



Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network Profile of Effective Practice



The Bois-Francs Community Development Corporation

Context

The Bois-Francs Community Development Corporation (CDCBF) intervenes on the administrative territory of the Arthabaska Regional County Municipality (RCM). From a geographic point of view, the Arthabaska RCM is situated halfway between Montreal and Quebec on its east-west axis and halfway between Trois-Rivières and Sherbrooke on its north-south axis. In 2003, the RCM had 65,319 inhabitants distributed throughout its 24 municipalities. The main urban core of the RCM is Victoriaville, which represents 61% of its population. According to a study conducted by the Mauricie and Centre-du-Québec Local Health and Social Services Network Development Agency (Agence de développement de réseaux locaux de

services de santé et de services sociaux), the RCM does well compared to its neighbouring RCMs¹, with the exception of some pockets of poverty. This current enviable situation comes from a long history of citizen mobilization that characterizes the community.

This Profile of Effective Practice is one of fifteen stories examining how innovative, community-based initiatives are using comprehensive approaches to improve social and economic conditions on a local level.

The profiles were created as part of a 2.5-year project of the Canadian CED Network looking at the links between social inclusion and community economic development.

For other profiles, more information on the project and additional resources on social inclusion and the CED, see the notes at the end of this document.

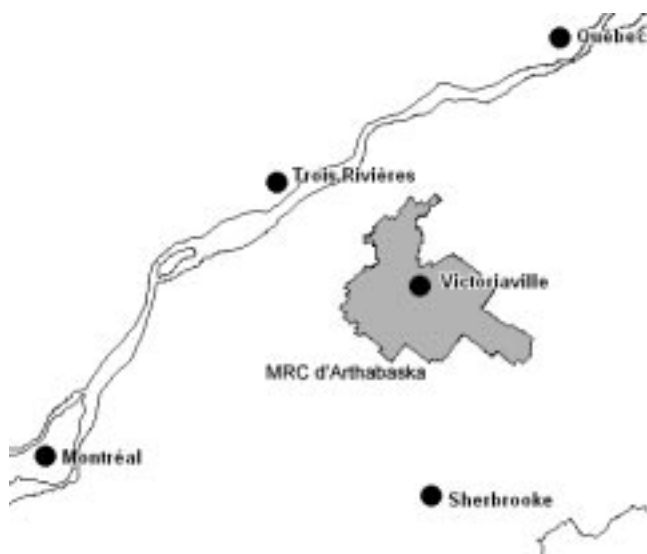
Like most regions in the vicinity of Montreal, the Arthabaska RCM went through difficult times in the beginning of the 1970s: many furniture and clothing companies closed down, leading to massive unemployment. The city of Victoriaville, urban core of the RCM, then launched an inquiry into how to manage the crisis. When presented with the conclusions of the inquiry, the city councillors were surprised: the crisis didn't need to be managed, they were told. Rather, the individual citizens should be equipped with the means to overcome the crisis on their own.² That common-sense conclusion sheds light on the spirit of the community and its willingness to be an active

participant in its own development. It is from this willingness to take charge that a panoply of citizen and community groups took root.

In beginning of the 1980s, the community sector in the Bois-Francs felt the need for a dialogue on its practices and how they could be better coordinated. The community actors thus decided to implement a roundtable discussion of community organizations.

In 1983, at the Trois-Rivières Summit, the participants recognized the Bois-Francs as a region with a strong community sector: they designated the territory as a pilot zone for the development of "community businesses". In 1984, the key actors then launched a community development corporation and worked to establishing it as an engine for social and economic change in the Bois-Francs region.

Location of the Arthabaska RCM



History

In 1984, 30 community organizations collaborated to establish the Bois-Francs Community Development Corporation. The first of its kind in Quebec, the CDCBF later served as a model for the development of more than forty CDCs in the province. From its beginnings, the CDCBF has produced its newsletter *Tendances et Trajectoires.*, a communication tool that informs members and policy makers about social and economic issues in the region and affecting the community sector in Québec.

The Region

Geographic region: The Regional County Municipality of Arthabaska

Geographic location: Halfway between Montreal and Quebec on its east-west axis and halfway between Trois-Rivières and Sherbrooke on its north-south axis

Population: In 2003, the RCM had 65,319 inhabitants.

Economic characteristics: the regional economic activity is dominated by the manufacturing industry, commerce and agroforestry production.

Social characteristics: According to the regional health agency, the RCM of Arthabaska manages better than the other RCMs in the region in regard to various social indicators.

Within four years, the CDCBF and the community sector succeeded in proving themselves and demonstrating the benefits of their actions to the community and to the influential leaders of the region. The CDC and its members were also able to buy a community building for \$1: it was baptized "Place Rita St-Pierre", in honour of an activist in the region. The community entrusts the management of the centre to the CDCBF, allowing its members (whether building tenants or not) to determine its direction. The 62,000 square foot building today houses 38 community organizations and also offers services such as a copy centre, an audio-visual equipment loan centre, a fax service and meeting room rentals. The proximity among community organizations located in Place Rita St-Pierre facilitates the sharing of information, expertise and resources and thus promotes the emergence of a dynamic community sector in the region.

In 1994, the CDCBF ensured its development and longevity by negotiating a financial memorandum of understanding with the City of Victoriaville. With this MOU, which is still in effect today, the city provides funding equivalent to approximately \$1.60 per inhabitant. Moreover, in 2003, the Arthabaska RCM recognized that the impacts of the CDCBF extend beyond the limits of the city and granted them financial contributions of approximately \$1 per inhabitant. Thanks to that recognition by local politicians, the CDC of Bois-Francs is one of the best-supported CDCs in Quebec.

Among the other milestones in the development of the CDCBF are its contribution to creating the "Table nationale des CDC" (Quebec CDC federation) in 1991, its contribution to accrediting a college program in community organization, and, more recently, the planning of the daycare centre La Marelle. The CDCBF was also the only CDC in Quebec to have been given the mandate to manage the provincial social economy funding program for its territory. Through this, the organization has helped with the development of many social economy businesses. However, realizing its limits of this approach in the current context, the CDCBF decided to return that mandate to the Bois-Francs Local Development Centre (Centre local de développement – CLD). The CDCBF still maintains a small portion of that function, namely that of consulting and supervision.

Activities

Today, the CDCBF brings together about 70 organizations from different domains such as consumer protection, culture, status of women, human rights, children, youth, family, drug addiction, people with disabilities, mental health, employment, housing, food services and childcare services.

These community organizations strategically chose to create the CDCBF in order to give themselves a stronger voice when dealing with different levels of government, and to ensure that their community values are defended. The CDCBF and its members "practice and support community intervention, local initiatives for community economic development as well as the fight against poverty and socio-economic exclusion."³

The philosophy of the CDCBF is to stimulate the community and to create a form of partnership that links social and economic issues by acting on five levels:

- Dialogue, partnership and representation;
- Information and research;

Bois-Francs Community Development Corporation (CDCBF)

Year incorporated – 1984

Activities and services – Start-up support or strengthening of non-profit or co-operative community organizations; organizational assistance; support seeking financing; follow-up and consulting during the first years; training and information; brainstorming sessions; Newsletter; representation at various collaborative bodies.

Data and results – 70 member organizations representing 12,000 individuals; represents community organizations from 15 different sectors; \$12,000,000 generated in the community; Place Rita St-Pierre houses 38 community organizations.

Awards – Alphonse Desjardins Award in 1989 for Community service (in 1976, Rita St-Pierre received the first Desjardins Award in the name of the CRIS). Award of Excellence from the "Réseau villes et villages en santé" (Healthy Communities Network Network) in October 1996, received from the city of Victoriaville for the realization of Place Rita-St-Pierre.

Future Priorities – Work towards the creation of an association of managers of community buildings that belonging to the community sector to use to leverage further development.



The Place communautaire Rita St-Pierre houses 38 community organizations

- Training;
- Stabilization and technical assistance;
- Development of community resources.

The goals of the CDCBF are to:

- Develop a united and strong community movement that shares the same values;
- Improve the capacity of groups to act and intervene in their community;
- Promote the active participation of the grassroots and community movement to improve the conditions of life for all community members;
- Maintain the capacity of the CDCBF to act and intervene.

Among the services which the CDCBF offers to its members are, in particular:

- Start-up support or strengthening of non-profit and co-operative community organizations;
- Organizational assistance;
- Support seeking financing;
- Follow-up and consulting during the first years;
- Training and information;
- Brainstorming sessions;
- Newsletter;
- Representation at various collaborative bodies.

Participatory and Comprehensive Analysis

The CDCBF bases its interventions on the values of its members. Those values are primarily: a democratic mode of operating, respect for human dignity, collective management, social justice, solidarity, autonomy and equity. On the basis of these values, the CDCBF works to further the socioeconomic development of its territory.

The values emphasize the social nature of the CDCBF's vision. The economic aspect is present, albeit pursued in a perspective of equity. In its relation with its members, the CDCBF intervenes mainly in regard to social matters. Moreover, when it sits on round tables, where it performs representative activities, it subscribes to and defends the values and characteristics of its members. The tables bring together actors from different spheres (private, public, community) who are confronted with complex problems that require economic as well as social interventions. The CDCBF participates in these roundtables by proposing alternatives. For example, if a factory on the territory closes down, the CDCBF may convene its members in order to help the recently laid-off people take charge of their situation and find new employment.

The comprehensive analysis that interconnects social and economic dimensions is thus done in partnership with the other actors of the community. It is in particular thanks to the open spirit, the understanding and recognition of the contributions of the community sector by the local administration and the political actors that this approach is possible. Similarly, if the CDCBF is confronted with an economic problem on the territory (for example, difficulties for youth to access transportation to job sites), it tries to resolve the problem with the concerned bodies (City, CLSC, RCM, economic development corporation, local employment centre). If the concern is mainly social in nature, the CDCBF will often assume the leadership.

The actors of the territory are aware that everything is related and that intervention is required on many levels in order to respond to a complex problem. In that sense, an actor such as the CDCBF is indispensable in promoting not only the coherent development of the community sector, but also of the territory in general. The complementarity of community actors and their interventions, as well as the cooperation activities that link them, allow for comprehensive interventions on the territory. While discussions between the CDCBF and the other actors often take the form of debates, all parties maintain mutual respect and an understanding of their respective roles.

Results and evaluation

The CDCBF has many impacts on the territory of the Arthabaska RCM. At times difficult to measure, these impacts are more often than not qualitative. The acknowledgment of the City and the RCM for the work of the CDC is perhaps the best measure of recognition. The interventions on the territory are better adapted, more precise and better managed. Moreover, the presence of the CDCBF prevents duplication of tasks on the territory. For certain problems, the members can adjust their mandate on the basis of new concerns. The success of the CDCBF has spurred the development of CDCs as well as the creation of new CDCs throughout Quebec.

Intervention Framework

Mission – Ensure the active participation of the citizens' and community movement in the socioeconomic development of the community.

Focus of Action – Representation of the community movement and dialogue about the social and economic development of the territory.

Conceptual Model – The approach of the Community Development Corporation

Supportive Policies – Recognition by the Arthabaska RCM as a local development partner. Financial contributions from the RCM and the City of Victoriaville for its operating budget.

Success Factors – Acquisition of the Place communautaire Rita St-Pierre in 1988 and contribution from municipalities for its functioning; good relations and mutual respect with other community partners.



A warm reception awaits visitors to the Place Rita St-Pierre (above), as well as a mural illustrating the vision of the CDCBF (below): "Together and Differently"



Success Factors and Lessons

The establishment and success of the CDCBF depended on many factors that laid the groundwork. The community culture and its level of mobilization on the territory was probably the main factor. The recognition of the CDCBF's contributions by key partners was also an important factor. For example, the granting of Place Rita St-Pierre to the community allowed the organizations to stabilize, anchor and consolidate their activities on the territory as well as to strengthen the dynamic of the community sector. The mutual respect of the various development agencies and their alignment within a vision of complementarity constitutes yet another crucial factor. Finally, the last success factor of the CDCBF is its drive to keep improving and to put the success of people before strictly economic interests.

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For more of information about the CDCBF, visit the site: <http://www.cdcbf.qc.ca>

Notes

1. Agence de développement de réseaux locaux de services de santé et de services sociaux Québec Mauricie et Centre-du-Québec, "Les inégalités de santé et de bien-être en Mauricie et au Centre-du-Québec une analyse écologique".
2. Lapointe, Claude (1994), "Entre le pouvoir et l'influence: la Corporation de développement communautaire des Bois-Francis".
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For more Profiles of Effective Practices and other resources on social inclusion, go to:
<http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/pages/learningnetwork.asp>

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