QUÉBEC'S COMMUNITY MOVEMENT:
A FORCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

Reflections on the state of Québec's community movement

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ABSTRACT

Québec's community movement is rooted in the popular organizations which sprang up in the 1960s and 1970s. These «groupes populaires» proposed an anti-capitalist understanding of society based on a class analysis. However by 2010, the «popular movement» had evolved into the «community movement», thus becoming increasingly institutionalized and depoliticized. Indeed for many groups today, service delivery has become an end rather than a means and active members have been replaced by passive «users» and even by «clients». More than just a changed vocabulary, these changes are indicative of a fundamental shift within the movement which is challenging long-held principles and practices.

This short article presents a critical profile of the Québec community movement. It is divided into three sections.   The first provides some background to the movement. A discussion of the content and impact of the recent historic Government policy on community action follows. A short conclusion raises three key issues which are confronting the community movement as it finds itself at a critical crossroad.

PART ONE

THE QUÉBEC COMMUNITY MOVEMENT: SOME BACKGROUND.

Québec is a «distinct society». Consequently, the tradition and history of community organization is different from that of the rest of Canada. Ironically, many of the pressures presently weighing upon Québec's community groups are an attempt to force them into a more «North-American» mould. [1]

The Québec community movement, excluding the social economy sector, is composed of more than 8 000 groups, of which roughly 4 000 identify themselves as «independent» community organizations. Five thousand of these groups have a funding link with the Québec government. [2] By definition, all 8 000 groups have an active democratic life, of which the annual general meeting (AGM) is the most important moment. A further 7000 groups and coops make up the social economy sector. [3] In short, different «currents» run through what other jurisdictions call «the third sector», a concept rarely used in among Québécois activists and for which nuances need to be drawn if it is to be applied to Québec.

The Québec Government recognizes the importance of making distinctions in its dealings with community organizations. In its recent policy paper, it distinguishes between **«independent»** organizations and other forms of community-based groups, such as foundations, cooperatives, economic community development initiatives, the «voluntary sector» and social economy enterprises. Certain forms of «third sector» intervention are explicitly excluded from its policy. [4]

The community action movement is rooted in a more politicized tradition. [5] Inspired by the liberation struggles of different peoples with whom Québécois activists have long felt an affinity (Palestine, Cuba, Nicaragua, Chile…), as well as their own sense of national oppression and identity[6], the early community movement, organized in «groupes populaires», defined itself as a force for social change. The groups making up the movement included citizen's committees, tenant's groups, neighbourhood day care centres and grocery stores, budgetary counseling groups (ACEF), literacy groups, unemployed and injured worker's groups, etc. . The early discourse of this milieu was anti-capitalist and included an explicit social class analysis. **[7]**

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[1] The recent explosion of the «social economy» sector is just one of the pressures to «North-Americanize» Québec's community sector. While some attempt to link the social economy to the community sector, its «market logic» is actually quite foreign to community action. This same attempt to introduce the market logic to community groups may be seen in the new federal **Not-For-Profit Corporations Act** and will probably be reflected in a similar Québec law that is expected in 2010.

[2] http://142.213.167.138/bd_recherche/portrait/formreporg.asp Site visited on March 29, 2010.

[3] http://www.chantier.qc.ca/ Visited on 24-03-2010

[4] Québec (2001) , *Community Action: A crucial contribution to the exercise of citizenship and the social development of Québec,* p 21

[5] See Favreau (1989), p 19ff and Jetté (2008), p. 44 ff.

[6] One obvious example is Pierre Vallières (1971), *White Niggers of America*. Without claiming that Vallières was a community activist in the 1960s (he was a journalist), his finished his days as the editor of *Recto-Verso,* a progressive community magazine. Other examples would include the importance of liberation theology and the impact of Paulo Freire on the development of popular education in Québec.

[7] The class analysis was tinged with nationalism as often the capitalists were «English» and the workers, «French».

A line can be drawn between much of what is progressive in Québec social policy and the struggles waged by the social movement, of which community organizations are an important component.[8] The independent community movement continues this tradition, most recently identifying itself as a social change movement in a formal vote taken at a national meeting.[9] By definition, an independent community group must be able to demonstrate that it is a force for «social transformation».[10] For their part, popular education groups define themselves as working to change the causes, and not the symptoms, of social inequality and injustice.

Obviously social change can take many forms. In the field of health and social services, alternative citizen-based services were developed by different community action initiatives before they were institutionalized. The much respected, Centres locaux des services communautaires (CLSC) grew out of the citizen's movement. Québec's accessible and public childcare system came into being because of the long-term struggle to universalize the community-based «garderies populaires». A myriad of similar alternative services –in mental health, women's centres, rape-crisis centres, neighbourhood houses- have changed their milieu by responding creatively and non-bureaucratically to citizen-identified needs or to assist disadvantaged populations.

Social change can also take the more conflictual form which is often necessary to defend basic human rights. To this end, many independent community groups have developed rights practices and initiated struggles to improve the working and living conditions of their members and «the society». They have contributed to improving social and economic rights on several fronts: drug insurance for poor people, social housing, access to health care, legal aid, unemployment insurance, universal childcare. The International Women's March (2005), which placed the issue of women and poverty on the political agenda of several countries, came about through an initiative from the Québec women's movement.

Formal recognition of this non-partisan political dimension of community action was attained in 2001 with the creation of a new type of community action group: un *groupe de defense collective des droits*.[11] Translated as «rights advocacy» groups, this category encompasses more than 450 organizations whose principle role is to defend and advance the social and economic rights of Québec citizens. Groups working in this field represent social assistance recipients, tenants, the elderly, people with a variety of handicaps, women, consumers, etc. Most of their public funding comes from an independent, non-governmental source and they fall under the responsibility of a relatively arms-length Secretariat.[12] Rights groups are funded to be watchdogs and social critics.[13]

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[8] A word on terminology. Québec's «social movement» is a broad term which encompasses different and changing alliances between the trade union, women's, students' and community movements. The «social movement» is strongest when all of these components agree on common actions (as in the *Bread and Roses March* initiated by the women's movement (1995), the fight against Law 102 initiated by the unions (1982) or the struggle against the Charest government's «re-engineering policy» (2004-5).

[9] Comité aviseur de l'action communautaire autonome (1996).

[10] Québec (2004b), section 3.

[11] Québec (2001), p. 28.

[12] Funding comes from the *Fonds d'action à l'action communautaire autonome*. This fund, independent of Government revenues, is composed of 5 percent of the profits of Québec's casino network. Rights groups fall under the responsibility of the *Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales (SACAIS)*. Created in 1995, this secretariat was originally an independent government agency

Coalitions (*Regroupements*) also receive State support. Whereas, in *québécois*, a «coalition» generally means an entity which is cross-sector (community- trade union, for example) or ad-hoc (on an issue basis), a *regroupement* is a permanent federation of groups , organized either sectorally (housing, women's centres, single parents, etc.) or territorially (regionally or locally).   Within the independent sector alone, more than 100 national sectoral *regroupements* are funded by the Québec government.[14] Further, Québec is divided into seventeen distinct administrative units. Separate regional coalitions representing women's groups, popular education groups, and health and social services groups are funded by the Québec Government which also funds a network of local coalitions, the *corporations de développement communautaire*.   Most «base groups» are members of at least one regional coalition and one national coalition. Many have multiple affiliations, representing their different needs and interests. While base groups work directly with the population, coalitions are important for developing critical social analysis , providing support and services to their members and for their role in demanding and negotiating the conditions of their member's funding. Several of the territorial networks are also active representatives of their members in partnerships with different State and private actors.

Finally, this brief overview would not be complete without acknowledging the importance of the health and social service sector which represents about 70 percent of the State's total commitment to community organizations. During the 1990s, this sector expanded exponentially as the Government increasingly involved community organizations in its major reforms through a series of policy initiatives. In fact, this component of the independent community movement has long insisted upon being a part of the decision-making process in the health and social services field. In the 1990s, regional coalitions of community organizations were funded precisely to facilitate community input into local health decisions. Consequently, the conflictual, watchdog role defended by other community sectors (particularly in popular education) was gradually replaced by models of partnership and consultation designed to facilitate the «co-production» of services in the health and social service field.

In other sectors as well, notably employment and community economic development, community organizations have chosen to try to influence public policy from within, rather than criticize it from without.   This approach has largely facilitated the arrival of New Public Management (NPM) practices in Québec.

The NPM grows directly out of the neoliberal redefinition of the role of Government and the concept of «public space». For the neoliberals, the role of Government is not to «row», but to «pilot».[15] In this view, the Government coordinates and plans service and programme delivery, but is not in the business of

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reporting directly to the Prime Minister's office. It has since been reduced to a department within the Employment and Social Solidarity Ministry.

[13] The Framework Agreement (Québec, 2004b) establishes a formal definition of a Rights group. The majority of a rights group's activities must be 1) political (non-partisan); 2) use a popular education approach; 3) promote the mobilization of the population around political issues; 4) present these issues to elected officials or decision makers.

[14] A question of terminology. In this text, «national» means Québec-wide. «Federal» is used to refer to «Canadian».

[15] The idea was first used by Osbourne, David et Ted Gabler (1996).

direct delivery.   Public services are privatized and their delivery becomes the responsibility of third party partners such as municipalities or not-for-profit groups.[16]

NPM is the form of public administration adapted to the neoliberal State. It applies to public administration principles which are imported from the private sector: efficiency, cost effectiveness, value for dollar. Services to be off-loaded to private or community partners are managed through service contracts awarded competitively to providers who can deliver them at the lowest cost. These contracts define the frequency, quality and nature of the goods being bought and sold, and detailed reporting measures are required. In this world view, citizens are perceived as «service consumers» and become the statistics and measurements recorded in reports made to funders.

Those community organizations that have accepted the logic of the State's dismantling to the private sector by becoming its useful partners have also seen their funding increased. Other sectors, either more critical or less useful to the State, become marginalized.   It is around this issue – the participation of the community sector in the dismantling of the State – that Québec's community movement is becoming increasingly fractured. More than a question of tactics, this split reflects fundamentally different visions of the role of the State.

QUÉBEC COMMUNITY SECTOR FUNDING

An obvious way in which Québec differs from the rest of Canada lies in the level of its State funding to the community sector. A double consensus within Québec society can help to explain the origin of this practice of public funding. The first aspect concerns the State's role for ensuring the redistribution of wealth.[17] While public funding of universal social programmes and public services and a multi-tiered and broad-based approach to taxation are generally held to be two forms of wealth redistribution, the State funding of community organizations is considered to be a third form. This first consensus is currently under attack by neoliberal governments, think tanks (Institut économique de Montréal) and journalists (Claude Picher).

The second consensus, directly related to the first, concerns the idea that persons, and groups of persons, excluded from power and influence have the right to express themselves in public debate. Community organizations are seen as vehicles for developing the arguments of this part of the population and for allowing it to gain the skills and experience necessary to make its voices heard.[18] It is in this sense that the funding of community groups can be seen as a form of wealth redistribution. By helping

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[16]   See Canadian Federation of Municipalities, *Mending Canada's frayed social safety net: The role of municipal governments, March 2010*. Available at: http://www.fcm.ca/English/View.asp?mp=1297&x=1302 Site visited on April 10, 2010.

[17] The Québec State, conceived and equipped for «nation-building», emerged in the 1960s out of the changes brought about by the Quiet Revolution. Consequently, the «Québec State» exists in a way in which the «Ontario State» or the «Saskatchewan State» does not.

[18] This is perhaps in «reaction» to the long tradition of Roman Catholic hegemony. Until the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, the Church's domination of the francophone population was all embracing (health, education, social services) and only sporadically challenged. There was neither «public education», nor «public» libraries (except in English Québec!). But then, who needed a library or education when the parish priest, ably assisted by «The Index», determined what could and could not be read and thought.

disadvantaged groups participate in social debates, community groups play a role in fashioning and maintaining pressure on the State to provide a wide range of accessible social programmes and public services paid for by taxes. Adult education, particularly popular education, has thus played an important role since the Quiet Revolution, as it has been an incubator of social criticism and demands. Through their involvement in popular education groups, thousands of citizens have gained basic organizing and critical skills necessary for more fully participating in society. Indeed, for nearly thirty years, Québec's Ministry of Education supported citizen education through popular education. From 1967 until 2005, it supported these efforts within community organizations; from 1987 until 1992, a separate programme supported them within trade unions.[19] Before the closure of popular education (including popular literacy) programs, «collateral damage» of the new government policy, almost one thousand community organizations could count on receiving recurrent public funding for activities specifically dedicated to forming an active and critical citizenry.

FUNDING OF THE COMMUNITY SECTOR: A SNAPSHOT OF 2008-2009

The vast majority of public funding for community organizations comes from the Québec government.[20] Apart from public sources, some funding is available to community organizations from private sources, most notably Centraide (similar to the United Way). Religious communities also have a long and financially significant history of supporting popular organizations.[21] Finally, in a disturbing development, a new private funding source has exploded on the scene. The Chagnon family, founders of the *Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon*, is the sole beneficiary of three publically legislated *public-private partnerships (*PPP). The family thus controls more than one billion $ (1,000,000,000$) of public and private funds for the next ten years which they are distributing to community organizations willing to offer services meeting the criteria of the family.[22]

Detailed information on Government funding is regularly published on a dedicated Web site.[23]   As the table illustrates, in 2008-09, the Government attributed nearly 800 millions $ to community organizations (in the broad sense). This figure excludes social economy groups, such as the publically funded 7$ a day *Centres de la petite enfance* (childcare) or homecare organizations.

[19] Voir Greason, Vincent " Adult Education in Québec", in Selman, Gordon et al, *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada,* Thompson Educational Publishing Company, Toronto 1998, pp 83-102. A bit dated, the text nevertheless offers a good overview.

[20] Direct funding from the Federal Government is minimal. It exists for immigrant and refugee groups. For social housing, federal money is administered by Québec or by municipalities. Federal funding to women's organizations and literacy groups has been cut in recent years. Minimal federal support for international solidarity groups can be available… as long as the groups are not pro-Palestinian. Most visible Federal funding is reserved for Anglophone groups under minority language arrangements.

[21] Until recently, most religious community funding was vetted through the *Comité des priorités des dons* of the Québec section of the *Canadian religious conference*. This committee, composed of regional representatives, analyzed more than 500 requests annually, and made recommendations to the communities for the yearly distribution of about 2,5 million $. This structure, which existed more than 25 years, collapsed in 2007 following a reorganization of the CRC which eliminated the CRC-Q.

[22] See l'Observatoire Chagnon at http://observatoirechagnon.blogspot.com/ for more information. The Foundation is highly contested within the community network, particularly within the family and women's sector.

[23] **Portrait du soutien financier gouvernemental versé aux organismes communautaires** available at: http://142.213.167.138/bd_recherche/portrait/formreporg.asp Site visited on March 29, 2010. The information provided in the table comes from this site.

Sector of intervention (by numerical importance)	Funding allocated (2008-09) $	Number of groups
Health and Social Services:	440,617,702.00	3324
Employment and training	171,076,739.75	411
Rights:	25,007,347.23	471
Family	19,574,192.00	362
Education (including literacy)	17,935,328.00	187
Total:	**794,678,742.18**	**5085**

Citing the conclusions of international studies emerging from John Hopkins' University, the Québec government notes that public funding is the primary source for Québécois community organizations, contributing more than 80 percent of their revenues. In this context, it is important to note the extreme pressure which is presently being placed on organizations to diversify their funding sources. On this question, the Québec Government clearly wishes to move in the direction of the international norm. [24]

According to Government figures, the 794,7 million $ was divided as follows
- 495,7 million $ (62 percent of total funding) went to core funding. 4 267 (or 84 percent) community organizations received some form of core funding;
- 247,9 million $ (31 percent of total funding) was spent in «fee for service». 1 770 (or 35 percent) community organizations had this type of relationship to the State;
- 50,2 million $ (6 percent of the total) was spent on specific projects determined by the Government; 1 453 community organizations partook of this form of funding.[25]

More on the different types of funding follows in the next section.

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[24] Québec (2001), p.14 . On this question, a word on the situation of rights groups is in order. The first characteristic of this new type of group (see note #10) requires that the majority of its activities be «political». However, because of their popular education roots, many of these groups are recognized by Canada Revenue Agency as «charitable organizations». It is increasingly impossible to square the circle: A rights group, which the province says must be political, can no longer meet the federal definition of an apolitical charity. Many groups risk losing their charitable number and with it their access to alternative funding sources if a solution to this dilemma is not soon negotiated between the two orders of government.

[25] Information available at: http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/action-communautaire/ Site visited on March 29, 2010.

PART TWO

THE GOVERNMENT POLICY (2001)

With the election of the *Parti québécois* government headed by Jacques Parizeau in 1994, Québec pursued its neoliberal conversion. Unlike the Liberal's before them, the PQ had a clear idea of the new role which awaited the community sector and this explains its urgency to adopt a coherent governmental policy concerning the community sector.[26]

Elaboration of the policy began shortly after Parizeau took power. Initially directed directly from the Prime Minister's office, [27] the file was eventually referred to Louise Harel, a powerful minister responsible for the Employment portfolio. Over a period of five years, the independent community sector, through its representative *the Comité aviseur de l'action communautaire autonome (CAACA[28])*, negotiated with governmental representatives to arrive at a mutually acceptable policy. In May 2001, a national meeting of some 125 representatives of all sectors of the independent community movement voted, by a 2/3 majority, to conditionally accept the governmental policy paper «as the best possible deal for the moment». Amongst the third of the delegations opposed to acceptance, seventeen organizations registered their dissidence, freeing themselves to publically distance themselves from the majority's decision. [29]

Formally adopted by cabinet in 2001, the policy reaffirms *« the place of community organizations at the centre of the renewal of Québec's social policies»* and recognizes *«their role in the social and economic development of Québec. »* [30] Although historic in its trans-governmental breadth, in many ways the policy simply transferred to the whole community sector the model which had already been developed and applied between itself and community groups in the health and social services sector.

For the purposes of this article, the «policy» to which we will be referring is in fact made up of three separate but inter-connected documents:

1. *Community action: A crucial contribution to the exercise of citizenship and the social development of Québec : A governmental policy (2001) ;*
2. *Action Plan* (2004a);
3. *Framework Agreement* (2004b).

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[26] Such a gesture was not entirely without political motivation. The PQ had also committed itself to holding a second referendum on the «national question» and gaining community sector support was a factor in the pre-referendum strategy.

[27] In fact, Parizeau appointed his wife Lisette Lapointe to be responsible for the file.

[28] A truly horrible acronym, *caca* is a child's word for «shit». The umbrella group has since become the *Réseau québcois de l'action communautaire autonome (RQ-ACA)*. Made up of 20 members (16 sectors of independent community action (consumers, housing, women, family, communications, etc.) and 4 national multi-sectoral *regroupements)* the RQ-ACA represents the 4000 members of the independent community sector.

[29] The author of this text was the delegate representing the Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec (MÉPACQ), one of the 17 dissident organizations. He was also a founding member of the «provisional» CAACA. For a brief history of the Comité aviseur and its dealings around the policy, see CAACA (2006)

[30] Québec (2001), Message from the Minister

These three documents form a global, comprehensive approach to government-community relations which is unique in North America. In the following overview, we will look briefly at three of its important elements: **definitions** of different types of community intervention, **funding** implications; and **accountability mechanisms**.

POLICY OVERVIEW[31]

The Government policy recognizes the contribution of the community sector to the social development of Québec. It clarifies the relationships the government has, or wishes to develop, with the community action sector in the broad sense and more specifically with the independent community action sector. Its general objectives are as follows:

> • *Acknowledge, promote, and support community action in the broad sense, that is, in its entirety, by taking into account its contribution to the elimination of poverty and exclusion, social development, and the development of active citizenship*
> • *Acknowledge, support, and consolidate independent community action and its natural field of application, namely, community education and social change, support for participation in the democratic process, development of a global vision of issues, the exercise of active citizenship, and entrenchment in the community*
> • *Ensure the consolidation of community action through general goals and national guidelines that will apply to the public authorities concerned, nationally, regionally, and locally*
> • *Recognize and support volunteering within community organizations*

It also proposes to *«consolidate community organization action by introducing mechanisms that allow an array of financial links to be established with the government»*.[32]

DEFINITIONS

The policy characterizes community organizations, in the broader sense, as those groups which correspond to the following basic criteria:

1. Non-profit
2. Community-based
3. Associative and democratic
4. Free to determine their missions, orientations, approaches, and practices

The *Framework Agreement* translates these criteria into a definition with precise indicators which can be validated[33]

On the other hand, an **independent** community action group, in addition to meeting the four previous criteria, must also meet four other conditions:

1. Created through a community initiative.

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[31] This author has written extensively about this policy although this is the first time in English. In French, see: *«Dix ans de lutte pour la reconnaissance», in Nouvelles pratiques sociales*, une recension de livre, Vol 20, no. 1, 2007; *«DCD, mais pas mort!»,* Relations, mars 2009; « *Une nouvelle pièce du casse-tête de la réingénierie...»*, Relations, décembre 2004, p. 5-6. ; with Bleau, Connie "Vers une association nationale des groupes communautaires autonomes?", *Relations*, mars 2004, p. 30-31; "Un point final pour l'action communautaire", *Relations*, octobre-novembre 2001, p. 8-9.
[32] Québec (2001), p16.
[33]Québec (2004b), section 3.

2. Pursue a social mission that promotes social change and that is specific to the organization.
3. Use active citizenship practices and broad-based approaches rooted in a comprehensive view of the issues at stake.
4. Have a Board of directors independent from the public network.

Again, the *Framework Agreement* translates these criteria into a definition with precise indicators which can be validated in order to measure the compliance of individual groups.[34]

The distinction between community organizations and «independent» community action groups might seem highly obscure. In fact, it is important on several fronts. From a historical perspective, it was the independent community movement which first demanded governmental recognition. In 1989, twelve years before the adoption of the policy, independent groups throughout Québec used a National Day of Visibility to support their demand for formal State recognition. Formal recognition, it was thought, with an accompanying increase in core funding, was the best means for ensuring the growth and stability of the sector. For posterity, let it be noted that the initial promise of the Parizeau government to elaborate a specific policy for independent community groups respected the milieu's demand. It was only relatively late in the process, with the publication of the first policy draft in 2000, when the independent milieu realized they were betrayed by the Government's decision to elaborate a broad policy covering the entire community sector.[35]

Secondly, the criteria of «social change» and «comprehensive view» applied to independent groups are highly significant. The first recognizes their political role as agents of social change. While the policy recognizes the broader community groups as «service delivers», it explicitly accords a social mandate to the independent groups. Further, the «comprehensive view» (*approche globale*) underlines the «holistic» approach employed by the independent groups who deal with the «whole person», not with the «specific problems» of an individual. These two criteria are presently questioned by the Ministry of Health and social services whose officials claim to be unable to adequately measure the milieu's degree of compliance.

The fact that Boards of directors must be free of the public network is also highly significant in that it protects the independent groups' autonomy. Specifically, this criterion ensures that no seats are reserved on an independent group's Board for public funders or public agencies (school boards, Centre local d'emploi, CLSC, etc.) Within the movement, this practice is extended to exclude designated places for municipalities, the local parish or trade unions. This exclusion is institutional : it does not prevent an individual citizen, who works at a CLSC or is a trade unionist, to sit on the Board of an independent group.

Finally, the distinction between independent and the broader forms of community intervention has funding implications.

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[34] Québec (2004b), section 3. As already noted, a third definition in the Framework Agreement creates the *groupe de defense collective des droits*. See note #13.

[35] It should be noted that only representatives of the 4000 independent groups participated formally in the negotiations leading to the policy which covers 8000 groups.

FUNDING

The policy clarifies the nature of Government funding for community organizations. Three types of funding are maintained:

- Core funding
- Service contracts
- Special projects

Compared to other jurisdictions, Québec has demonstrated relatively generous support for community organizations. However, its support for core funding is also significant and seems more sustained than elsewhere in Canada. The 2001 policy proposes to limit «core funding» to the independent sector.[36]

The importance of core funding cannot be overestimated. Defined in the policy as *«not limited to service provision»,* core funding covers costs related to the overall mission of the group, general operating expenditures, wages necessary for basic operations, but also human rights education and advocacy, associative relationships with other organizations, joint action and lobbying, citizen participation.[37] Further, core funding takes the form of a «lump sum» payment which is subjected to less rigorous accountability mechanisms than the other two forms of funding. [38]

The Government notes that its policy initiative towards the community sector is unique in that it does not tie public funding to «service complementarity» or to the creation of partnerships. Further, it hopes that limiting core funding to the independent organizations will:

> *«… end the disputes regarding the distinctions between alternative initiatives and services arising from independent community action and initiatives and services that complement those offered by the public sector. (p. 25)*

As a point of fact, «fee for service» funding was first introduced to the broader community sector in the 1980s with a first Framework agreement established for groups from the employment sector. «Fee for services» slowly worked its way into the independent sector in the 1990s through a special agreement signed between the State and alternative mental health groups. By the end of the 1990s, women's shelters, youth centres (Auberge du Coeur) and a variety of other community organizations began to accept this form of funding to supplement their insufficient core funding.[39]

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[36] In research done for the *Ligue des droits et libertés du Québec*, Bill Clennett has pointed out that this point is not as clear as it might appear on first reading. The Policy «grandfathers» core funding for those community groups (in the broader sense) which already benefitted from this kind of funding. The debate may well be moot.   «Core funding», as it is presently understood, might be threatened following a recent compromising report by Québec's Auditor General. In June 2008, he noted that the reporting mechanisms for core funding did not permit him to adequately evaluate the use of public funds by those health and social service community groups which he examined. He urged the conversion of core funding to «fee for service». When the Doberman barks, the Chihuahua jumps…

[37] Québec (2001), p. 27.

[38] Ibid., p. 28, 36.

[39] See Jetté (2008), p.195 ff.

The Government policy clearly distinguishes the nature of «fee for service» funding:

> *«The rationale for service agreements differs markedly from that underlying funding for the missions of community organizations. Service agreements are contracts that specify the commitments of the parties concerned. Generally speaking, they include a detailed description of the services the community organization provides, supporting documents for related costs and expected results, and items such as the number of people served, conditions for access to these services (age, status as employment-assistance or employment insurance recipients, etc.), referral and follow-up procedures, and the computer systems to be used to transmit user data. There are several criteria that may be used to determine the amount of service contract funding, including hourly cost, cost per act, cost per user, or overall cost.* [40]

It was the presence of «fee for service» funding in the Government proposal which lead to the split at the 2001 national meeting when the independent sector voted on the Government's policy proposal. While recognizing the Government's right to develop service contracts for its own ends, the dissident groups reminded the assembly that the whole purpose for demanding recognition was to guarantee, consolidate and eventually increase the core funding attributed to community groups. To legitimize the principle of «fee for service» funding by accepting the Policy as mutually agreeable was, according to the dissidents, to open the door to the Government's hijacking of the community sector for its own ends. This issue continues to divide the independent sector.

Further, while the policy does commit the Government to maintaining the principle of core funding, no such commitment is to be found on the level of this funding. In fact, the policy is clear that the State can, at best, participate in the funding of community organizations: it does not commit itself to anything approaching «full funding». Which obviously begs the question: At the individual group level, can an organization survive strictly on its core funding? Or is it forced to turn to «fee for service» arrangements in order to remain viable? These questions are particularly interesting in the context of the change in Government in 2004, when a third question was added: How will the change in government (from the PQ who negotiated the policy to the Liberals who implement it) affect the answers to the first two questions.
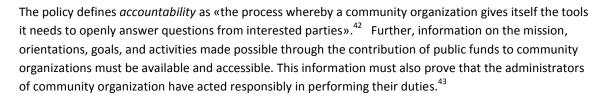
ACCOUNTABILITY

We briefly referred to the arrival of New Public Management practices in Québec at the end of the 1990s. This management style is clearly present throughout the policy initiative :

> *Popular and government support for community organizations hinges on the conviction that the mission of the organizations is appropriate, that funding is being managed wisely and that community action is producing tangible results. Government responsibility for managing public monies is of primary importance. As taxpayers, citizens have the right to be fully informed of the way the government spends their money, as well as the right to know whether the expected results have been achieved. This government responsibility has a direct impact on community organizations. It imposes transparency requirements for, among other things, accountability and the evaluation of the quality of the services delivered on a voluntary basis. Community organizations have the responsibility of providing their funders, members, service users, and the communities they serve with information that enables them to assess how public funds are being used.* [41]

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[40] Québec (2001), p. 33.
[41] Québec (2001) , p 35.

For the Government, recognition of community organizations is reciprocated by the fact that these same groups must be held accountable for how they manage the funding they receive.

The policy defines *accountability* as «the process whereby a community organization gives itself the tools it needs to openly answer questions from interested parties».[42]   Further, information on the mission, orientations, goals, and activities made possible through the contribution of public funds to community organizations must be available and accessible. This information must also prove that the administrators of community organization have acted responsibly in performing their duties.[43]

In fact, the accountability provisions of the policy are as exhaustive as they are exhausting. Apart from the impact upon individual groups who are required to hire specialized staff to meet reporting requirements, all community groups are now fully open to scrutiny by their funders and to some extent, by the general population. Statistical information on all funded groups– including full access to the sources and amounts of public funding – is available on the Internet. Further all publically-funded health and social service community groups are required to hold an annual public information meeting thus allowing any citizen to question administrators about the mission, activities and finances of the group. [44] This information meeting is different from the AGM which is open to members and invited guests only.

PART THREE

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Times change. The fact that community organizations received more than 750 million $ of public funding in 2009 is now less related to the State's desire to redistribute wealth or to facilitate citizen participation in public debates than it is a reflection of the Government's decision to use the community infrastructure built up over the past thirty years as a means for off-loading public responsibilities to new «partners». During the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, the community sector has become increasingly integrated into the more formal networks of employment and health and social services. The Government promises to accelerate this off-loading:

> «As part of the recent reforms in health and social services, manpower, education, family assistance, and local and regional development, the government has decided to **create an environment that is even more conducive** to the development of community resources.»[45] [Our emphasis]

The process of aggressive State reorganization, made infamous by the Charest government's «re-engineering» fiasco, had actually begun under the previous PQ government.[46] Over time, it has dramatically changed the nature of community intervention. Gone are the days of the «groupe populaire» when members controlled their own organizations! Most of today's community organizations are

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[42] Ibid., p 36.

[43] Ibid., p 36.

[44] Public questioning about an organization's position on abortion is just one example of the potential minefield represented by this requirement.

[45] *Québec (2001), p.9*

[46] MÉPACQ (1997) *La localisation, la régionalisation… et la mondialisation* remains the best analysis of the PQ's neoliberal tendencies.

professional, efficient, well-organized and even adequately staffed. Many can afford to avail themselves of the new dedicated benefits and pension service … offered by a community organization! And, of course, «community services» are much cheaper than «public services».

The final section of this paper addresses three issues which are critical to the future of Québec's independent community movement. The first concerns **citizen participation** in a context where active members are being replaced by passive clients.[47] The second looks at the transformation wrought by New Public Management (NPM) on the **volunteer boards** who oversee community organizations. Thirdly, as clients replace members and as the impact of NPM practices makes themselves felt, large parts of Québec's community movement are becoming **depoliticized**. Which raises the question: is it still a force for social change?

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Without question, Québec's community movement has played an important role for citizen development. Gérald Larose, who headed the public consultation phase of the policy process, recognized this when he described independent community action as a broad-based social change and active citizenship movement.   He further praised it as promoting democratic citizen initiatives while working within a perspective of social solidarity, social change, gender equality and the elimination of poverty and discrimination. He lauded its role in defending human rights, developing alternative services and responding to emerging needs. These ideas made their way into the Government's policy:

> *[The Québec government recognizes] the independent community group movement, that is, their community activities are geared towards social change and development. They are involved in efforts to improve the social fabric and quality of live, which often means the fight against poverty, discrimination and exclusion It is a citizens movement that takes a special interest in the living conditions of all members of society and the quality of public services, a movement that demands to be consulted and have more of a say in the decision made by those in power.»* [48]

While all this is true of the movement that was, is it still true of the movement as it is?   In terms of where the movement is heading, is this rhetoric still pertinent? The automatic, knee-jerk answer is «Yes». A more complicated answer is what follows and it is conditional.

Historically, the independent community sector has prided itself as being made up of democratic organizations in which «citizen participation» has been crucial. An active and engaged membership with a healthy «vie associative» have made the independent sector an important source of citizen education.[49]

However, as the State proceeds to off-load services to the private, including the private not-for-profit sector, public agencies increasingly refer clients to third parties. In the field of health and social services,

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[47] The «exercise of citizenship» is included in the title of the formal government policy.

[48] *Québec (2001), p. 15.*

[49] The concept of «vie associative» translates poorly; at best it would be a combination of «internal democracy» and «internal group life». «Vie associative» encompasses the all of the ways in which members of a group interact with each other: the AGM, committees, socials, activities, mobilizations, producing newsletters, etc. It is everything which fosters a member's sense of belonging to the group. For examples of the community movement's contribution to citizen education, see :   Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (1998), p.60-61,89.

the CLSC refer clients to community organizations for services. Schools refer children to community associations for tutoring or physical activity. The public employment service (CLE) refers clients to literacy and employment groups. Even the Welfare department refers clients to rights groups who are have been formally requested to assist «the clientele» to file for benefits.

To meet and satisfy these needs, community groups must develop increasingly specialized expertise. In many groups, the «global» approach, long valued by the independent sector, is replaced by «particular» service delivery. In order to meet the new requirements imposed upon them by the public networks, community organizations are becoming professionalized: better educated, the staff is professionalized; «fee for service» means a more professional administration …[50]

These changes weaken the membership base of community organizations. Not that the groups are empty – quite the contrary: they are full as never before. But the traditional member is being replaced by the referred client who comes for a specific service. The new clientele is, in fact, a service «consumer». Consumers «consume»: they come to a group to receive the promised service, not to become involved in the group. Thus, in many cases and for many groups, the very nature of the relation between «a person» and «the group» has changed.

Pressured to perform, and submitted to the requirement of «fee for service» arrangements, the «professional», working in a community organization, becomes more concerned with service delivery than with the collective life of the group. The «service» becomes an end in itself and is no lingered considered a means for inviting citizens to become involved in their group or in society. Activities not covered by the service agreement – such as citizenship education, maintaining membership committees, critical thinking, organizing public meetings – are perceived of as an inefficient use of the group's time because they are not measurable![51]

VOLUNTEER BOARDS

The «groupe populaire» was the principle form of organization in Québec's community movement until well into the 1980s. Activist and membership-based, a popular organization «belongs» to its members. Regular «membership meetings» (assemblées générales des membres) was a form of direct democracy which ensured membership control over the group. When direct democracy became too unwieldy, a «management committee» would be formed from within the membership. It carried out the members wishes and regularly reported back to the membership. « Accountability» remained at all times with the «base». This popular model gave rise to the defining principles which continued to govern the «vie associative» of many of Québec's community based organizations until quite recently. Among these principles, two stand out. First, an organization exists for and because of its membership. Second, a group is primarily accountable to its membership.

With the evolution of the «groupe populaire» into the «groupe communautaire», many volunteer boards are now more important than the membership of the group it administers.   The fact shouldn't be surprising since all groups receiving State funding must now be legally incorporated. As such, they fall

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[50] Each regional Health Agency has a «complaints commissioner» who is mandated to investigate and respond to complaints made by users of community health and social services. In the olden days, when groups had members and not clients, complaints were dealt with at membership meetings.

[51] The question is debated at greater length in a French version of this paper. Written during the author's Carold Fellowship year, it is available by contacting the author directly: vgreason@bell.net

under a law which dictates that the «power» of a not-for-profit corporation lies with its Board of directors.[52] Further, as the principles of NPM make themselves felt, volunteer Boards –and even individual Board members – are becoming increasingly accountable in a legal sense for decisions made by the organizations which they administer.[53]

While the volunteer Board has traditionally been considered a learning experience, it is no longer a place to make mistakes. Whereas the Board had four basic roles and responsibilities (memory, accountability to membership, employer, and overall management[54]), the importance of memory and accountability to members is shrinking. Accountability is now to funders, and Boards are increasingly called upon to develop those networks which are necessary to ensure and increase their group's funding. Further, as funding and responsibilities increase, so does staffing: the role of the Board-employer is becoming extremely important.

Consequently, the «professionalization» which has overtaken community organization's activity at the service and staffing levels has its corollary at the Board level. Now considered a formal service provider, and even a «co-producer» of services[55], groups are being forced to turn to complicated «fee for service» arrangements with State funders. These take the form of complex contracts for which the Board is ultimately responsible. Certain Health Boards are even turning to a public tendering process for choosing a service provider from amongst different community organizations, which necessitates the formulation of complicated bids. All of this is forcing community groups to go outside of their traditional membership to find experienced Board members who have contacts and expertise which could be useful to the group. This introduction of the private sector's «expert» model into the community milieu means that «split-level boards», made up of a combination of a group's traditional «members» and outside «experts» are becoming relatively common in certain sectors – and even required in others.[56]

Finally, the increased responsibility thrust upon volunteer boards, both as a corporate entity and for members personally, is becoming a real issue with the community movement.   Ordinary citizens are hesitant to join a board either because they are not sure they have the necessary expertise or because they do not want to assume personal liability for decisions a Board might have to make. Groups which are going through hard times find it particularly difficult to find volunteer members. For certain groups, literacy issues become problematic. With clients replacing members within organizations, and people from outside of the membership sitting on a group's Board, the traditional role of the community organization as a place for developing an active and articulate citizenry is changing.

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[52] The vast majority are incorporated under the third section of Québec's Company Law. Québec is about to create a new law specific to not-for-profit corporations which will probably mirror the new Federal legislation. The Federal law received royal sanction in June 2009 and is just now coming into effect.

[53] The new Federal legislation «responsibilises» individual board members by outlining more clearly their legal obligations.

[54] For a discussion of the roles and responsibilities of the volunteer board of a community organization, see TROVEPO *Quand la loi rencontre la tradition: rôles et pouvoirs d'un conseil d'administration,* 2003, 28 pages. Available at www.trovepo.org

[55] Denis Bourque, in a communication with the author, notes that the concept of «service producer» is found in the Québec Health Act. Yves Vaillancourt speaks of the community sector as a co-producer of services. Bourque (2009), p. 24, note 1.

[56]   The new Federal legislation opens the door to remunerated Board members which will only hasten the transformation of volunteer Boards to the expert Boards that one finds in private industry.

DEPOLITISATION

Ironically, this paper is being written during a period which has seen the largest socio-political mobilization in the recent history of Québec's community movement. On April 1, 2010, more that 12 000 citizens, from all across Québec, demonstrated in the streets of Montréal to protest the Québec government's budget, brought down two days earlier. Announcing an increase in the provincial sales tax, increased student tuition fees, a new tax for health services and «user fees» for individual medical acts, the budget provoked real anger within the Québec population. The April 1st demonstration, long planned to coincide with an increase in Hydro rates, was principally organized by regional «popular education» coalitions, national rights organizations, and the more politicized wing of the student movement.

A more accurate example of the state of mobilization within the community movement can be seen in the reaction to the Government's 2009 regional consultation on it next anti-poverty action plan. For example, community organizations organized two distinct demonstrations in Trois-Rivières. One the one hand, the «popular education» groups protested the general orientation of the proposed action plan with its continued distinction between «the deserving» and «non-deserving» poor. Simultaneously, the health and social services coalition demonstrated for increased government funding so that its members could help the Government implement the very proposal the popular education groups were denouncing!

Whereas Québec's community movement traces its origins to the politicized citizen's groups which resisted the massive urban renewal projects which destroyed many of the downtown neighbourhoods of nearly all major cities in the 1970s and 1980s, many of today's community groups are actively participating in the dismantling of the State. As their goal is limited to offering efficient and quality services, the dimension of social transformation is being lost. «Social involvement» is a concept which does not apply to clients; for staff, it is often translated as involvement in «my» group.   Few seem to identify the notion with advancing a «social project» based on justice and equality.

In this sense, a recent study by Yvan Comeau is significant. Interviewing a cross-section of community organization staff people who have university or college social work diplomas, the study asked themto describe concretely what they did over the course of a year. None of the respondents mentioned «consciousness raising» or developing critical thinking amongst the people they worked with. Thirty-five percent of the interviewees said their task involved «service organization»; twenty-four percent, that it involved facilitating meetings; eleven percent, organizing activities involving pressure tactics (notably to increase their group's funding); and a mere seven percent mentioned that part of their task was devoted to political education.   One percent of the workers said they had a vision of society based on class analysis; twenty-five percent said their vision was based on the importance of partnerships and consultations with stakeholders; twenty-one percent, that it involved helping **individuals** gain control over their lives. Perhaps most tellingly: when these workers were asked how they identified their job priorities, the more common response was: with their work colleagues! In short, citizen members are so totally absent from community organizations today that the most important decisions, around such things as work priorities, are decided… by the staff, amongst the staff![57]

Workers with a social work diploma are certainly not the only workers in community organizations. And a social movement that is only built upon paid staff is not a political force. Nevertheless, Comeau's study confirms a tendency which seems to be widespread. The transition from member-based to client-based,

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[57] Comeau, Yvon et al (2009), *L'organisation communautaire en mutation*, p. 72-78.

from activist driven to staff driven, from passion to efficiency is the perfect recipe for institutionalization. Large segments of today's community sector are clearly institutionalized. Their interventions are no longer determined democratically by their members; they are dictated by terms partnerships or service contracts. Funders do not value «popular education»… and so this element of a group's programme is at best relegated to a minor status… and at worst is dropped completely.

In short, the independent community movement is today at a crossroads. Its health depends on inventing ways to allow citizens to reinvest its organizations. Without the active involvement of a citizen-based membership, the democratic nature of the community sector is open to question. A democratic movement has democratic groups. If Québec's independent community movement is to remain a force for social change, it is going to have to stop fighting for funding and start fighting for those very populations it was founded to defend.[58]

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[58] A further text will look at some ideas for repoliticizing the Québec community movement. It will appear in the Fall of 2010.

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QUÉBEC'S COMMUNITY MOVEMENT:
A FORCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

Reflections on the state of Québec's community movement

Vincent Greason
April 2010

	agree	kind of…	disagree	Comments
		Please check		
An interesting text, generally interesting				
I learned something				
Similar issues are confronting groups in the Rest of Canada…				
This text made me think				
Interesting subject, but I think the author has missed some important points				
This text raises important questions and should be published somewhere…				
Way too long. You lost me…				
I am not sure where the author was going with this… it is missing something				
I am looking forward to what the author will propose as solutions to the problems he has raised.				
I like the author's point of view and what he has to say makes sense to me…				

1. I would have liked to see the following ideas better developed:

2. This text might be published in the following journal / magazine:

    Titre :
    Lieu de publication :