

Local development and the social economy in rural Quebec – the National Rural Policy

Social economy enterprises are important partners of rural development in Quebec and they are recognized as being particularly suited to the challenges of rural communities. Social economy enterprises help revitalize villages and enable citizen engagement, making rural villages attractive places to live with local services and sustainable development perspectives.

In order to help rural communities identify promising development solutions, the government of Quebec created a National Rural Policy. Its overall approach is based on the premise of local communities' autonomy. The first version of this policy was implemented from 2002–2007, and the second version covers 2007–2014.

In this second period, the National Rural Policy commits the Quebec government to injecting \$280 million over seven years. The policy covers 1,011 municipalities and 34 First Nations communities for a total population, in 2005, of 1,913,910.

ACTORS INVOLVED

The Government of Québec, municipalities, Regional County Municipalities (MRC), which comprise about 5 to 10 municipalities, the Regional Development Cooperatives (CDR), which support the creation, consolidation and expansion of cooperatives on their territory and Local Development Centre (CLD) which are appointed by local elected officials to support entrepreneurship and the development in their target communities.

HOW IT WAS IMPLEMENTED

The first National Rural Policy created 'rural pacts'. These are agreements between the Quebec government and MRCs to strengthen the capacity of rural communities to control their own development. The MRC must commit to identifying the most promising open and participative development initiatives. In return, the government provides funds to support these initiatives. The 'rural pact' funds can be used to support municipal projects or social economy enterprises. Projects are selected using a decentralized process by which local municipal officials encourage citizen participation in local development. Municipal authorities also have great latitude in managing these funds.

The 2007-2014 National Rural Policy innovated by creating rural laboratories. These laboratories are pilot projects that carry out innovative initiatives in sectors that have not been sufficiently studied and in which may lie potential solutions for rural communities. The identified laboratories have the mission of producing new knowledge and expertise that, if convincing, can be transferred to other rural communities. These rural laboratories are managed by municipalities, development organizations or social economy enterprises. Currently fifteen of the 33 rural laboratories are managed by social economy enterprises, and several focus on citizen mobilization while others focus on technical aspects and new economic sectors – a few even combining these two elements. Several territories have highlighted the strong link that exists between citizen participation and the creation of successful projects, thus opening the door to

The ideals that underlie the National Rural Policy demonstrate the affirmed will of the government of Quebec to ensure the sustainability of rural communities and of rural identity while representing a new approach on the ways to build on the autonomy of local communities.

IMPACT

Several measures in the NPR have contributed to reinforcing the capacity of social economy enterprises in rural communities. Based on the autonomy of local communities and the empowerment of local elected officials and citizens, this policy is in line with the social and solidarity economic vision and strengthens the support and recognition offered by government agencies in favour of collective entrepreneurship.

Since 2007, the results of the rural pacts include:

- 5,011 projects supported;
- \$80 million contributed by the Quebec government, which leveraged \$680 million in investment from other entities, including local development investment funds, labour pension funds, grants and traditional private investment;
- 6,900 jobs created or maintained;

The NPR also led to the creation of a network of 180 rural development agents. Their mandate is to mobilize rural citizens and offer technical support for the collaborative process within communities. They also support project promoters in developing their initiatives.

AUTHORS—COLLABORATORS—SOURCES

Adapted from the document; [“Social and Solidarity Economy: Our common road towards Decent Work”](#)

To find out more:

http://www.mamrot.gouv.qc.ca/pub/developpement_régional/ruralite/

<http://www.mamrot.gouv.qc.ca/developpement-regional-et-rural/ruralite/politique-nationale-de-la-ruralite/>

<http://www.mamrot.gouv.qc.ca/developpement-regional-et-rural/ruralite/laboratoires-ruraux/mesure/>

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