

Colleagues, wherever you may be, put your research to work and take a stand for life!

--Gibson, Bird-Rose & Fincher, 2015: ii-iii

The urgent economic, political and planetary crises of our era call for bold, experimental, and critically-informed responses that offer new ways of producing, exchanging, sharing, and investing. Since the rise of a robust social economy sector in the late 1960s, Quebec has been heralded worldwide as a key site for such economic and political innovation. Yet the dynamics of neoliberal adjustment and austerity, coupled with cultural trends toward institutionalisation, have diminished the potential for fundamental social change of many “first wave” social economy initiatives. In recent years, however, activists emerging from struggles against globalisation, austerity and/or resource extraction have augmented their oppositional politics with new forms of autonomous, self-organised economic activity. This energetic and growing « second wave » of transformative economic innovation, which currently sits on the margins of Quebec's social economy sector, has yet to be documented or analyzed.

OBJECTIVES

Building on our previous work on anti-authoritarian organising (Bellemare-Caron et al., 2013; Breton et al., 2007, 2012a,b, 2015a,b; Fortier et al., 2009; Jeppesen, Kruzynski & Riot, 2016; Jeppesen et al., 2014a,b), this study aims to document, analyze, and theorize the new wave of autonomous practices of just and sustainable livelihood emerging at the margins of Quebec's social economy.

We have **three knowledge-producing objectives**, which are to: 1) map the breadth and scope of autonomous self-managed economic initiatives, in order to consolidate burgeoning networks and make visible what is generally hidden from view; 2) document and analyze the diversity of economic, political and ecological practices enacted within/amongst these types of initiatives in three exemplar geographical regions and in the Atikamekw territories in order to build capacity and contribute to contemporary debates across discipline and language divides on strategies toward just transition; 3) experiment Antiauthoritarian participatory action research (APAR), in order to facilitate reflexive process amongst research participants and to contribute to feminist and anarchist debates on methodology.

CONTEXT - LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

Economic, political and planetary crises: Capitalist economics are in crisis. Inequality skyrockets as the gap between the rich and the poor continues to increase (Stiglitz, 2015); displaced migrants are subjected to increasing controls and forced into precarious labor (Walia, 2013); Indigenous peoples are stripped of their land as multinationals enclose territory in the name of resource extraction (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2013). Traditional political vehicles of change are also in crisis. Social actors of differing political stripes are losing faith in state politics, as policy-making for social justice as well as social, health and education services are hindered by globalisation and austerity measures (Tremblay-Pépin, 2015). Decades of neoliberal policy have weakened trade unions' capacity to negotiate decent working conditions and off-loading of state services onto community organisations has reduced their capacity to engage in advocacy for the most marginalised (Hanley, Kruzynski & Shrage, 2013; Graefe, 2006).

Finally, we are faced with an unprecedented ecological crisis that threatens to destroy ecosystems and permanently alter the climate (Alteo, 2015; Brondizio et al., 2016; Calisto Friant & Langmore, 2016; Gombay, 2013; Haraway, 2015; Moore, 2016). Ulrich Beck argued convincingly that modern society has so normalized risk that we are today blind to consequences of planetary destruction. Instead of acting, we “react with numbness, disconnection and resentment” (1992, cited in Instone, 2015: 30).

Rebellion and creativity: But not all are numb. People across the globe are in revolt (e.g., Ancelovici & Dupuis-Déri, 2014; Coburn, 2015; Ortiz et al., 2013). In the wake of crises, there is a renewed interest for and openness to thinking about ways that the economy can be transformed to be more just and democratic (Cumbers, 2012). And in fact, the past 15 years have been marked by a proliferation of economic and political initiatives at the margins of the mainstream (e.g., Alteo, 2010; Carlsson, 2008; Dixon, 2014; Frémeau & Jordon, 2012; Grubacic and O’Hearn, 2016; Healy, 2015; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Parker et al., 2014; Piotrowski, 2014; Sitrin & Azzelini, 2014; Sarrasin et al., 2012, 2016; Solnit, 2010; Zibechi, 2010), from “worker, consumer and producer cooperatives; fair trade initiatives;

intentional communities; alternative currencies; community-run social centers and resource libraries; community development credit unions; community gardens; open source free software initiatives; community supported agriculture programs; community land trusts and more” (Miller, 2010, p.25).

Experimentation in Quebec/Indigenous territories: In Québec these types of initiatives have been flourishing for decades. The province has been internationally heralded as a leader in social economy. The sheer number of initiatives is astounding in many different sectors including workplace training (Defourny, Laville & Favreau, 1998), local health and social services (Vaillancourt, Aubry & Jetté, 2003), territorially-based initiatives that support collective enterprise (Favreau & Lévesque, 1996), and provide financing of regional and local economies (Comeau et al., 2001). Many of these initiatives, created as “alternatives” by and for the people, in the wake of tumultuous social mobilisations in 1968-1970, following government policy adopted in 1996, have been officially recognized and funded by the state (ex. universal daycare, health and social service clinics, legal aid services, home care).

Although these initiatives have no doubt contributed to the democratisation of state institutions and economic practices, many of them face serious challenges today, from cut-backs, to centralisation of power, to increased bureaucratisation and control (Côté, 2011; Graefe, Simmons & White, 2013). In 2014, Klein, Fontan, Harrisson & Lévesque predicted that following the 2008 crisis we might witness the emergence of a new wave of “innovation clusters” (Lévesque, 2014) as social actors in Québec are stimulated to engage in new experimentations; with the proliferation of autonomous self-organised economic activity in the past five years, we can safely say that their prediction has come true.

As predicted, the most recent political generation (Whittier, 1997) of the social economy movement in Québec is enacting “social innovation” from an autonomous, collectivist and critical perspective. Two main micro-cohorts are those that emerged from the 2001 anti-globalisation protests and the 2012 Maple Spring. The years following were the terrain of some initial experimentation (Fontan, Silvestro & Noiseux, 2007; Kruzynski, 2007), but it is only in the past five years that we can observe their multiplication and consolidation. In 2016 alone, four significant events were organised by this network to skill-share, share vision and build common infrastructure (Autin & Sarrasin, 2016; Khelil, 2016).

There is also a resurgence of interest in anticolonial, economic self-determination amongst Indigenous peoples who claim that capitalist models of development negate fundamental principles at the heart of their way of life: that of responsibility to one another and to the more-than human world (Atleo 2010, 2015; Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard 2014; Gombay, in press). In line with this assertion, young people in the Atikamekw territories are pursuing alternative forms of economic development rooted in their own values, namely in the promotion of their art and culture (Awashish, 2013).

This new phase of experimentation has yet to be systematically studied. As engaged-researchers we have the responsibility to seize the political moment, study what works/does not work, and engage in the debate on more just economic practices. This is where our main contribution lies.

Theoretical Approach: In Québec, an extensive corpus of scholarly work has been produced on the social economy by the CRISES (research centre on social innovation) using a theoretical framework that mobilises institutionalist-regulationist, social movement and organisation theory (Lévesque, 2014). Although this framework has proven useful to analyse social economy initiatives throughout Québec, it does not resonate with social actors of the current political generation who are critical of the state and yearn for revolution, not reform (Sarrasin et al., 2012, 2016). Given this, they tend to be critical of the CRISES’ institutionalist focus, its very way of framing the social economy (Bergeron-Gaudin, Jetté & Vaillancourt, 2011) and its emphasis on social change as renewed social democracy (Lévesque, 2014).

As we engage in APAR, we are sensitive to how social actors with whom we are co-constructing knowledge conceptualize their own praxis. We thus need another framework. Gibson-Graham’s politics of post-capitalist possibility, an open framework that has attracted a plethora of autonomist scholar-activists (Chatterton & Pickerill 2010; Land & King 2014; Miller 2015; White & Williams 2014), political ecologists (Moore & Robbins 2015; Schroeder, St. Martin & Albert 2006), queer studies scholars (Brown 2009; Oswin 2007), third wave feminists (Dombroski, 2016a,b), post-development

scholars (Escobar, 2008; Hill 2014; McGregor, 2009; McKinnon 2007), and Indigenous studies scholars (Bargh, 2011; Curry 2003; Gombay, in press, 2005, 2012, 2013) is our point of departure.

This framework involves “a re-visioning of power and a re-theorizing of revolution, from strategy and tactics to affect and energetics” (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. xx). Gibson-Graham proposes three sets of conceptual tools: 1) the *diverse economy* (Gibson-Graham, 2006a), allows for a wide “range of social relations to be seen to bear on economic practices including, to name just some, trust, care, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, coercion, bondage, thrift, guilt, love, equity, self-exploitation, solidarity, distributive justice, stewardship, spiritual connection, and environmental and social justice” (Gibson-Graham, 2014, p. 151), 2) the *community economy* (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013), refers to that economy that results when we use this economic diversity to negotiate our interdependence with each other, humans and the environment, and 3) a multi-faceted *theory of change*, compatible with network structures and revolution as process, based on the articulation of (political) assemblages and their ubiquity, that helps articulate ways in which diverse economic practices and community economies might become robust transformative forces relative to larger scales and institutions (Gibson-Graham, 2011; Roelvink, St. Martin & Gibson-Graham, 2015).

In line with this, following Healy, this theoretical framework, based upon vast empirical evidence of community economies in the making, is useful in that it can help “loosen the grip of two familiar fantasy frames: the de-politicization narrative that tells us things are presently hopeless and a capitalocentric narrative that tells us change is impossible” (2015, p. 394). Choosing a framework that kicks capitalism out of the driver’s seat allows us to move beyond binary thinking that interferes with creativity. It opens up the space of becoming, opening up possibilities, creating more freedom to experiment. It is a framework that helps us to think outside the box, moving beyond “the failings of past forms of public ownership rooted in the social democratic and Marxist thinking” (Cumbers, 2012, p. 213), the seemingly impossible goal of creating a “cooperative republic” (Draperi, 2012) or most oftentimes capitalocentric and statecentric discourse of many contemporary Marxist and anarchist scholars (eg. Albert, 2008; Caffentzis & Federici, 2013; Grubacic, 2011; Harvey, 2011; Holloway, 2016; Moore, 2016).

Research questions. We have developed research questions that will enable us to make an empirical contribution, as well as a theoretical one, as we engage in dialogue with Gibson-Graham and the engaged-scholars working within this framework and beyond. As an intersectional/anti-oppressive lens informs our analysis we will remain vigilant to enactment of power, domination and freedom in the social relations under study (Hill & Bilge, 2015; Sandoval, 2000). Human/non-human relationships will also be problematized throughout. Finally, we will explore if there are differences in expression depending on whether practices are enacted by settler populations or Indigenous peoples and if so, what can be learned from these differences.

1. Economy. How are social actors framing/enacting a diversity of economic practices? Who constitutes the community that interacts to produce interdependent livelihoods? How are human and non-humans acknowledged and connected in this community? How is work organised? How does it contribute to human and non-human surviving well? How is it related to caring/livelihood? How is enterprise enacted and surplus distributed to humans and non-humans? What legal enterprise forms are adopted? How are transactions or encounters with human and non-humans being reframed? How are they framing property and engaging in commoning? How are these practices taking into account non-humans? How are they enacting finance and investing in futures, human and non-human?

2. Politics. How are social actors framing/enacting a diversity of political practices? How is domination being harnessed, recreated, and rendered visible, to then be harnessed once again? How are social actors/initiatives connected to contentious movements? How are they constructing “political economies of scale” by linking together? How do they relate to state/political actors? How do they enact decision-making and organisational forms? Who is involved? How do they enact politics of affect/subject? How are they working through relations of privilege/oppression? What is the role of self-training/education?

METHODOLOGY

Approach. Following feminist research traditions, ours is designed to contribute to scholarly debates and knowledge, as well as to have transformative effects (Corbett, 2007; Olivier & Tremblay, 2000). Similar to Gibson, Rose & Fincher, we think from a stance that is “curious, experimental, open, adaptive, imaginative, responsive and responsible”, “with the community of life” (participatory), “to contribute to healing (action)” (2015, pp. i-ii). Our approach, antiauthoritarian participatory action research (APAR), was previously developed and experimented by the now defunct Research Group on Collective Autonomy (Collectif de recherche sur l’autonomie collective; Breton, Jeppesen & Kruzynski, 2010; Breton et al., 2011; Drapeau et al., 2006), building on past research by Kruzynski (2002; 2003a,b; 2004). In keeping with prefigurative politics, APAR is about enacting, in the here and now, the type of research relations that we aspire to: 1) researchers (including students) are rooted in the milieu being researched; in this case, we are all involved in autonomous self-organised economic initiatives, and 2) the value-practices for ethics and accountability are coherent with the anti-authoritarian political culture that pervades not only how the research team functions (e.g., non-hierarchical coordination, task rotation, skill-sharing, relationships of care, challenge of power dynamics), but also our rapport with research participants (e.g., non-hierarchical relationships, co-construction of goals, questions, analysis and products) and with the broader milieu (e.g., validation sessions and action tools). In line with this, we will set-up critical reference groups (CRG) (Mulligan & Nadarajah, 2008) with social actors participating in the study to co-determine design, process, dissemination and application.

Field-sites – two axes: Fieldwork will be conducted with self-managed groups engaged in economic activities (defined following Gibson-Graham’s diverse practices). We will select initiatives in different geographical regions that are: 1) engaged in horizontal modes of self-determination, 2) committed to collective management of benefits, 3) working to reduce the distance between producers and consumers in transactions performed, 4) participating in the expansion of the commons, and 5) experimenting with emancipatory relationships between humans and more-than-human others. Within each initiative there will be at least one person connected with contentious movements and who is committed to enacting post-capitalist futures.

For lack of a better term, and to differentiate with other types of social economy ventures, these initiatives will be referred to as “autonomous self-managed economic initiatives”. Axis 1 will focus on settler initiatives (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015; Snelgrove, Dhamoon, Corn tassel, 2014), while Indigenous initiatives are at the heart of axis 2. The decision to create two axes is based on preliminary findings that indicate that while similarities and alliances might exist, settler and Indigenous-run initiatives tend to evolve in very different contexts and in parallel. Also, axis 2 has an “autonomous” status, in that research will develop in accordance with evolving relationships and understandings, as advocated by Indigenous and decolonizing research methodologies (Absolon 2008; Kovach 2008; Migwans 2013; Smith 2008), and will model SSHRC’s Statement of Principles for Aboriginal Research by promoting research by and with Indigenous peoples.

AXIS 1: Exploratory work has revealed a proliferation of autonomous self-managed economic initiatives across the territory both in urban and rural contexts. Data collected at two major events regrouping several hundred social actors from these types of initiatives has confirmed our intuition that social actors on the margins are experimenting with emancipatory social relations, engaging in formal/informal networks and share a number of challenges (Khelil, 2016; Autin & Sarrasin, 2016; Charniguet, 2016). Social actors from 17 different initiatives located in nine geographical regions have agreed to participate in our project. Their activities range from farming and gardening, to developing ecovillages, running a campsite, LETS, forestry, information technology and much more. Following Snow & Trom (2002), field work will be conducted in three exemplar sites; that is, three geographical regions in which at least three such initiatives have been up and running for two years or more.

AXIS 2: According to Sengupta (2015) Quebec has more cooperatives than any province in Canada. Yet only a handful of these are autonomous self-managed economic initiatives in Indigenous

communities. One such is in the Atikamekw Nation. Karine Awashish, expert of cooperatives and co-founder of Coop Nitaskinan, will co-lead this axis, and produce a case-study of her own workers' cooperative, as well as of initiatives the Coop has incubated/supported: the Tapiskawan project to promote Atikamekw art and a sustainability project in Manawan. Given that this research is in its initial stages, its scope is modest at this stage; we hope that it will serve as a springboard for future work across other Indigenous territories, including, for example, with the Inuit-run Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (Tulugak & Murdoch 2007).

Research strategies, data collection and analysis. We will engage in weak theory/thick description of diverse economic practices (Gibson-Graham, 2014). Using participatory theorizing (Gordon, 2007), knowledge will be co-constructed using Diane Vaughan's (1992) theory elaboration method.

Our knowledge-producing objectives will be met through the following research strategies to be deployed in three phases: 1) mapping, 2) multi-sited fieldwork and site-specific analyses, and 3) multi-scale and multi-place analysis (Masson, 2010).

Phase I is common to both axes, while Phases II and III may differ, as, following Indigenous decolonizing methodologies mentioned above, the framework, research questions and methods remain to be developed by the axis 2 CRG (co-lead by Awashish and a scholar of Indigenous studies who is collaborating on this project, Nicole Gombay). Given this, Phases II and III are detailed only for axis 1.

Phase I: mapping across the territory (Year 1): Phase I aims to map autonomous self-managed economic initiatives in Quebec/Indigenous territories. Building on previously collected data, we will 1) conduct a documentary analysis (using NVivo) of online materials (websites and social media) produced by and/or about these initiatives (including existing repertoires such as the cartographie de l'économie collaborative au Québec and visages régionaux, case-study reports, theses); 2) use a questionnaire to collect data from specific initiatives that is not available on-line; 3) organise a (virtual) focus group with key informants from each of the administrative regions to validate the mapping. By the end of Phase I, we will be able to: 1) narrate the nature, scope and networking of autonomous self-managed economic initiatives across the territory; 2) identify and validate issues/themes of concern to social actors to explore further in Phase II; 3) begin creation of knowledge mobilisation tools for use by social actors; 4) choose specific initiatives/exemplar sites for field work and develop specific strategies for further data collection; and finally, 5) begin to situate this mapping in relation to scholarly literature.

Phase II: Multi-sited fieldwork and site-specific analyses (Years 2 to 4): Given APAR, the exact methodological tools will be determined by the site-specific CRGs composed of Kruzynski, research assistants and one social actor per initiative. The process, for each exemplar site, could be as follows : 1) building on data previously collected, assemble descriptive information on each of the three chosen initiatives (using minutes, grant applications, websites/Facebook, flyers/brochures) and prepare field work, 2) over a one-week period with each initiative in the exemplar site: *participant observation* to break the ice and to get a feel for particular issues or themes (we will keep reflective research diaries and field notes); conduct and audio-record three *focus groups* with people who are working in and around the organisation (we will consider using photo-narratives); after each focus group do a preliminary analysis (emergent themes) to present to the next focus group (co-construction of knowledge by collective interpretation of data), 3) in consultation with the CRG, following theory elaboration methodology, conduct analysis of emergent themes in dialogue with existing concepts/theory and previous empirical findings (NVivo), 4) at least one month later, with each initiative, organise two virtual focus groups to present preliminary analysis for discussion and validation, and 5) two-day validation workshop in the exemplar site: bring together delegates from the three initiatives under study in the region to present transversal (to the different initiatives) analysis for discussion and validation. By the end of Phase II we will have produced a thick-description of each of the three exemplar sites, including co-constructed understandings of economic, political and ecological practices.

Phase III: Multi-scale and multi-place analysis (Year 5). Once fieldwork and site-specific analysis has been completed, we will work with the three site-specific CRGs to conduct analysis transversal to

the regions under study. We will organise an event to bring all the social actors involved together to share findings and co-elaborate theory. By the end of Phase III, we will have all the material necessary to complete the dissemination as outlined in the Knowledge mobilisation plan.

TOOLS FOR RESEARCH and related activities. Two tools for research will be developed.

First, we will set-up an **online aggregator** as well as a **virtual networking/discussion forum**. The aggregator will be built from scratch to regroup, in the same virtual space, our mapping of initiatives and networks, our open access database, related online research reports, theses, academic and non-academic productions (text, video, TEDs), researcher profiles/teams, post-secondary education programs, blogs, resources/services/events and calls for papers/publications. Exploratory work has enabled us to identify research teams working on related topics, but from different perspectives and with broader criteria (Institut de l'environnement, du développement durable et de l'économie circulaire; l'Observatoire de la consommation responsable; McGill research group on the ecology of collapse; The Centre for society, technology and development; Economics for the Anthropocene) – we will sift through their work to identify information specific to autonomous self-managed initiatives. This tool will allow for an instant big-picture view of data that exists in the virtual world, but is too scattered to be useful for research and capacity-building purposes. It will be accessible, intuitive and visually attractive and will be fully integrated with social media. It will 1) enable *scholars* and *graduate students* to have a better idea of research that has already been conducted, oftentimes by engaged-researchers whose work is often less visible; 2) stimulate interest amongst *young people looking to pursue post-secondary studies* and help them identify programs that suit their interests; 3) facilitate networking amongst *social actors*, especially those living in rural areas, as well as access to information that they need to build capacity in their organisations; 4) provide an outlet for the findings of *our study*, thereby increasing the chances that our work will be used by others, in Quebec but also worldwide. A research assistant (RA) will be hired to get the aggregator/forum up and running; manage information; do manual importing (automatic updates will be set-up for all trusted sources); moderate new postings proposed by registered members; conduct a continuous evaluation and work with technicians to fix any problems. During the first two years, the IT cooperative developing the tool will train team members as-needed, a task that will be taken over thereafter by the RA. In order to sustain this tool beyond its creation, following strategic directions to promote the social economy, Concordia University will be approached to fund its upkeep as of year 6.

Second, the current Community Economies Collective (CEC) website will be rebuilt as a **virtual interface for the broader Community Economies Research Network**. CERN is an international network of researchers, Kruzynski included, inspired by, or in conversation with, the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham. CERN, open to students, academics, policy makers, community researchers and activists, is both a communication network and a community of interest that provides contexts for emergent collaborations. Currently, CERN communicates by email listserv. With over 150 members from Australia, North America, Europe and South East Asia, the time is ripe to create a virtual interface to consolidate and increase visibility of the network, to expand membership in Canada (currently: Québec 2; Ontario 2; Newfoundland 2; British Columbia 1) and to connect with the new Quebecois chapter of CERN that we are developing as we conduct this study. Agaric, an IT cooperative working with the CEC website committee, along with an RA, will do the work to 1) expand the website to support non-English languages in an effort to open up the conversation namely to French and Spanish-speaking members/communities; 2) include a section for CERN member profiles to facilitate networking amongst researchers and to increase visibility with respect to potential graduate/postdoctoral students; 3) add a “hot debates” section to enable different members from across the planet to co-construct knowledge in virtual space; 4) add a section for calls for papers/presentations and to announce new publications; 5) include a web conference section to increase the reach of the many presentations done by CERN members across the globe and to reduce the ecological footprint related to air travel; 6) allow for membership fee collection in order to raise funds to upkeep the interface once it has been created.