



What's Next for Community Economic Development?

Meeting Summary and Insights
Montréal | April 11, 2016

A timely invitation...

On April 11, 2016, on the invitation of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) and Québec-based Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC), more than **20 thought leaders** came together for **a day of critical reflection and generative thinking on the future of Community Economic Development (CED) in Canada**.

“As we make plans for our national conference in May ([ECONOUS2016](#)), we’d like to take advantage of that event to reflect together on the next chapter for CED in Canada,” the invitation explained. “But before that, we’d like to bring together a select group to shape that larger inquiry.”

The invitation offered the following background:

“This is a pivotal moment for CED in Canada. Growing inequality, ecological and climate limitations, the fourth industrial revolution, big data informing new measures of well-being, and the rise of a systems approach to complexity and networks all recast and reinforce the holistic approach that underpins CED. They also impose an urgent re-articulation of its relevance and role.

Against this backdrop, support for the infrastructure of place-based development has been steadily declining, and community agencies have increasingly been shoehorned into a service delivery role, with less capacity to mobilize citizens for their own development.

At the same time, interest in business and finance models that blend social and economic impacts grows.

Over the last 15 years, the practice and language of CED has become fragmented and the energy that animated CCEDNet’s creation has dissipated. Although our capacity for connection is greater than ever, **the vision and concepts that unite our action are ripe for renewal.**”



Who was there

The group consisted of representatives from community organizations, membership-based associations, academia, foundations, and the federal government. Together, their work touches on economic and labour force development, community engagement, social enterprise, economic justice, policy advocacy and more, spanning local, regional and national levels across Canada. Others who could not attend the meeting provided input via personal interviews.



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Overview

- The gathering represented a rich **sharing of diverse contexts, perspectives, practices and experiences** connected to the principles and vision of community economic development. **Creating and reinforcing relationships to support knowledge transfer** was, in itself, a key objective of the meeting.
- Some participants arrived unsure whether and how their own work connected to CED. By the end of the day, there seemed to be **a sense of shared interest and opportunity**. Others arrived with questions of relevancy: was CED simply “a movement for one point in time?” In the end, the sentiment expressed by some was that **“CED is back on the agenda as an important topic.”**
- There was a clear **call for spaces and times in which solutions could be co-created**, across the spectrum of approaches that CED encompasses.
- Some also saw a **need for collective dialogue and vision**. “There has to be a common vision and a bigger dream in Canada for local development and prosperity.” “What is the narrative that can hold the many, diverse practices of CED?” Is there a narrative that would allow them to find “common ground,” take root and be renewed?
- Many saw this as “a time of opportunity,” **“a moment for a leap forward.”** “Communities are more empowered.” The people involved have demonstrated “perseverance” and have developed “wisdom and collective memory.”
- Several comments seemed to sum up the group’s sense: “Challenging existing perspectives and practices in CED is positive. **ECONOUS2016** is a good opportunity to **foster some creative tension and to set a challenge for the future.**” It’s time to “own the shift in power relationships between the community sector, government and the private sector. Stop asking permission and lead. Focus on ways to act now. Examine our own behavior and assumptions.”



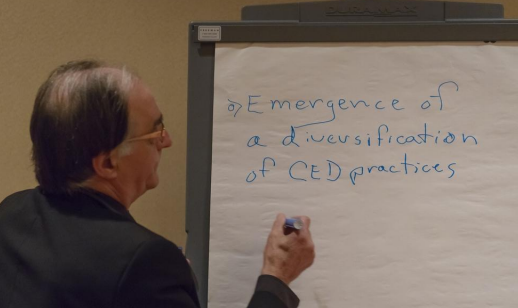
The Structure of the Meeting

Over the course of the day, participants explored 3 questions:

1. What is worth celebrating and carrying forward?
2. What are the strategic opportunities before us?
3. What conversations do we need to have at **ECONOUS2016** and beyond?

From these conversations, 5 themes emerged, each with their own successes, strategic opportunities and vital conversations:

- Theme #1: Practices & Programs
- Theme #2: Partnerships
- Theme #3: Promotion
- Theme #4: Policy
- Theme #5: Paradigm



Theme #1: Practices & Programs

What is worth celebrating and carrying forward?

The emergence of a diversity of successful CED practices & programs. Much more training is available. The Community Futures program shines as a long-standing example.



What are the strategic opportunities before us?

- Implement CED strategically, systemically: define the problem, look to the research, use a CED strategy that can address the problem, use better tools, recapture the systemic approach that was inherent in CED.
- Engage young people: tap into youth disenchantment with the status quo; learn from existing programs (e.g., kids learning about co-ops, entrepreneurship in school; universities getting more involved/attuned); share our expertise in collective initiatives, explore different ways of collaborating.
- Grow/scale what's working: leverage new technologies to share learning; develop pilot programs; be vigilant and ready to act on opportunities; get organized to publicize and replicate.
- Determine how CED fits in existing strategies, e.g., various local poverty reduction strategies.
- CED can be an important approach for Canada's plans to meet carbon reduction objectives and implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.



What conversations do we need to have at ECONOUS2016 and beyond?

- What small successes could we work on together?
- What will it take to make CED deeply relevant to young people?
- What can each of us contribute to CED?
- What are the highest priority actions and projects?

"There is a sense of urgency because there is an immediate opportunity for us to establish priorities and see how we can work on these priorities in the short term. The time is right to establish priorities."



Theme #2: Partnerships

What is worth celebrating and carrying forward?

There has been much learning about collaboration. Partnerships have solidified, moving from short term to long term, from local to regional to global. Multi-sectoral partnerships have included municipalities and the private sector. All of this makes CED projects more feasible. In all, “a mixed group of stakeholders (funders, organizations, citizens, etc.) has promoted interconnection and convergence in perspectives around CED.”



What are the strategic opportunities before us?

- Create a network of networks. National and regional alliances. There is “room for intermediaries to bring programs and people together.”
- More multi-sector and multi-movement gatherings to encourage positive collaboration and opportunities.
- Build social capital. Build the network. Build on open source commitment to create a movement together. “We need to assert ourselves to believe that we can move a CED agenda forward. We are not in competition, we need to co-operate and collaborate.”

What conversations do we need to have at ECONOUS2016 and beyond?

- Inter-organizational governance: how to create a movement and a critical mass around what we have in common (not focus on what is different)?
- What partners have we not yet engaged but we should?
- How do we create space for more diverse engagement?
- Do hybrid models (e.g., video game co-op) offer a chance to develop new partnerships, occupy new spaces?
- How to work together for knowledge transfer? What role can technology play in this?



“It is good to identify new ways to organize and put forward projects.”



Theme #3: Promotion

What is worth celebrating and carrying forward?

The professionalism and credibility of CED and its practitioners has grown. We are better at measuring and communicating impact. Good research is available, along with success stories. CED has become more mainstream, with heightened interest in alternative models and practices. There is more focus on CED versus traditional large-scale economic development. There is a widespread desire for change.



What are the strategic opportunities before us?

- Make our work more visible. Communicate more and better. Use positive framing (building community wealth vs. anti-poverty). Rebrand CED. Simplify language. Eliminate jargon.
- Engage more of the community around us. Identify how to incorporate different generations and different methods of collaborating. Tell the story using new tools and metrics (e.g., use labs).
- Capitalize on growing interest in new models. Emphasis on “local” - how to move CED in this direction.

What conversations do we need to have at ECONOUS2016 and beyond?

- Who else needs to be around the table?
- What would get them here? What is the hook to invite others in?
- How do we agree on a common methodology to evaluate CED outcomes?





Theme #4: Policy

What is worth celebrating and carrying forward?

Within government, there is a growing openness - an appetite, even - for policies that support CED. The current context offers links between CED and national priorities.

What are the strategic opportunities before us?

- Capitalize on political momentum
- Develop a new national CED policy, co-constructed and implemented by a critical mass
- Get more organized to assert more pressure toward policy

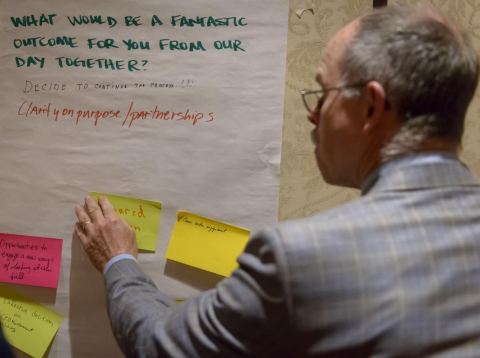


What conversations do we need to have at ECONOUS2016 and beyond?

- Are government financing conditions working? If not, what adaptation is needed?
- How to position CED with government? How to navigate the dichotomy of seeking collaboration and also applying pressure?
- What specific policy changes do we want? Can we leave with a menu of feasible policy options?



“Ask representatives of the government if they have been able to pick on specific policy oriented issues or initiatives that can be acted upon, i.e., introducing a tax credit to invest in CED initiatives. A menu of feasible policy options would be useful as a takeaway for ECONOUS participants. The conference will contain hundreds of people who are doing those things on a day to day basis. It would be interesting to see if they are able to leave with a feasible menu of policy options to start to push and argue for because they had that learning experience at ECONOUS.”



Theme #5: Paradigm

What is worth celebrating and carrying forward?

Mindsets are more open. Previously dominant theories (e.g., “trickle down” economics) have been credibly debunked. There is a broad desire to rethink existing paradigms. The values of CED are at the heart of emerging understandings of how the world works.

What are the strategic opportunities before us?

There is an opportunity to make it clear how new, emerging practices connect to CED. To make it more compelling and attractive for others to engage in the work of strengthening communities through an integrated, interconnected approach.

What conversations do we need to have at ECONOUS2016 and beyond?

- What would be the elements of a CED manifesto or declaration? A national CED framework?
- What would be a broadly engaging process to craft such a manifesto, inviting commitment?
- What are the fundamental principles that underpin our work?
- What is the kind of economy that you/we want?
- What kind of language will help build bridges?
- What would it mean to move from transaction to transformation?
- What is the potential role of questions, of inquiry, in creating a shared narrative?
- What would it take to reappropriate the sharing economy toward an economy of sharing?

“CED is plural and not singular. CED is not a fixed structure, it is about process and ongoing change. CED is a practice that theorizes itself, which is both positive and a discomfort.”

“It’s challenging to think of common vision. There are lots of common objectives to consider. ‘What can I contribute?’ may be more useful than ‘This is what CED is about.’”



WHAT'S THE MOST EXCITING AND SUCCESSFUL CED PRACTICE YOU HAVE SEEN OR BEEN ENGAGED WITH?

CDEC DE QUÉBEC !

Fab-labs

Pont couvert
de Wakefield
Covered Bridge

Cooperative de solidarité
dans les pairs relations
de soutien
solidarity groups

Potential of Social
Investment Programs

Most Successful
Community Futures Program
that has been operating
nationally since 1985
1980 started 268
1178 in assets, 3000 volunteers offices

Institutions
engaging in
social procurement

New
CED Municipal
policies

Most Successful
Youth Internship
Programs in Eastern Northern
Ontario - to retain youth in
rural communities

new social engagement

Sharing
economy

Inter-
municipal
Collaboration
eg Stockholm

COMMON VISION
NATIONAL
CED FRAMEWORK

Mainstreaming
Green Jobs
Sustainable

Partnerships with
RDEE Canada +
CDEC for
Tourism Initiatives
+ Studies

“What would be a fantastic outcome for you from our day together?”

- Decide to continue the process
- Clarity on purpose and partnerships
- A national policy on CED (a new one, strong and with public investment)
- Opportunities to engage and new ways of looking at the field
- Collective decision on CED movement building
- Common vision of CED
- Shared vision
- Food for thought
- Cross sector engagement
- Common vision, national CED framework
- Engaging interested folks on cluster project

Looking ahead

Across all the emergent themes and the many discussions, there appeared to have been an appetite for three types of continued action and inquiry:

1. A pragmatic, practical, **action** orientation.
 - What can we do together?
 - How can we build the future by creating it and fostering even greater community innovation?
 - What are the priority actionable items?
2. A focus on creating spaces of exchange to “encourage positive opportunities and **collaboration** between people.” According to one observation: “Social capital is the currency of our ability to learn together.” Strengthening relationships and the communication tools to facilitate information sharing is critical to improve the coherence and impact of our efforts.
 - What kinds of opportunities for **continued dialogue** are most valuable?
 - Who else should be part of the discussion?
3. A call to bring together diverse actors around a **common vision**. “Reframing CED to make it more inclusive and to engage a broader audience is vital if we are seeking systemic change.”
 - What would a **generative commons** of community economic development look like?
 - What is needed to cultivate and steward it?
 - What does this require from us and from our organizations?

All three of these paths of inquiry are questions of working on a broader movement, even as we work in it. All are needed, and each informs the others.

These conversations will continue at **ECONOUS2016** and beyond. For more information on future activities, please contact info@ccednet-rcdec.ca.



CEDEC



ECONOUS2016

Le Congrès pancanadien de développement économique communautaire
The National Community Economic Development Conference