

CEARC in Newfoundland: A Growing and Thriving Co-operative Sector

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In May 2024, I travelled to Newfoundland to conduct research in the co-operative sector. Daphne Rixon, who lives in St John's, and I are writing case studies on the Newfoundland and Labrador co-operative sector – emerging co-ops and co-ops that are mainstays in their communities.

The Newfoundland and Labrador co-operative sector is few in numbers, about 40 active co-operatives. They are found in a wide range of industries such as finance and banking, housing, construction, retail, administration, and social assistance. Some are mature co-ops that have been contributing in their communities for decades, whereas others are just getting off the ground and others are in the 1–2-year-old range.

Our first foray was into the fishing industry. Fishing is so much a part of Newfoundland's history and psyche through to today; it is not surprising co-operatives have played a role in this industry. The Fishery Protective Co-operative is a cutting-edge co-op looking to play the part of a democratic broker for harvesters in Newfoundland. We met with Ryan Cleary, long-time activist in the fishing sector, to talk about the development of the FPC. We got Fishing 101 in this conversation and how important the co-op model is for equality, equity, and democracy. According to Ryan, "the FPC will provide independent owner-operators with greater control over their fishing enterprises and commercial licences, and ensure them a fair, transparent, and more consistent return on their investment".

In a time when monopolies are rampant, capital is amassing in the hands of few, and participation or democratic process are few and far between, the FPC is looking to make changes in the industry. Stay tuned to see what impact FPC can have in the Newfoundland fishing industry. CEARC will be creating a case study about this emerging co-op.

Next, Daphne and I, made our way over to Bell Island to visit the Bell Island Community Development Co-operative and spin off, The Rolling Pin Bakery. While Bell Island is only a 20-minute ferry ride from St. John's, you couldn't be further away from the urban bustle of the city. The Bell Island population was once over 12,000 with a number of iron mines employing miners and a thriving village to support their families. With the mines closing in the 1980s, Bell Island has seen the population dwindle, people shopping off island, and youth leave for employment opportunities elsewhere. Enter the Bell Island Development Co-operative, a non-profit co-op aimed to support the economic and social welfare of Bell Island and Bell Islanders.

The development co-op thought a bakery on island would be a good enterprise to develop. It would provide jobs, food staples (i.e., bread, buns, cookies etc.), and a place to hang out for islanders, while also taking advantage of the growing tourist market with the mine tours. The Rolling Pin Bakery has been in business for 32 years and while it has seen its fair share of ups and downs, it is still active and providing top quality baked goods. Daphne and I can attest to the delicious jam jams, tea buns, and peanut butter balls that Jennifer, Ken, Hailey, and Mary supplied us with.

Daphne and I will be developing a teaching case study on the Rolling Pin Bakery. With teaching cases students work through management, operations, or strategic planning issues embedded in to real life

situations and enterprises. We will then filter the students' suggestions and ideas back to the Rolling Pin for their consideration. More details on the Rolling Pin Bakery in later articles from CEARC.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Co-operatives (NLFC) are celebrating their 75th this year (for more information, please go to [NLFC 75](#)). As a thriving federation they are reinvigorating the co-operative sector, the provincial government, and communities to think co-op! They are making opportunities for communities to start co-operatives and for businesses to think co-op as part of their succession plan. Kristen Murray of the NLFC is working with emerging co-ops through a new Co-operative Incubator Program, while also tackling a co-op conversion of a cafe. Lots of activity and energy to build on.

The trip to Newfoundland wasn't all work, we also enjoyed many amazing walks, live music, and food that Newfoundland has to offer – can you say chips, gravy and dressing! Whales even made an appearance while we were on a drive “around the Bay”.

With these case studies, CEARC hopes to highlight the ingenuity and doggedness of the Newfoundland and Labrador co-operative sector for a wider audience. As a person who has “come from away”, I am looking forward to seeing the Newfoundland and Labrador co-operative sector grow and thrive, as well as my next trip to Newfoundland.