

**Speaking notes for**

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**President, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council**

**At**

**the 1st International CIRIEC Research Conference**

**on the Social Economy**

**University of Victoria,**

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- Thank you, Dr. MacPherson, M. Beaulieu, M<sup>me</sup> Detiège, Elder Butch Dick and Dr. Brunt. It's a pleasure to be here.
- I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the splendid leadership of Ian MacPherson, Annie McKittrick and everyone here at the University of Victoria in putting this wonderful conference together.
- I'd also like to thank my colleague Éric Bastien, who is the SSHRC program officer responsible for our Social Economy initiative, for his talent and commitment leading up to this conference and throughout the year supporting all the partnerships in this major initiative.
- Je suis ravi d'être ici aujourd'hui pour l'ouverture de la première conférence mondiale de recherche en économie sociale tenue au Canada et organisée conjointement par le Centre canadien d'économie sociale, CIRIEC-International et CIRIEC-Canada.
- Comme vous le savez, la recherche sur l'économie sociale est fondée sur l'établissement de partenariats. Je suis fier de participer à cet important événement servant à créer des liens et à partager des connaissances entre les disciplines, entre les pays et entre les différents secteurs de la société.
- As president, I am proud that funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council has supported this collaboration between the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships, CIRIEC International, CIREC Canada and the University of Victoria.
- With more than 300 participants from 30 different countries, including researchers, government officials and senior practitioners, this conference truly reflects the spirit of collaboration that social economy research is built upon.
- At the reception, a number of people asked about SSHRC's support of social economy research. I'd like to take a moment now to situate this historically.

- This major initiative began with our Community-University Research Alliances program. Through this program, the Council has been involved in funding research that connects the campus and the larger community—since 1998.
- When we began, the idea of campus-community collaborative research was very new and not widely accepted.
- Over the past 10 years, we have learned that community-university partnerships have unique benefits:
  1. Both researchers and community partners benefit from shared expertise and learning.
  2. Community-University alliances provide diverse training opportunities for students.
- Then in 2004, the Council was asked by the Canadian government to develop a funding program specifically for research that would: *strengthen the Social Economy in Canada by creating knowledge, resources and information on how it operates and contributes to social and economic outcomes in Canada and in the context of international comparisons.*
- Immediately, we recognized the importance of social economy research. It encourages strong partnerships between different sectors of society, and promotes alternative economic models and creative entrepreneurship that are focused on a “triple-bottom line,”—economic, environmental and social.
- In other words, social economy research improves our quality of life.
- As a result of the new funding, in Sept 2005, SSHRC supported the first four regional social economy research networks across Canada, and the Canadian Social Economy Hub here in Victoria.
- Each network received \$1.75 million over five years to connect university and community researchers.

- The National Hub: Led by Ian MacPherson here at the University of Victoria
- Le réseau du Québec : présidé par Jean-Marc Fontan de l'Université du Québec à Montréal
- The Atlantic Canada network: Led by Leslie Brown of Mount Saint Vincent University, Nova Scotia
- Southern Ontario: Led by Jack Quarter of the University of Toronto
- Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and northern Ontario network: Led by Lou Hammond Ketilson at the University of Saskatchewan
- In March 2006, the last two regional networks were launched:
  - Alberta and British Columbia: Led by Mike Lewis of the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, and administered by Royal Roads University here in Victoria, BC; and
  - The Northern network Led by Chris Southcott of Lakehead University, and administered by the Yukon College in Whitehorse, Yukon
- This structure is very Canadian in that it draws upon the expertise and experience of communities across Canada.
- Through these networks we are also linked internationally, which is also very Canadian. International collaboration has been a Canadian strength for many years. Canadians co-publish with foreign researchers more than the global average, and in many fields, the number of co-authored publications with foreign researchers has doubled over the past 20 years.
- Not surprisingly, perhaps, Canadian scholars are now increasingly playing major roles in global research networks as illustrated by your presence here today.

- The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is fostering connections across Canada, and between Canada and the rest of the world. We focus on international research collaboration for two reasons.
  1. It is essential to the quality of the research carried out, and
  2. This increases the impact research in the social sciences and humanities, and on the social economy in particular, has on society.
- The Council's Social Economy program currently boasts 285 participants and 151 partners, including community and university-based researchers and organizations from every region of Canada as well as international partners from the US, Argentina, Brazil and the United Kingdom.
- The international aspect of the social economy program is an important part of SSHRC's work.
- In 2005, the Council developed a policy to encourage international collaboration.
- Our Social Economy program fits neatly within this framework.
- Another example is our new joint Community-University Research Alliance program between the International Development Research Centre and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, which links Canadian researchers with researchers from developing countries to address major global development issues.
- SSHRC has also begun developing relationships with funding agencies outside Canada to explore best practices in research funding policy. In September we hosted an International Forum of Funding Agencies, which brought together my counterparts from Ireland, China, the Netherlands, Finland, France, South Africa, Germany, India and the US to discuss key policy issues related to funding social science research.

- We often say that SSHRC is Canada’s research council focused on “people”: what we think, how we live, our past, present and possible futures. In many ways—and this is especially true of the social economy program—the knowledge and understanding produced by research in the social sciences and humanities affects the way we live and interact with one another. We support research that speaks to what it means to be human.
- This research also helps us meet the challenges of our modern knowledge-based economy.
- When we talk about future trends in working and the keys to future economic success, we talk about flexibility, communication and collaboration across geopolitical boundaries. The knowledge economy, by its very nature, requires learning, experience and expertise in many different areas.
- The Council’s social economy program is one way that social sciences and humanities research strives to build the skills needed to meet the challenges of the future.
- More than 300 students are active in the Canadian research networks as research assistants and interns. These students are learning and gaining work experience in two worlds at once—the university and the community-based social economy.
- Whether these students choose to continue an academic career, become involved in the nonprofit sector, or go on to a career in the private sector, this experience will shape the skills they carry with them throughout their careers.
- But it is not just the students who are learning. The social economy program is engaging researchers and community partners in a unique relationship based on mutual learning.
- University researchers receive feedback and guidance from those working in the field, while community partners become actively involved in research.

- The national hub and regional networks in Canada are also developing a social economy curriculum, including virtual learning sessions.
- The result of all this is a diversified collaboration that has at its heart the social health of communities, environmental sustainability and quality of life.
- But the impact of social economy research reaches beyond the partners, researchers and students involved in the work.
- The goal of the program is to “strengthen the Social Economy in Canada by creating knowledge, resources and information on how it operates and contributes to social and economic outcomes in Canada and in the context of international comparisons.”
- The Canadian social economy program is accomplishing this through 151 individual research projects across Canada.
- These projects are all collaborative with local partners.
- Many projects look at the overall structure, operations and climate of the social economy.
  - For example, by mapping the social economy in specific regions; or undertaking social economy policy development and analysis.
- Other projects focus on specific questions and challenges. For example:
  - Developing and retaining human capital in First Nations;
  - the cost/benefit quality of employer-supported volunteering;
  - the role of women in the fishery.
- Last spring the Canadian government launched anew Science and Technology Strategy that describes three Canadian “advantages” that must be developed in order to create a competitive and sustainable Canadian economy, and to position Canada as a world leader in research excellence and innovation.

- From our point of view, social sciences and humanities research underpins all aspects of the “science and technology” strategy, which itself is directly related to your research on the social economy.

1. The People Advantage:

- Canada must be a magnet for highly skilled people. The goal here is to develop the best-educated, most-skilled, and most flexible workforce in the world.
- Developing talent is an essential part of this program.
- In the social economy program, students have the benefit of learning on campus and in the community.

2. The Entrepreneurial Advantage:

- Canada must translate knowledge into commercial applications that generate wealth for Canadians and support the quality of life we all want.
- Our social economy research delivers here as well.
- The social economy in Canada is estimated to employ more than 1 million Canadians in more than 150,000 organisations with annual budgets of about \$75 billion. Credit unions, co-operatives and employment training programs all provide essential services that do indeed create wealth and improve quality of life.
- Social enterprises often develop alternative economic models and new ways of doing business.
- “The social economy,” writes Nancy Neamtan, co-director of the Quebec social economy network, “has been at the forefront of new and innovative ways to create wealth, produce goods and deliver services, while integrating social or environmental goals into the very act of production.”

- And here's another example, at Algoma University College in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, researchers are working with local farmers to examine marketing practices and strategies that will place local beef in the hands of local consumers. As the demand for local foods and products increases in Canada and around the world, lessons learned here will open up new, economically and environmentally sustainable opportunities for farmers across the country.
- In the West, researchers from the University of Alberta, the Alberta Community and Co-operative Association, Simon Fraser University and the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal are working together to examine the role resource-based social enterprises play in sustaining and revitalizing rural communities. Their work will identify best practices that can be applied to timber, energy, fishery, food production and eco-tourism sectors across Canada.

### 3. The Knowledge Advantage:

- Canadians must be positioned at the leading edge of the important developments that generate health, environmental, societal, and economic benefits. This is exactly what research in the social sciences and humanities offers to society.
- The social economy research program is developing new thinking and innovative results that will enhance government policies, re-shape how the social economy functions, change the way specific organizations carry out their work, and help build healthy communities.
- Thus far, the social economy program has held more than 100 events, ranging from “modest” workshops and lunch-box series to this conference today.
- The social economy program has also created websites, inspired newspaper and magazine articles, newsletters, presentations, courses.

- In other words, the social economy research program is making a difference.
- Let me emphasize again, in closing, how pleased the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is to have contributed support to the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships. Félicitations à M. MacPherson et à ses collaborateurs, au Canada et à l'étranger. Et bon congrès!