HARNESSING THE POWER OF NETWORKING:
THE CASE OF THE NATIONAL TABLE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS

BY NICOLAS SOUMIS AND MYRIAM BÉRUBÉ

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.

In Quebec, the autonomous community movement is a driving force behind community development. Several key actors in this movement have opted to work in networks. What are the advantages, and what are the outcomes? The case of the *Table nationale des Corporations de développement communautaire* offers some inspiring insights.

BACKGROUND

United we stand, divided we fall. The origin of this maxim may have been lost in the mists of time, but its message is crystal clear. Coming together to pool our resources and focus them on a common goal increases our chances of success.

For those involved in community development as part of the autonomous[1] community movement, this principle is usually embodied in

WORKING AS A NETWORK

- Aims to pool resources, knowledge, etc.
- Helps build strong relationships with peers and partners.
- Promotes the adoption of common visions and positions.
- Improves communication, coordination, and mobilization.
- Increases leverage, outreach, and advocacy.
- Helps obtain funding.

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[1] According to the *Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome* (RQACA), this movement, initiated by civil society, aims to transform living conditions and respect people's rights, from a perspective of individual and collective empowerment. This movement is called "autonomous" because its members define its objectives, mandates, and methods.

the form of networking. Working as a network - that is, within an associative structure that fosters mutual support, collaboration, and capacity-building - provides many benefits. First and foremost, it enables them to build relationships and pool their resources, shared knowledge, and efforts to maximize their impact. Through networking, these players can more easily adopt common visions and positions around the issues they aim to address. It also allows them to improve communication and coordination amongst members for more effective mobilization. Finally, networking is a way for them to achieve the critical mass and recognition needed to strengthen their advocacy power, political influence, and ability to secure funding.

In Quebec, a myriad of organizations are involved in community development, responding to community needs in various sectors: health, education, the environment, food, housing, immigration, culture, poverty reduction, etc. This type of work is demanding, and often stretches the resources and capacities of any one organization. That's why many of them have decided to network. The case of the Table nationale des Corporations de développement communautaire (TNCDC) provides a strong example of the advantages and outcomes of this approach.

THE NATIONAL TABLE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS: WORKING AS A NETWORK TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE THE AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY MOVEMENT The

TNCDC is one of Quebec's community action networks. Provincial in scope, it is dedicated to community development and the well-being of its members. Its mission, which advocates for the comprehensive and sustainable development of society based on social justice principles, is two-pronged.

The first component aims to bring together the Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and support their respective objectives. CDCs are established at the initiative of community organizations in a given territory (neighborhood, city, or county/MRCs), and are deeply rooted in that territory, giving TNCDC a solid local base. The mission of each CDC is to provide direct support to community organizations within its territory, and to join forces with them, as well as with citizens and other local partners, to develop promising projects. These projects are unique in that they enable local community players to respond to social needs by realizing their goals and breaking away from conventional solutions. For example, the CDC
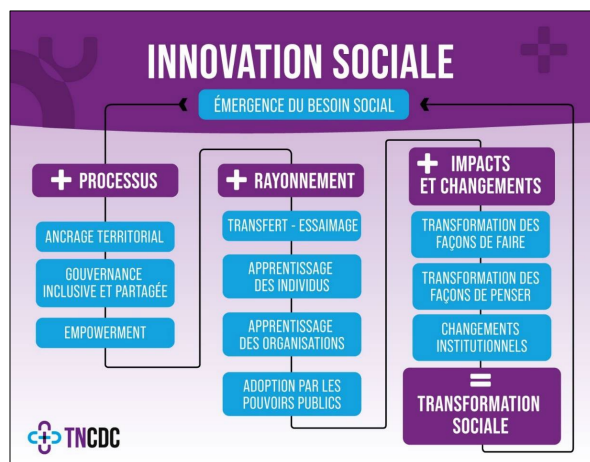

TNCDC is a network that:

- covers **15** of Quebec's 17 administrative regions.

- brings together and supports **69** CDCs, which are key players in community development.
- supports more than **2,700** community organizations and social enterprises.
- promotes the role of the autonomous community movement in social innovation focused on social transformation.

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des Sources (Eastern Townships) carried out a consultation to draw up Agenda 21 for the MRC des Sources. The CDC de Lotbinière (Chaudière-Appalaches) launched the *Express de Lotbinière*, a public transport service for the municipality's residents. In Montréal, the CDC de Côte-des-Neiges founded *Habitations communautaires de Côte-des-Neiges*, an organization that manages social housing to help people with modest incomes secure a place to call home. The CDC de Pierre-de-Saurel (Montérégie), working with a number of partners, has deployed a "web of intervention" to combat homelessness.

These examples eloquently illustrate the capacity of Quebec's autonomous community movement to innovate and bring about lasting, transformative social change. This is why the second part of TNCDC's mission is dedicated to promoting not only the movement's important contribution to social innovation, but also the social transformation perspective behind this work. As TNCDC Development Officer Ophélie Couspeyre explains, "The products and services resulting from social innovation are important, but we also want to emphasize the approach itself, the process that leads to social innovation, because that's primarily what can be applied to other contexts and lead to social transformation."

Source : TNCDC

A recent TNCDC initiative linked to its role of representing and promoting the autonomous community movement and CDCs is the exhibit entitled L'innovation sociale, naturellement communautaire. Launched in November 2019, this mobile exhibition showcases 31 innovative projects led by CDCs and their partners across Quebec. MaCommunauteLSJE.com, a web platform set up by the CDC du Lac-Saint-Jean-Est to disseminate information on local organizations and services, and Une rentrée scolaire accessible pour tous, an initiative launched by the CDC

Source : TNCDC

de Mékinac aimed at the affordability of school materials and social inclusion of primary and secondary school students, are two projects featured in the exhibition. According to Ms. Couspeyre, "These projects can inspire other communities grappling with similar issues. But they also serve as 'calling cards,' communication tools to illustrate concretely what CDCs do in the field, and to shine a light on the work they do with their members and local partners."

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CONCLUSION

The TNCDC case study highlights elements that may inspire players in the autonomous community movement who wish to work in networks. First of all, CDCs are the fruit of a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach: they are not created by the TNCDC, but by the community organizations in the areas where they are established. The TNCDC then accredits the CDCs through a support process that ensures that the model and reference framework are implemented in each one. This approach gives CDCs the dual advantage of benefiting from the support and outreach offered by a network, while retaining their autonomy.

The structure of the network headed by the TNCDC (TNCDC ⇌ CDC ⇌ local community organizations) is another interesting element, reminiscent of the way matrioshkas, the famous Russian nesting dolls, fit together. By taking advantage of the local (territorial) and multi-sectoral base of CDCs, as well as TNCDC's ability to promote the work of local players and disseminate their best practices on a provincial scale, such a structure makes it possible to bring about action and change on several levels.

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> **"Working as a network enables us to work collectively to identify priority societal issues in Quebec, and to equip ourselves to tackle them. TNCDC's multi-sectoral base gives it a 360° view of an issue and its ramifications."**
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> *– Ophélie Couspeyre, Research Development Officer, TNCDC*

One final important element is the use of networks to promote the role of the autonomous community movement in social innovation. The CDCs and their local partners would be hard-pressed to gain recognition for the importance and merit of their own territorial initiatives. However, the support of the TNCDC network makes it possible to achieve a critical mass of initiatives, ensuring that the role of the autonomous community movement in social innovation is recognized at its true value, and backed up with the necessary outreach. "This recognition allows us to be heard and helps us to influence public policy and obtain funding so that CDCs can carry out their work in the best possible conditions," concludes Ms. Couspeyre.

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