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Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's (SSHRC)
Partnership Development Grants

Principal Investiga

mutuelles (IRECUS) – with the co-operative development expertise of the national federation – Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada (CMC).

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The Co-opConvert project and partnership has been formed to conduct research, mobilize knowledge, create capacity, and influence policy in order to create awareness of the co-op option for closing SMEs. It particularly aspires to understand why BCCs are not more compelling for Canadian SME owners who are retiring, to explore and map the organizational and contextual dynamics of the few BCCs that have formed in Canada, and to better grasp why and how BCCs are beneficial for sustaining jobs and for the socio-economic wellbeing of local economies and communities. Responding to SSHRC’s “Imagining Canada’s Future” challenge area “New ways of learning for an evolving society and labour market,” the project’s two key objectives are:

to identify the necessary enabling environments for BCCs in Canada (SSHRC Insight goals).

to build capacity for BCCs in partnership with Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada (SSHRC Connection goals).

Objective 1 seeks to generate knowledge about BCCs in Canada and the enabling environment for BCCs more broadly. Objective 2 consists of various collaborative efforts to build capacity for BCCs and mobilize knowledge in partnership with Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada.

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Several jurisdictions around the world have strong enabling environments for BCC creation, including specific legislation, capacity-building supports, anchor co-operative movements and federations, and targeted financing mechanisms (Adeler, 2014; Ben-Ner 1988; CECOP-CICOPA, 2013; Degli Antoni & Sabatini, 2017; Delahaye, 2005; McCain, 1999; Rothschild, 2015; Ruggeri & Vieta, 2015; Vezina & Girard, 2014; Vieta, 2019). *Enabling environments* for the development of worker-owned firms and co-ops (including BCCs) constitute a “growth ecosystem” (Hoover & Abell, 2016, p. 1), embracing “human, social and financial capital” with strong institutional and community “trust relations” (Gijssels et al., 2014, p. 268), supportive policy and funding, and engaging co-operative sector networks (Battilani & Schröter, 2014; Guillotte, 2016).

While there is emerging research of BCCs

potential for robust enabling environments for BCC creation across Canada given its multi-billion dollar social economy sector (McMurtry, 2010; McMurtry et al., 2015; Quarter et al., 2017), the reality is that BCCs have been few in numbers, have varied greatly across the country, and most retiring owners, workers, unions, and policymakers are unaware of their potential for saving jobs and business (Bernstein & Hodge, 2008; Duguid et al, 2015).

The Co-opConvert Project addresses these knowledge gaps, seeking to broaden our understanding of BCCs in Canada, more deeply understand what constitutes their enabling environments, and contribute to the promotion of better policy for and awareness of the BCC solution for retiring owners and closing firms.

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Developed from a synthesis of the extant international research literature on BCCs, the following theoretical propositions (ThP) and main research questions (RQ) drive this project:

- RQ 1: What are the main BCC enabling environments from around the world?
 - o RQ 1a: What are their main characteristics (i.e., policies, programs, financing/funding, legislation, key animators and leadership, social capital, supportive networks, etc.)?
 - o RQ 1b: What are the key indicators of their robustness?
- RQ 2: How many BCCs have existed in Canada (historically and currently)?
- RQ 3: What types of BCCs have existed in Canada (historically and currently)?

RQ 8: Who are the key stakeholders and animators of BCCs (internationally and in Canada)?

RQ 9: What are the business succession or conversion knowledge, preferences, and plans of retiring owners in Canada? (E.g.: How open are retiring business owners to the idea of BCCs? How do retiring owners learn about BCCs? What new skills, capacities, and

3. *A survey of retiring SME owners* from across-Canada with a representative sample of 500-1,000 retirement-aged SME owners to gauge for their knowledge of and propensity to facilitate a BCC solution.
4. *In-depth, semi-structured interviews* of other BCC stakeholders and key informants from various organizations involved with BCCs across Canada.
5. *Multiple embedded and contextual case studies*, selecting 12-18 illustrative and contextually embedded case studies consisting of currently operating and already-closed BCCs.

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The project's Objective 1 addresses SSHRC Insight features by generating knowledge about the enabling environment for BCCs. The project's Objective 2 builds on Objective 1 and speaks to SSHRC's Connection feature. The knowledge that is being generated will be mobilized with Co-operatives and Mutuels Canada to enhance its development work with co-

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