

International Newsletter for Sustainable Local Development

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Summary

Message from the Editorial Team.....	1
Cooperatives and Inuit Communities in Canada.....	1
5th Meeting for the Globalisation of Solidarity.....	4

Message from the Editorial Team

The link between indigenous peoples and the cooperative approach is most striking. Group spirit and the Commons are something all these communities share. In addition, the fundamental spirit of cooperatives, that of collective enterprise and collectiveness is perfectly suited to indigenous communities' mentality. In this issue, we illustrate, albeit in simplified form, the way in which cooperatives have provided the natural model that correspond to the values of the Inuit populations of Canada.

As most of our readers are aware, we are involved in various ways with the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social and Solidarity Economy (RIPESS). All three of us actively participated in the 3rd third meeting for the Globalisation of Solidarity in Dakar in 2005, as well as the 4th that took place in Luxemburg in 2009. The programme for the next meeting, scheduled to be held in the Philippines next October, is now on-line.

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Cooperatives and Inuit Communities in Canada

By Yvon Poirier

The Canadian Arctic is a vast polar territory that stretches from the Atlantic right across to Alaska; it is the home of the Inuit. The Inuit are a "people" who have lived a nomadic existence for many thousands of years, living essentially from their fishing and hunting activities. Their community differs from other indigenous peoples of the Americas. They arrived later, and are related to the Inuit of Greenland, the Lapps of Finland and the native people of Siberia.

Since the 1950s, the development of health and educational services provided by the Canadian government, the development of trade and the military presence during the Cold War all accentuated and accelerated change within these communities. This has led to the creation of villages, built so that people could live closer to services. The need was born to create businesses to trade Inuit art, particularly the internationally renowned stone sculptures. These spontaneously were built as cooperatives as *“the principles of cooperative structure were well adapted to our culture of sharing”*. In another document, we can read that *“The main aim of all cooperatives was to unite the community and to act as the spokesperson for their interests”*.

Two important federations of cooperatives currently exist: the Arctic Cooperative is present in the North and West of Canada, and the Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau Québec (Nunavik) in 14 Inuit villages in the northern part of the province of Quebec.

The Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (FCNQ)

This Federation was founded in 1967, and includes the cooperatives of 14 Inuit villages with a total population of 13,000. The cooperative movement is the main non-governmental employer in the region, with approximately 350 mainly Inuit employees.

This cooperative movement is far more than just commercial outlets. To illustrate, here is an overview of their activities (excerpt from the website):

Operating retail stores with a wide selection of merchandise at competitive prices, often paying back savings in cash and shares to members at the end of the year.
Banking, post offices, cable TV and Internet services.
Management training, staff development and auditing service.
Marketing Inuit art across Canada and around the world.
Operating hotels, a travel agency, and hunting and fishing camps.
Bulk storage and distribution of crucial oil & fuel supplies.
Construction projects in Nunavik for housing, schools, etc.

The annual revenue of the Coop for 2012 was \$230 million.

Artic Cooperatives Limited

The 31 cooperatives in the Canadian North operate similarly to those in Quebec.

The Arctic Co-Operatives Ltd was founded in 1972 (under a different name), and is the result of a merger between regional groups. It also extended its services to meet the needs of the population of local villages, including food, cable TV and Internet services. The annual revenue for 2012 was \$196 million. Similarly to Nunavik, it is the main private employer with 800 employees.

A similar process is under-way in Quebec. Plans are going well for of implementing an autonomous government. It is even more complex as their territory is itself within that of Quebec; and even though it covers a vast area, there is no road infrastructure etc. It is interesting to note that the meeting to constitute the Federation of Cooperatives of Nouveau-Québec was the first time that the 14 communities met together. They state that working as a Federation led them to the idea of autonomous governance.

We sincerely hope that the community spirit as well as the collective tools such as cooperatives will enable them to resist and build a better world that respects the ecosystems of which they have a greater than average awareness than most inhabitants of our planet.

<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inuits>

<http://www.fcncq.ca/webconcepteur/web/fcncq/>

<http://www.facebook.com/Fcncqlagiisag>

<http://www.arcticco-op.com/>

5th Meeting for the Globalisation of Solidarity

The 5th RIPESS Meeting for the Globalisation of Solidarity will be held in Manila in the Philippines from October 14th - 18th 2013. The theme will be “SEE as an alternative development model”

The programme is online in English, French and Spanish at:

<http://www.ripest.org/programme-manila-2013/>

Newsletters available on-line:

<http://local-development.blogspot>

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