology include Creswell (2013), Yin (2008) and Stake (2006). Creswell (2008) for example critically examined, compared and contrasted three social enterprises specifically targeting women. Multiple types of data were collected from each case to provide depth including interview data with both service providers and participants, observation of the program and the participants, a review of documents and reports, archival records and physical artefacts as per the methods outlined by Yin (2008). Data analysis included description of the bounded cases, within-case analysis and cross-case analysis.

A *multiple case studies* approach allows the researcher to observe the same phenomena or process in different contexts (Stake, 2006). Researchers can choose cases from different regions of the country, providing the opportunity to examine regional and cultural variations or highlight social, economic, political and ethical differences (Stake, 2006).

BALTA found much local innovation occurring in niches. We found some single organizations (e.g. housing cooperatives or green businesses), were connected to/with larger movements (e.g. bike and automobile coops) and their reach extended from the neighbourhood to across city or rural regions. Most of these 'local' initiatives had links to larger scale associations. *Actor Network analysis* is a method that might be employed if we are interested in examining the dynamics of upward and downward linkages across scales associated with a particular social economy innovation initiative.

4.6 Asking the Right Questions

Another task of the CBR cluster is to come to agreement on definitions of key terms, identify and organize the key questions and lines of inquiry, and key parameters/characteristics we wish to identify across cases. For example....

We will want to know what we mean by scaling up and scaling out, by innovation, by successful. We will want to define who our community partners will be. Will they be intermediary organizations? Will they be geographically defined places – neighbourhoods, communities, towns, cities, regions? Will they be communities of interest? How does scaling of innovation happen? Is it based on effective leadership? Is the key social organizations – social capital, political capital, financial capital? Is it cultural? Homogenous cultures with strong identity like Mondragon – do they work better? Does it work better with adaptive management or strong hierarchical management? Does technical expertise make the difference?

What does scaling out and scaling up look like from the grassroots perspective or bottom-up perspective?

How do communities understand scaling out and up, and how they network to accomplish it, is an interesting research question for us to consider.

Depending on the size of the reference location (neighbourhood, village, town, large or small city, urban municipality or sub-provincial region) we could be engaged in major scaling out exercises. Scale of the innovation scale out and up initiatives is an important issue for the CBR cluster to consider and provide some boundaries for.

Another potential research question: To what extent is there spatial (place) variety in transition pathways? While focusing on locality and place there are good opportunities to weave theory from the bottom up, based on an understanding of relational spatial analysis (Raven et al. 2012) Raven argues “that actors and institutions at multiple spatial levels interact to create “spaces for innovation,” (p. 64) So one research task is to grasp and unravel those multi-level interactions from a bottom up view.

Raven et al. also make some spatial arguments about multiple spaces, multiple kinds of proximity, actor-networks, and different application domains. For example, how is the same low carbon energy innovation developed or scaled out in different applications – wind energy to sell at commercial scale to grid, wind at micro scale household to grid; wind as source of power for specific municipal or neighbourhood project? Or wind for a small business?

4.7 Project and Program Monitoring, Evaluation and Planning Tools

Another method for researching we might want to consider is practical and pragmatic project and program monitoring, evaluation and planning tools. These tools are not so prominent in the world of academic research, but they are commonly employed, or required by project and program funders as a performance or outcome monitoring tool. Perhaps we can employ them as a research tool for understanding scaling out and up

Among a range of methodologies being considered for monitoring and evaluation of impacts for the long term research program is the 'Most Significant Change' technique (Davies & Dart, 2005). *The Most Significant Change* technique is a monitoring methodology that is very effective in discovering and elevating findings through a systematic approach to building a cross-section of stories from diverse stakeholders in change processes.

MSC is aimed at organisations, community groups, students and academics who wish to use MSC to help monitor and evaluate their social change programs and projects, or to learn more about how it can be used. The technique is applicable in many different sectors, including agriculture, education and health, and especially in development programs. It is also applicable to many different cultural contexts.

MSC has been used in a wide variety of countries by a range of organisations including Oxfam and Care International. By 2004, MSC had been used both by NGOs and governments in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and Australasia.

Other potential evaluation methods include **Results Based Management** (a CIDA tool used widely in international development and social development), the International Development Research Centre's **Performance Measurement and Monitoring** and the Plan: Net **Splash and Ripple** Process – a more qualitative, participatory, adaptation of CIDA Results Based Management that utilizes storytelling within its process of identifying inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact (PLAN:NET 2008).

5.0 The Community-based Research Cluster Workplan

This will include a discussion on how to work together (academic and non-academic partners) in developing a methodological framework and design.

Communications Plan: Most communication will be web-based with at least one face-to-face meeting. Webinars will be used to brief and inform partners (e.g. the presentation of the work plan). E-mail will be used to gather information and feedback from partners.

Resources: CBR Cluster will be facilitated by Noel and Ana Maria with operational support from Stuart as time permits and from students for specific literature reviews. More discussion about this topic needs to be included in the discussion/ dialogue with partners.

Time Frame: The overall methodological plan must be submitted by February 2014. Most of the contact in the final phase of proposal development (October 2013-February 2014) will likely be via e-mail, webinar, and teleconference.

There might be ~~be~~ **are** two opportunities for some participants of this cluster to have face-to-face meetings: Congress in Victoria in June 2013 (which we do not have funding for) and a scheduled BALTA 2, two-day symposium for early October of 2013 in Athabasca.

Meetings of the cluster 2 would be scheduled for every 6 weeks starting in December.

In our work in the CBR cluster we will also want to consider how we coordinate the production of academic writing – e.g. on the research framework for the investigation of social economy scaling out and up methodologies.

6.0 CBR Cluster Schedule

Webinar Presentation

November 2012

Webinar presentation of general assumptions, concepts & principles and questions to partners. Webinar led by Noel and Ana Maria. Webinar is preceded by an e-mail message to partners.

Dialogue with Partners: Part One:

The Landscape and How We Work Together

February 2013

In this first dialogue we want to tap into our collective knowledge and experience. Key themes of the conversation will include

1. The nature of the partners' PAR community work - including methods used.
2. Important academic and practitioner documents re: PAR/SE/Scaling/Climate Change
3. Key informants in the field – who else should we be talking to?
4. Knowledge Mobilization Opportunities we can leverage.
5. Potential Community Partners

Elaboration of the PAR Methodological Framework

March 2013

Draft a paper for presentation in June. Paper presented in a Webinar. E-mail feedback.

Dialogue With Partners: Part Two: Convergence

April 2013

Preparing for a June Conversation.

Recruiting Partner Communities: Outreach

May 2013

1. Affirm Existing Community Partnership Candidates (i.e. Communities with whom we already have relationships).
2. Identify new Community Partner Candidates.
3. Confirm Community Partner Selection Criteria
4. Draft a Recruitment Protocol for Community Partners

Assumption: that the community partners express an interest in or are engaged in scaling up and scaling out activities in the key sectors (food, housing, energy, finance)

Dialogue With Partners: Part Three

October 2013

Review of Proposal Draft (webinar session or face-to-face meeting?)

Enlist One to Three Community Partners

September – October 2013

The partners might be local, intermediary or sectoral. They will have expressed an interest in innovation transfer or are in the process of scaling up an innovation (either energy, food, transport, finance or housing) We will review each phase of the research process with the partners: from visioning to evaluation. At this stage we will need to decide on a community by community basis if in our Community Partnerships we will be engaged in substantial **knowledge transfer** of scale up

approaches (the major thrust of the PDG proposal) or leave room to consider an **acompanamiento** role vis-à-vis a community's autonomous scale out and/or up process.

Research Cluster 2 – Partners

Co-Leads:

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Paul Watson Alberta Rural Development Network
Hannah Wittman University of British Columbia

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