

BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION: A CASE STUDY ON *PROJET COLLECTIF*

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This publication is part of a series of case studies that illustrate different ideas to inspire changemakers involved in community development in the Quebec context.

Social innovations abound in Quebec. Across the province, numerous changemakers are working to develop communities in response to their various needs and challenges. But in such a rich, vast, and diverse ecosystem, how can we optimize collaboration and knowledge-sharing between all these partners, allowing them to strengthen their capacities and increase their impact? This case study on the *Projet collectif* offers insight into this crucial question.

BACKGROUND

Capacity building is essential to community development. It enables changemakers to draw on collective learning to enhance their skills and increase efficiency within their operating structures. In this way, these actors increase their ability to intervene collectively to tackle various community issues, helping to maximize and sustain the impact of their interventions.

Knowledge mobilization is one of the ways changemakers strengthen their capacities. This process involves pooling



CAPACITY BUILDING

- Involves collaboration and knowledge mobilization.
- Aims to increase changemakers' knowledge and the effectiveness of the structures they operate within.
- Increases the ability of changemakers to solve complex issues.
- Maximizes the transformative and systemic impact of interventions.

different forms of knowledge (know-how, expertise, practices, lived experience, culture, etc.), often specific and localized, in order to generate new forms of knowledge and practice. This approach calls for collaboration, collective learning, and knowledge sharing, and is based on three principles: knowledge accessibility, pooling of needs and resources, and mutual recognition of different contributions.

Over the years, Quebec has forged a solid reputation for social innovation. For several decades now, a variety of change agents (NPOs, research teams, governments, foundations, communities, working groups, etc.) have contributed to community development through innovative and sustainable responses to community needs and issues. Quebec's dynamism in terms of social innovation, and the abundance of initiatives and knowledge this generates, are undeniable assets for these actors. However, Quebec's vast geography, its cultural diversity, and the uniqueness of each of its communities are all obstacles to effective knowledge mobilization.

This is where the supporting partners come in. Their role is to ensure the systematic transfer and mobilization of learning from community development initiatives, ultimately strengthening the capacities of the partners involved. To achieve this, they provide a range of tools to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing.

PROJET COLLECTIF: BUILDING CAPACITY TO COLLABORATE

[Projet collectif](#) is one of the many supporting partners active in Quebec. Co-founded in 2022 by [TIESS](#), this non-profit organization's mission is to “facilitate access to knowledge and foster exchanges between people and organizations that are creating a more equitable and ecological society.” To this end, Projet collectif offers various programs designed to meet two objectives: 1) support for the creation and facilitation of communities of practice, and 2) the development of tools and practices to facilitate knowledge mobilization. These objectives are complementary, to strengthen change-maker capacity, not only in their interventions in the field, but also in their ability to collaborate in contexts characterized by complexity, diversity, and intersectionality.

[En commun](#) is probably the most well-known program run by Projet collectif. It aims to strengthen the intervention capacities of change-makers by helping them develop innovative, adapted, and sustainable solutions to meet the

PROJET COLLECTIF is:

- A team of **12** people who provide support and coaching to strengthen collaboration and knowledge mobilization.
- A digital platform that brings together:
 - More than **8,000** users across more than **170** communities of practice.
 - **12,000** notes presenting various theoretical and practical knowledge.



Source: Projet collectif

community's needs and challenges. In concrete terms, *En commun* is a digital platform that offers two tools for collaboration and knowledge-sharing between these actors: *Passerelles* and *Praxis*.

[Passerelles](#) is a virtual space that allows change makers to create and join communities of practice around a particular region, theme, or issue. Socio-Ecological Transition and

Transition en commun are two examples of such

public communities. While the former is intended as a very general forum for exchange on the socio-ecological transition, the latter brings together various Montreal players involved in a co-construction process aimed at raising community awareness of such a transition and helping them to implement it. Many other themes are addressed across other *Passerelles* communities of practice: rural issues, food systems, health, economic decline, culture, community development, post-pandemic, etc.

[Praxis](#) is a collective, open-source database that compiles a range of information in the form of notes to support and inspire changemakers. For example, as of August 2023, the Socio-Ecological Transition community of practice had 340 notes on a wide variety of themes, including climate justice, energy, ecofeminism, the oil industry, the ecological footprint, and more. The *Passerelles* and *Praxis* tools work in tandem: *Passerelles* communities of practice generate knowledge that can be recorded in the form of notes on *Praxis*, and in return, the notes recorded on *Praxis* can be consulted by *Passerelles* communities of practice and serve as sources of inspiration for their work.

Collaboration between changemakers can, however, prove difficult. The context may pose certain challenges (vastness of the territory, regional specificities, etc.), but the particular nature of social innovation work also creates its own set of challenges. The complexity of the needs and issues at stake, the need to involve different sectors, the presence of partners from different cultures and backgrounds, and even feelings of distrust or competition are all obstacles that can hinder collaboration and knowledge mobilization, and consequently, capacity building.

That's why *Projet collectif* believes it's essential to support and accompany changemakers. Joël Nadeau, Co-Founder and Co-Director of this nonprofit, insists on this aspect: "*Projet collectif* is often perceived as merely a digital platform, but it's much more than that. There are people [who are there to help] behind this platform." By offering peer support, personalized coaching, and the opportunity to experiment, *Projet collectif* helps changemakers develop the skills and openness needed to collaborate in complex, multi-sectoral contexts.

CONCLUSION

Projet collectif’s innovative contribution as a supporting partner is based on two specific features. The first lies in deploying a digital infrastructure to support knowledge mobilization. This encourages networking and leverages the expertise of the various partners involved in effecting change. The second, and even more important, feature is the support provided for the sharing of learnings. This encourages greater inter-sectoral and inter-regional collaboration between partners. On this point, Mr. Nadeau explains that Projet collectif intends to foster the strengthening of a new culture conducive to collaboration, the formalization of learning, co-learning, and knowledge diffusion: “There is still a certain lack of recognition of the importance of these approaches, and that's where we talk about a [necessary] strengthening of culture.”

Finally, En commun users highlighted some aspects that contributed to their positive experience with the program. These are all elements to keep in mind when implementing similar knowledge mobilization initiatives:

- The user-friendliness and human scale of the digital platform
- The ability to tailor tools and practices to specific user needs
- The guidance and support offered by a dedicated team.

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“A collective project delivers capacity building at two levels. Yes, we help actors build their capacity to make their work more effective, but we first seek to build their capacity to collaborate.”
– Joël Nadeau, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of Projet collectif