



A new paradigm of rural innovation: *learning from and with* rural people and communities

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Innovation at the heart of the rurality- we can learn from the rural

- Both scientists and the general public agree that the rural world is characterized by strong attachment to traditional values, and is lacking of a sense of initiative, creativity and innovation. This, supposedly, is why the rural world is lagging behind in development
- Even if rural people are typically excluded from the creative class, the history of Québec rural communities shows that they have been and are still very creative, and then, we can learn from those rural communities.
- A paradigm shift is needed for a better understanding of rural innovation based on the recognition that rural people and communities are creative and have been innovative over the time and then, instead of trying to learn them how to innovate, we must try to understand the various innovations they put in place in order to face multi-faceted rural development challenges.

Rural innovation: a key feature of long-term rural history

- Québec's rural history illustrates the creativity and inventiveness of rural inhabitants, with:
- the **country road (*rang*)** as an innovative settlement pattern suitable for sparsely inhabited rural space,
- **work bees** to raise barns and maintain public roads;
- **farming circles (*Cercles agricoles*)** to provide technical training;
- **fire insurance mutuals** organizations to manage risk
- **forest co-ops** to create jobs
- Plus leading innovations such as **Marketing Boards** to sell farm products, a kind of **fair trade** before it became a popular term, or **Caisses populaires**, credit unions that are a major economic force today.

Rural innovation today: underestimated but widespread, contributing to sustainable rural development

- Rural innovations in the Québec context can be classified according to the three basic dimensions of rural sustainable development:
 - 1) making productive and sustainable use of the natural environment;
 - 2) managing economic development; and
 - 3) structuring social organization.
- Most of the time, innovations can be characterized as **social innovations**, which is the creation and implementation of a new institutional arrangement to solve a problem, deliver a service, or take advantage of a new opportunity.

1) Making productive and sustainable use of the natural environment

- **Collective management of private forest (OGC):** ensures better management and productivity of many private forests. These corporations are also in charge of restoring forests to create jobs in rural forest-dependent communities.
- **Wildlife reserve Duchénier:** organizes the management of a large portion of public land for recreation, tourism and wildlife conservation, while creating job opportunities. The only case of a wildlife reserve managed by rural citizens.
- **Agri-environmental agricultural Clubs:** a group of 50 farmers joined together and hired an agronomist to implement best practices in soil and natural resource conservation
- **Water management public corporation:** various stakeholders of a watershed joined together to manage the water in the basin sustainably.

2) Managing economic development

- **Caisses populaires** have been instrumental as innovators in Québec's rural history, these credit unions continue to play a primary role in the economic development of the rural sector as well the whole Quebec economy
- **Local development cooperatives (JAL)**: a new form of cooperative in which all citizens of one or a few communities enrol to allow collective enterprises to develop activities to improve local economic and social conditions.
- **SER (Sociétés d'exploitation des ressources, resource harvesting corporation)**: created after a social rural struggle in the 1970s, to give rural people from communities living along the large Québec public forest access to forest resources, mainly by working to restore public forests.
- **Sociétés d'aide au développement des collectivités**: local development agencies put in place by federal development (known as Community Future Development Corporation in other provinces) with devolution of management to local stakeholders, offering technical and financial support for small business start-ups.
- **Local development Centre (CLD)**: local government provides incentives and support to foster local economic development. Funds are provided by both central and local governments
- **Local development Fund**: in connection with the CLD and municipalities, these local investment funds helped finance small enterprise start-ups.
- **Rural cluster**: a local innovation system in a rural setting such as the small town of La Pocatière, Québec.

3) Structuring social organization

- **Health Coops:** a solidarity cooperative running a health centre in a small community to attract doctors
- **Public-public partnership for maintenance of local delivery of services:** Usually, public-private arrangements are used to deliver public services, but what is new and innovative is the capacity to have PPPs (as public-public partnerships).
- **Internet Access as a public service:** the local government offers high-speed Internet (broadband) in remote rural areas using Wi-max technology,
- **Agro-food consultation roundtables:** stakeholders specific regions join together to organize R&D to improve opportunities in producing, processing and marketing new food.
- **Multi-level primary schools:** The six grades of primary school are combined into two groups of students to have a sufficient student volume to keep a school open in the community.
- **Inter-municipal service agreements:** a new institutional arrangement in which rural municipal governments join together to organise a service (such as fire protection or waste disposal)

A Place-Based Development Organization: The Centre Local de Développement (CLD)

- The CLD is another innovation by building an institutional arrangement to put in place an organisation able to promote and support local development in sustaining local entrepreneurship
- CLD's business affairs are managed by a board of directors composed of elected municipal officers from local municipalities already on the MRC council and people from the business and social economy sectors.
- CLDs offer frontline assistance and technical or financial support services to prospective or active entrepreneurs (guidance, help with business plans and financing, etc.)
- Discussion around the writing of the *Local economy and employment plan* often acts as a learning process in which various stakeholders gain a better understanding of their region, assets, and challenges, as well as a view of what might be done locally to create more sustainable rural development.

A rural cluster: the case of La Pocatière, Québec (1)

- La Pocatière local innovation system follows an original and remarkable development trajectory. In contrast with many local innovation systems occurring in territories with long industrial traditions, La Pocatière has no evident manufacturing past.
- It first arose from within a solid tradition of farming and agricultural-science research and knowledge transfer around public teaching, applied research, and technology-transfer establishments (relation with isolated producers not enterprises)
- La Pocatière case has underlined the importance of local networks in the functioning and dynamics of its innovation system.
- Plus the capacity to utilize outside resources, in both political and economic terms, on varied scales in pursuit of their innovation activities and to strengthen and strategically position their institutional framework.
- Now, La Pocatière is transferring its own model to a group of small cities all round Eastern Québec

A rural cluster: the case of La Pocatière, Québec (2)

- We learn from that case study:
- Ability to survive to crisis that change drastically the configuration of a local innovation system, is central of the La Pocatière innovation system
- A local innovation system is not recent but may have lasted for decades and centuries
- A rural cluster may emerge from a territory without a strong industrial tradition
- Publics institutions might be the main actor of a successful local innovation system as that case show the relevance of institutional actors and their capacity to respond to economic and technological change.

Université rurale québécoise (URQ) : a new way to showcase rural innovation

- URQ is a non-formal education initiative linking academic knowledge and knowledge from the field; one week intensive training in a rural region every two years
- Not-for-profit organisation promoting rural development by cross-fertilisation or knowledge-sharing. Very popular, fully booked each time.
- URQ became a showcase of those rural innovations in the region under study.
- URQ have shown that instead of thinking that we have to learn to rural people, we can and we must learn from the rurality.
- Learning by sharing experiences and knowledge, by meeting during a full week seems to be a training model suitable to *development agent* in the field.

Rural inhabitants: a creative class?

- The consequences of realizing that we can learn from rural communities are numerous and far-reaching. Instead of seeing rural people as part of the problem, we should see them as part of the solution.
- Rural innovation: by necessity or by opportunity? (as GEM entrepreneurship models)
- Rural people are also a “creative class” (R. Florida)
- Rural innovation is much more than technical innovation and new products; rural innovation occurs in three basic dimensions of a genuine sustainable development: managing natural environments, building instruments or institutions for economic development, and facilitating social life.
- Then, we may consider each rural region as a “Living Lab” from what we can learn.
- Quebec (Canada) National Rural Policy is a good example of a public policy supporting rural innovation, specially with “Rural Laboratory”

Conclusion: Policy implications of the new paradigm of rural innovation

- If rural people and communities are innovative, public policies must support that « community capacity-building » which allows them to still be innovative
- This means policy supporting empowerment as the main focus of local development policy
- Public policy must support decentralisation and “local development” that will allow public-private partnership at local level, a prerequisite of a local innovation system
- Public policy must sustain not only scientific and technical innovations inside enterprises but also social innovations that create new ways to produce goods, to deliver services and improve quality of life in rural sector for the benefit of rural people and the whole society.



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Thanks you
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