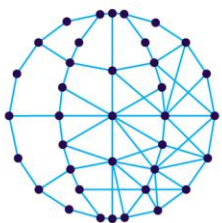


*Cooperatives : The Power to Act*  
Texts selected for the international calls of paper

# GATHERING CIRCLES FOR INDIGENOUS ECOPRENEURSHIP AMONG FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES OF SOUTHERN QUEBEC

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present a feasibility study on the Gathering Circle Co-operative. The Gathering Circle Co-operative is a concept of Indigenous business aimed at strengthening Indigenous economic activity on a reserve through the promotion of the food co-op as the choice of chefs, dinners and consumers who appreciate local food. The competitive advantage outlined for the Gathering Circle Co-operative involves a custom software platform for the efficient cost management of the integrated short food supply chain. The custom software platform allows for the further integration of the social component of the co-operative model, which acts as a comparative advantage for the co-op, providing a positive brand image through food donations. Finally, the Gathering Circle Co-operative provides for community resource management ensuring effective use of local resources. The paper will present an income assessment, capital funding requirements, organizational structure, marketing strategy, cash flow and breakeven analysis. The conclusion of the paper presents an optimistic assessment of the Gathering Circle Co-op model's potential as an economic driver.

## Résumé

Cet article a pour but de présenter la faisabilité d'une étude sur la coopérative Gathering Circle (cercle de rassemblement). Conceptuellement, cette coopérative repose sur une pratique du commerce autochtone visant à renforcer l'activité économique d'une réserve par la promotion de la coopérative alimentaire en s'associant à des chefs cuisiniers, dîners et consommateurs pour mettre en valeur les produits alimentaires locaux. L'avantage concurrentiel qui ressort de la coopérative Gathering Circle comprend une plateforme logicielle personnalisée pour la gestion efficace des coûts de son circuit alimentaire de proximité intégré. Celle-ci lui permet d'intégrer davantage le composant social du modèle coopératif, lequel procure un avantage comparatif à l'image de marque positive de la coopérative via les dons alimentaires. Enfin, la coopérative Gathering Circle permet une gestion des ressources communautaires en assurant l'utilisation efficace des ressources locales. Ce papier présente l'évaluation des revenus, les exigences relatives au financement, la structure organisationnelle, la stratégie marketing, les flux de trésorerie et l'analyse du seuil de rentabilité. En conclusion, il propose une évaluation optimiste de la potentialité du modèle coopératif de Gathering Circle comme moteur économique.

## Resumen

El objetivo de este documento es presentar un estudio de factibilidad acerca de la cooperativa GatheringCircle (que se podría traducir al español como «Ronda de Encuentro»). Conceptualmente, la cooperativa GatheringCircle es un emprendimiento indígena que apunta a fortalecer la actividad económica aborigen en la reserva mediante la promoción de la cooperativa alimentaria con una selección de chefs, cenas y consumidores que valoran los alimentos locales. La ventaja competitiva planteada para la cooperativa GatheringCircle incluye una plataforma informática personalizada para la gestión eficiente de los costos de la corta cadena integrada de suministro alimentario. La plataforma informática personalizada permite una mayor integración del componente social del modelo cooperativo, que actúa como una ventaja comparativa para la cooperativa, al suministrar una imagen de marca positiva mediante la donación de alimentos. En definitiva, la cooperativa GatheringCircle brinda una gestión de los recursos comunitarios que garantiza el uso eficaz de los recursos locales.

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Este documento presentará una evaluación del ingreso, los requerimientos de financiación de capital, la estructura organizacional, la estrategia de comercialización, la tesorería y del análisis de equilibrio. La conclusión del documento presenta un análisis optimista del modelo de la cooperativa GatheringCircle como un potencial impulsor económico.

## Background

Building resilient business models that are diverse and strong enough to withstand shock is important in the non-Indigenous population, as it underpins the strength of Government structures. For First Nations of Southern Quebec, it is an imperative, as Federal Transfer dollars have fallen on a per capita basis and reserves have increased their demands for self-government. Describing the “two row wampum” system of government, the Mohawk Council declared “Our ‘row’ must be made strong enough to withstand any and all attempts by foreign powers to control it”(Hamilton, 2015). In order to combat a 25% youth unemployment rate(Hamilton, 2015), it has become cause majeure to create, build and study successful modes of sustainable socio-economic development in a First Nation Southern Quebec environment in order to create the wealth that will ensure vitality and independence.

Montreal,as one of the top food cities in the World (#13 according to Thrillist and in the top 20 according to Food and Wine), features the most restaurants per capita in Canada and provides the perfect incubator in which to establish an agrifood distribution business based on the traditional teachings of the Sharing Circle. The Gathering Circles Food Co-op was designed to be the cohesive model that will run and operate through a consensus of Nations with a “self-employment based on Indigenous Knowledge”(Dana, 2005: V). We know through the literature that“Indigenous organizations and entrepreneurs have existed for thousands of years. In Canada, the number of contemporary Aboriginal organizations has grown exponentially over the past 10 to 20 years. In the early 1990s, there was an estimated 6,000 Aboriginal organizations in Canada, and the number now stands at over 30,000.” (Weir, 2007: 5) What remains to be determined or what we do not know is what structures and models make for the best socio-economic development tools. And though a millennia worth of evidence as to the value of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, we have no examples of how this “ecopreneurship” can add to Indigenous business models.

Using a concept case approach,this paper will present a community-based ecopreneur initiative outlining a resilient (diversified) business model. From this model we can measure the effect of the intersection with other Nations—Indigenous and Non-Indigenous—and achieve a better understanding of the socio-economic benefits of the model itself.

## Problem statement

The issue of indigenizing economic development on reserves has been a long-standing one that has divided researchers, communities and government for decades. The lack of socio-economic creation, mismanagement of resources and discourse has plagued any conversation surrounding the First Nations (Mohawk, Abaneki and Huron) of Southern Quebec. Salée identified this when he quoted the Hawthorn Report referring to First Nations as “a group economically depressed in terms of the standards that have become widely accepted in Canada. They are not sharing equally with others in proportion to their numbers in the material and other gains” (Salée,2006: 5). The problem has been

further compounded by the lack of a community-based response, as most development models encourage first nations people to, according to Wuttunee's reference in Porsanger's essay on Indigenous methodology, "to enter the very market-based, capitalist system that has marginalized many of them for years." (Prosanger, 2004: 24)

There exists a belief system and a perspective within these communities that has shown us how we can walk with the indigenous people of Canada—more specifically the first nations of Southern Quebec. These beliefs are based on the traditional teachings of Mother Earth and are commonly referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) providing communities with blueprint to create their idea of the good life, be it by: creating independence, developing cultural programming or capital projects. The ability to meet the disenfranchisement with an economic model built on TEK would provide, "expanded opportunities to earn income, better nutrition, modern knowledge about illnesses, and access to modern health" (Godoy, 2005: 7). Godoy (2005) may not have identified the goals correctly as he does not, according to Chilisa (2012), put himself into the community. But, what Godoy did identify is the entry point to achievement to which Indigenous communities can use to build a sustainable economic system for their communities. By utilizing the harvest of the Three Sisters (squash, corn and beans), the gifts of the moose and the deer, the unique fresh water fish resources, berries and maple syrup honorably for economic purposes allows the ecopreneur to build a sustainable community in the ecology of Quebec, namely around Montreal.

Despite the burgeoning contributions by many authors, most literature that reviews the issues surrounding the concept of the Gathering Circle Ecopreneurship does little in identifying new forms of enterprise, social-economically beneficial intersections and perspectives on the operating a co-operative enterprise in a First Nations community. The literature does not address how First Nations co-operatives could shape, enrich, and improve existing communities. There are many gaps in the literature around the concept of the community and the ecological in co-operative development, which could help to shape future policies for economic or "eco-nomic" co-operative development.

### **Purpose and objectives of research**

The purpose of this concept case study is to explore the role of Indigenous Ecopreneurship in a "Gathering Circle" model in creating independence for First Nations of Southern Quebec. Gathering Circles is a frame of reference that applies to the Co-op enterprise model as used by Farm-to-Table development practitioners and thusly should serve to expand its understanding. This concept case study will measure before and after effects of attitude shifts with surveys, explain the use of traditional approaches to the Farm-to-Table movement and explore the multiplier effect on the social economy of a First Nations community. Analyzing what social entrepreneurship is as it applies to the social economic revitalization will aid in our understanding of the meaning of social entrepreneurship in the present conditions, from the point of view of indigenous peoples and more significantly to the First Nations of Southern Quebec.

#### *Objectives:*

1. To understand community views on the effects of the Gathering Circle concept and measure its socio-economic impact in individuals and on reserves.

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2. To understand traditional teachings on ecology work within a resource development/ harvesting in a for-profit model.
  3. To view the Sharing Circle within the co-operative model.
  4. To generate recommendations to augment Indigenous Ecopreneurship within First Nations communities and increase entrepreneurial activities.

### **Significance of Research**

As we are generating and studying the effects of Ecopreneurship in Gathering Circles among the First Nations in Southern Quebec, many new insights and findings will be added to the existing literature and assist with forming a collaborative governance practice that can be used in adapting more inclusive policies.

This conceptual study will explore how traditional teachings can be used in an agribusiness model and demonstrate the relevance of traditional knowledge in a modern economic context. Research into how a new socio-economic engine like Indigenous Ecopreneurship could help to add to both business and education, and in addition help provide insight into economic policy on other reserves by modeling a workable prototype.

Using the results of the oral history and interviews, we can demonstrate that intersection of reserves in a structured co-operative has positive and directional implications in socio-economic terms and that the intersection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in an agribusiness sharing model will create a basis for adaptation of socio-economic policies. This concept case study not only will gather community insights that can be used in forming future businesses, but dissecting the results will allow us to explore new policy directions that will consider ecopreneurship as an economic driver.

Finally, with the results of this concept case study, we can look into how indigenously directed economic development can impact the Indigenous system, thus improving our knowledge of the practice of Indigenous research.

### **Overview**

The literature review brings together journals and peer-reviewed analysis as it pertains to Indigenous Ecopreneurship among First Nations communities of Southern Quebec. It serves as a starting point to this study and includes views of different scholars as they have studied this topic. The literature was reviewed from relevant articles and journals, underscoring the socio-economic, environmental and co-operative influences on First Nations. Missing pieces within the literature have been identified in order to form the central thesis of this paper.

## Definition of key terms

**Indigenous ecopreneurship:** Using TEK in a modern context of creating wealth for communities through using the platform of the harvest.

**Farm-to-Table movement:** The transparent relation between food and the consumer which brings the best and freshest food choices to them in real time.

**Co-operative or Co-op:** A business that is owned and operated by its members. Gathering Circle is the term chosen for conceptual co-operative operated in a First Nations environment.

**TEK: Traditional Ecological Knowledge.** This is a way of knowing, seeing and thinking that has been passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions and makes up one of the central approaches to the way Indigenous peoples interact with the world.

**Socio-economy:** Interaction of social and economic factors.

## Gathering Circles and socio-economics

Anderson et al.(2006) studied the creation and effect of entrepreneurship on and among First Nations reserves. This qualitative measure is used to survey an existing body of research and attempts to develop a new paradigm. The study focused on several communities and how they structure their economic development differently. Anderson et al. concluded that First Nations choose to “rebuild their communities on a traditional and culturally grounded foundation while simultaneously improving their social and economic circumstances” (Anderson et al., 2006: 2). They also went on to identify key elements of this development:

1. Attaining economic self-sufficiency as a necessary condition for the preservation and strengthening of communities.
2. Gaining control over activities on traditional lands.
3. Improving the socioeconomic circumstances of Aboriginal people.
4. Strengthening traditional culture, values and languages and the reflection of the same in development activities.
5. Creating and operating businesses that can compete profitably over the long run in the global economy, in order to:
  - a) Exercise control over activities on traditional lands;
  - b) Build the economy necessary to preserve and strengthen communities and improve socioeconomic conditions.
6. Forming alliances and joint ventures among themselves and with non-Aboriginal partners to create businesses that can compete profitably in the global economy.
7. Building capacity for economic development through:
  - a) Education, training and institution building, and
  - b) The realization of the treaty and Aboriginal rights to land and resources.

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While the conclusion that the author's draw is that entrepreneurship provides a path to many different forms of independence, their stance seems to be centered on government actions to induce entrepreneurship rather than individual motivation towards this goal.

The second paper of note is by Salée (2006), which is along the same tract as Anderson et al. (2006). Salée(2006: 11) believes "the quality of life and well-being of Aboriginal communities and individuals in Canada will improve if they are properly empowered and provided with opportunities to reclaim control over their lives and sociocultural assets," again espousing independence through entrepreneurship. This idea is reflected often in Salée's paper and again removes the individual from responsibility and places it with the government (Aboriginal) and with the community.

Salée states that "when Aboriginal communities make their own decisions about what approaches to take and what resources to develop, they consistently outperform non-Aboriginal decision-makers" (Salée, 2006: 14). This uses a well-meaning methodology but is an overly simplistic Western Colonial approach to Aboriginal entrepreneurship as it does not take into account the surrounding Westernized community or culture.

In stark contrast to the first two papers, Banerjee and Tedmanson's(2010)paper stands out arguing that barriers to economic entry lie in "discursive practices of 'whiteness' in the political economy" (Banerjee and Tedmanson, 2010: 147). The paper employs a participatory research method in remote Kuninjku Northern Australia. Banerjee and Tedmanson argue that "race has been incorporated into management theory and practice through discourse of diversity, affirmative action or equal opportunity" (Banerjee and Tedmanson, 2010: 151).The authors do not see the mainstream economy valuing the traditional activities of hunting and fishing. This valuation of hunting and fishing is an indigenous approach, but the authors' conclusion does not include other solutions to valuing resources.

Finally, we have Lindsay (2005), whose interpretive paradigm research identifies the roots of Indigenous entrepreneurship, which lie in the appreciation of Mother Earth. Lindsay (2005) postulates that there is less entrepreneurial activity in Indigenous than there is in non-Indigenous communities. This represents a fairly narrow interpretation of entrepreneurship. The author's view is critical to developing what can be called the ecopreneur model for development as it sets the stage for the inclusion of environmental concerns into the business model.

Taken as a whole, the four papers presented hererepresentthe gap in the research literature. We have three papers : Salée (2006), Lindsay (2005), and Anderson et al. (2006), that draw a similar conclusion—that the path to independence from colonial dominance is through the entrepreneur model. What this research does not include is what may be the least difficult and most natural path for First Nations or the First Nations of Southern Quebec. They all reviewed the genesis of entrepreneurs but failed to recognize the economicor, more specifically, the socio-economic power of Mother Earth within the Indigenous culture.Ecopreneurship would allow for an honorable harvest that could be gathered and shared in a Gathering Circle model—returning the value back to the community. The fourth paper by Banerjee and Tedmanson (2010) was exclusionary of the value that traditional practices could add to economic activity. If turned around and viewed as an asset to economic activity traditional activities that would not only be considered an asset but act as a foundation for the Gathering Circle to underpin the importance to the health of the community and the economy.

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## Indigenous perspective on ecology and harvesting

Godoy et al. (2005) studied the effect resource extraction had on the well-being of the Tsimane' people of the Amazonian Rainforest. This qualitative study measures the impact of indigenous people upon "increasing their participation in the market economy" (Godoy et al., 2005: 1). Their findings were, "irrespective of traditional practices, increasing integration into the market and population pressure induce indigenous peoples to degrade renewable natural resources" (Godoy et al., 2005: 7). The authors pointed at numbers that indicated that as the Tsimane entered into the market, their rates of deforestation were double and their intensification of farming activities were higher as they re-planted quicker. Godoy et al.'s (2005) findings were that the rate at which the Indigenous people entered the traditional market economy was matched by the rate of loss of TEK.

Kassam's paper on human ecology brings us another qualitative and quantitative assessment of "how human ecology, in this case subsistence hunting and gathering, maintains specific cultural values such as sharing, which in turn sustain the community through dramatic social change" (Kassam, 2010: 100). Kassam suggests that the ecological perspective of the Inuit guides them to make sustainable use of traditional (fish and seal) and non-traditional resources. Kassam's (2010) paper puts forward the assumption that indigenous people are generally good to the earth and conserve their resources.

As a corollary paper, we present Schoenfeld's (2011) on the Farm-to-Table movement. His qualitative analysis is around how this movement has turned the "Farm-a-business" model on its head. Small scale, community, and organic farms are creating desirable food resources that are in demand and highly desired. This is creating room for the small-scale producer to raise livestock, harvest crops and generally husband the land using a healthier and more ecologically sound methods. Not related to Indigenous research and not considering of Indigenous peoples, this article provides a lesson that is relatable to all peoples when it comes to ecopreneurship. The consideration of Mother Earth in the utilization for the growth and harvesting of crops and livestock is imperative to a sustainable, culturally attune food system.

The last research is the TEDx talk by Kimmerer (2012). Kimmerer is from the Anishanabe from Alaska. In her talk, Kimmerer marries her Indigenous world view with managing resource extraction of all kinds—farm, trees, minerals, etc. Kimmerer's qualitative approach is as personal as it is educational—meaning that she believes in the 7 Teachings of the Anishanabe:

- 1) Teaching- Never take the first plant you see.
- 2) Teaching- Ask permission.
- 3) Teaching- Do not steal.
- 4) Teaching- Listen for the answer.
- 5) Teaching- Minimize the harm.
- 6) Teaching- Share what you have taken.
- 7) Teaching- Reciprocate the gift

Kimmerer (2012) suggests that if this was to be widely used by all people, the results would be transformative in terms of "being a part of the environment" and change how we approach the Harvest.



When taken as whole, the positive ecological outcome that can be developed through taking a traditional approach to nature using TEK can be quite positive. What is not explored and represents a clear gap in the literature are the following . Two of the papers , Salée (2006) and Lindsay (2005), consider the economic model of sustainable profits. Kimmerer (2012) and Kassam (2010) only view the teachings as impacting the harvest. Land management that can accrue and distribute wealth among our community can be a harvest of its own. If managed with the same care and concern that other economic resources are, community harvests work within a co-operative First Nations model.

The gap that is created by the missing component in Godoy et al.'s (2005) research is that he narrowly focuses on a conclusion that resource extraction induces indigenous peoples to harm the land and abandon their traditional teachings. Godoy et al.'s (2005) study is based on a very small sample and provides insight into only one case. One case cannot be a foundation for an economic model, but current research is lacking. An examination of the topic of Indigenous entrepreneurship needs to be examined. This paper provides a conceptual discussion on the potential of the use of a First Nations co-operative model for economic development in light of the dearth of current research.

### Co-Op models and First Nations communities

The qualitative work by Berlo(1998) examines and extracts information in regards to the few co-ops that exist in Indigenous communities, e.g. the Inuit Art Co-op. Berlo clearly identifies that “these co-ops have had a major responsibility for production and marketing arts and crafts since the 1960s.” (Berlo, 1998: 178). The paper also centralizes Berlo's position when she says, “co-operatives, capitalizing on traditional activities and values, were felicitations form accommodating Canadian ambivalence by both “modernizing” Inuit (involving them in the wage economy) and enabling them to retain roots in the past (espousing principals of egalitarianism and expanding traditional activities” (Berlo, 1998: 181). Berlo's conclusion is drawn using an Indigenous view but does consider the community's views in regards to the co-op formation and that it is imposed upon, as opposed to birthed within the community. Nevertheless, it is the fair and democratic income distribution method that has worked in delivering “the good life” development models around the globe for Indigenous communities.

As an example, we can look to Altman in his qualitative study of the joint ventures in very remote Northern Australia, where it is posited that “engagement in the hybrid economy might be a preferred livelihood option for many Indigenous Australians” (Altman, 2005: 121). Allowing the Aborigines to create their own system, a hybrid model, with shared wealth based on Indigenous teaching may result in the most successful models of growing the socio economy. This hybrid model is a “way to exist for the nomadic people that move between where kin-based and market-based production relations co-exist” (Altman, 2005: 130). Altman's conclusion is meant to serve as a contrast to economic activity in immobile cities and act as a case study for transient communities.

We have presented two pieces on the Indigenous co-op model, environmental consideration and cultural concern. Another piece is offered by Silcoff and Strauss's(2015) paper outlining specific issues that have developed around MEC (Mountain Equipment Co-Op) and its governance. Silcoff and Strauss (2015) cite the loss of accountability to the members, which has caused a schism in MEC's community. Their article reviews the positive benefits to communities, accountability to its members, creating and sharing wealth in a healthy ecosystem, and reduced cost structure due to low corporate

tax because of co-operative business model. Silcoff and Strouss's (2015) article points out where things may have gone wrong for MEC, but in general they speak to the reasons why the co-operative model, when it works, is a tool that can be used in community economic development through the incorporation of community into the business.

The last paper is by Berge (2015), who is the current Business Chair of Co-operative Enterprises at the University of Winnipeg. Berge's view is clear from the start that co-operatives provide a unique way to raise up communities outside of traditional economic models. When Berge discusses the Tragedy of the Commons, Garret Hardin's (1968) famous economic treatise, Berge presents Hardin's "view that a common resource would be ill-used if left to individualistic management as each individual would use as much of the resource as they possibly could till the resource was depleted" (Berge, 2015: 2). Berge counters Hardin's in the article contending that community action is the basis for co-ops, "that people all over the world use cooperative means to manage common resources effectively" (Idem.). The paper presents the view that the current economic paradigm needs to be revisited and that community action through co-operation and co-operative education might be the best solution going forward.

All the works mentioned, aside from Altman's (2005), draw a similar conclusion which is, working as a community is a more effective and more useful way to create wealth for all. However, the articles are missing two critical components. Berge could have included the "genesis of co-ops" as it would have completed the picture—as it would assist us in developing a stronger model for working with and researching the co-op in First Nations communities. Berge's article presents the benefits of co-ops without examining structures that bring a co-op to life. The other problem is the tendency to micro-measure within the research—in Altman's (2005) and Berlo's (1998) studies, they do not provide enough scope to accurately measure the effect of co-ops in an Indigenous context. It would be hard to use either of the models presented as they are limited in their review to a micro-level analysis of co-operative business.

## Summary

In conclusion, this literature review summarizes the diverse views with regard to the study and research around Indigenous Ecopreneurship and the Gathering Circle model. We see views that conclude that environmental damage occurs when Indigenous people intersected with the economy of colonized world. Other authors present on how sustainable and traditional harvesting methods can create a positive base for economic development, and other authors show the community benefit of a co-op. Additionally, the idea that first nations should not rely on the Western World for economic structure was presented as we do not provide a proper place for Indigenous peoples within the current economic paradigm.

The discussion that will be conducted within this paper will delve into and combine the learning that will address the missing pieces in the existing literature. The focus of this discussion will be within five Indigenous communities of southern Quebec (two Mohawk, two Abenaki and one Huron) and will build on the models that currently exist in farm-to-table and co-op research. The discussion will provide a more qualitative commentary on the socio-economic benefits that Gathering Circle ecopreneurship can create.

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## Literature gaps

### GAP-1

There is missing research into the socioeconomic benefits of an entrepreneur/ecopreneur role in First Nations communities.

### GAP-2

Missing is a survey of the role that traditional harvesting can play in resource development.

### GAP-3

There is missing research in to the role of co-ops as a community development tool in a reserve setting.

## Discussion Outline

For the purposes of this discussion piece, the remainder of this article will refer to a researcher conducting a research project. This approach will simplify the discussion and allow the reader to follow the discussion to its conclusion.

The researcher will adopt an advocacy/participatory approach. The participatory approach entails an action for reform that may result in the change of lives of the participants (Creswell, 2009). This approach will also take into consideration values, cultural beliefs and norms that are central to a way of life. This consideration imperative will also underpin the tone of the research concentrating on a walk with and not impose from the outside approach.

The researcher will adopt a qualitative method of design in this study. The research will be done on the home reserve and using multiple methods of gathering information from survey, interviews and participatory interactions. The researcher will listen and use inductive analysis to draw conclusions to avoid imposing categories on any responses. The research will use purposive sampling, in which researchers intentionally select or recruit participants who have experienced the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored in the study, i.e. ecopreneurship. The qualitative research has been selected as the qualitative process examines and comprehends the nuances of studying difficult socio-economic and social issues in multifaceted settings with many layers to the information.

## Selection of site participants/communities/sampling

Participants from all 5 five communities will be selected utilizing snowball sampling to be informally interviewed. Every effort will be made to recruit participants from a variety of occupations (e.g.: harvester, managers, and executives). The interview results will be combined with a sharing circle/oral history gathering—see below—to be conducted on reserve. An effort will be made to keep an equal number of female and male participants for the sharing circle to avoid gender bias.

On reserve sharing circles will be conducted with the following participant groups:

- Youth (18-22)
- Young adults (23-39) and Adults (40-64)
- Elders (65 and older)

Targets for the make-up Sharing Circle discussions:

- Youth: 6 (3women, 3 men)

- Adults: 8 (4 women, 4 men)
- Elders: 6 (may be skewed towards female)

Individual Informal interview by age:

	Youth (16-21)	Young adults (22-32)	Adults (33-55)	Elders (56 and older)	Total
Women	2	4	6	2	12
Men	2	4	6	2	12
Total	4	8	12	4	24

### Data Collection Procedures

To explore the perspective of Indigenous Ecopreurship among the First Nations, this study proposes to collect stories through informal interviews and sharing circles. Following the community consultation to ensure the research project is acceptable to the communities, ethics approval will be sought from the University of Winnipeg. The communities involved in the project will be asked to provide names of people from different age groups who will represent the community's views.

Informal Interviews will be conducting following the outline listed below:

1. How has working in the co-op affected your outlook towards yourself and your community?
2. Have you encountered challenges; how were or are challenges overcome?
3. Has the co-op helped the community to deal with challenges?
4. Views of on Traditional Harvesting?
5. Do you have any examples how this has affected you in any way?

Once the interviews are completed, they will be transcribed and analyzed. Interviews will be conducted by one individual and the analysis by another to avoid any personal bias affecting the analysis results. The interview process will be used to adjust and improve the questions for the sharing circles such as thoroughly defining terms that groups may not be accustomed to using in everyday conversation.

The second phase of the research project will involve the collection of information from the sharing circles. Led by the researcher, a total of 15 sharing circle groups will be conducted on the 5 different reserves. The different age groups discussed above in sampling section 3.2 will be brought together. The sharing circle will be held either in public buildings within the reserves, or at the home of a community member to ensure participants are comfortable enough to share in the circle. The main focus of the sharing circle group discussions will be to gather communal or community-oriented perspectives and identify ways in which the community as a whole have viewed the co-op business. As food plays an important part in Mohawk, Huron, and Abeniki culture, a meal will be shared with participants to further encourage communication. The sharing circle questions were designed to allow discussion to happen naturally around the following topics:

1. How do you view the Co-Op as a community?
2. How has the Co-Op affected you personally?

3. How has it changed your views of your neighbors and of other reserves?
4. Any examples of the positive or negative impacts?

Lasting between one to two hours, focus groups will be conducted to allow for lively discussion and reflection between participants on the role of the co-op in the community. Along with a meal, each participant will receive a small honorarium for participation in the research study.

Finally, a survey of consumer attitudes will be circulated and gathered electronically. The survey will serve as a basis of how Indigenous co-operative ecopreneurship is viewed by the community as a whole. Additional data collection methods that will be used are listed in the following Table 1: Methods for data collection.

**Table 1: Methods for data collection**

Objectives	Data Collection Strategy and Methods
<b>To understand community views on the effects of the Gathering Circle concepts and measure its socioeconomic impact in individuals and on reserves.</b>	Oral History Gathered in Sharing Circles on reserves with an informal interview method used to initiate discussions
<b>To understand traditional teachings on ecology work within a model of resource development/ harvest in a for profit model.</b>	Oral and recorded survey will be approved and conducted on Elders and Business leaders to understand how they view harvesting. Wholesale clients will also receive the survey to understand
<b>To view the Sharing Circle within the co-operative model</b>	Interviews both structured and unstructured will be conducted with all members of the Gathering Circle Co-op
<b>To generate recommendations to augment Indigenous Ecopreneurship within First Nations communities</b>	A draft of the conclusions that will be the sum of the research will be circulated. If approved by the communities and the co-op members it will be circulated to all different levels of government.

The following data collection tools will be used in the interviews and discussions: note-taking, recorders (electronic), videos, and photographs.

### Ethical Issues and role of researchers

The following ethical considerations will be observed in the conduct of the research:

- Achievement of the CORE II
- Adherence to OCAP and TRIPS principles of conducting research
- TCPS certification and other relevant certification from other bodies will also be obtained including permission of the Ethical Board of Review of the University of Winnipeg
- Protection of privacy and rights of participants will also be followed
- Trust, guard against misconduct that might influence their institution (Israel and Hay, 2006)
- Integrity and identity of participants will be guaranteed

A legal release outlining, in plain English, conduct that will be guiding the research will be signed prior to any research being conducted. The release form will be generated though and approved by community members. It will also be reviewed by a Human Rights attorney, in order to secure another level of security for the community. Meetings will be held with the community members prior to the arrival of the researcher in order to explain the “why” of research and respond to any questions or concerns. As the researcher will be present for long period of times, it is important to engender the engagement of the community in the process in order to avoid any “awkwardness” with the research project and deal with any doubt prior to arrival.

Participants will be made aware of the fact that they can choose to withdraw from the study or the decision of not wanting to volunteer information any longer and would be respected as such. Participants will be made aware of what they are being asked to do and they can decide whether to participate or volunteer information or not. Furthermore, it will be made explicitly clear that employment and or issues surrounding the co-op will not be determined or affected by this study.

### Researchers

The researchers will declare and elaborate at the beginning of every session any personal or environmental bias. The senior researcher and the community engaged researcher will facilitate group discussion, analysis and the conduct of interviews. They will also have a transcriber, as eye contact and “being available” is very important. They should as well take notes when necessary. Researchers will act as moderators. Notes should be made in regards to the following: relationships and interactions, discomforts as well as attitudes and behaviors as that could affect any outcome. They must be sure to properly notate when these events occur with time and date.

### Plan for data analysis/validity/reliability

Collaboratively, researchers and community members will analyze the focus group transcriptions, interviews and survey results and a thematic analysis will be developed. Main themes arising from the three sources will be used during and post research to develop a narrative on the impact on the socio-economy of ecopreneurship in the co-operative model. Results will then be presented to various co-ops and various reserves for input and suggestions. Based on the results from key informal interviews and sharing circle groups, a list of common responses to questions will be generated.

## Sharing Strategies

As will be discussed in the next section, sharing is part and parcel of Indigenous research, therefore the following will be used.

1. Create a DVD/vignette/documentary
2. Develop a community report
3. Plan a day of celebration across and on each reserve
4. Dissemination throughout the local media (print, radio, local cable TV)
5. Curriculum/teaching material for students in local schools
6. Made available to the Co-op

Other possible outcomes of the research:

1. Conference presentations
2. Peer-reviewed journal publications
3. Other publications
4. Curriculum/teaching material for non-Indigenous audiences

## Validity/ Reliability:

Validity is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the community (Creswell and Miller, 2000). As has been stated, the community will be continuously consulted and a written report will be submitted weekly in order to ensure that methods and findings will be continuously and scrupulously tested. The reliability of the model will be compared and contrasted with other papers and scholarly work to ensure that it stays within a certain pattern.

## Indigenous research

Indigenous Research embraces the views and participation of participants in the research. The researchers wish to ensure that the community's context is properly understood and that it will be reflected in the analysis. In addition, it is vital to Indigenous research to make the analysis relevant, understandable and beneficial for the community and not merely an intellectual, or theoretical pursuit.

In order to align the research with Chilisa's(2012) position regarding continuation of research, it is about "helping members to reflect upon learning and growth" (Chilisa, 2012: 285). We need to adopt this continuation of research in the activities of this proposed research project. The themes stemming from the sharing circle discussions and interviews may result in a change in perceptions and views with regard to Indigenous entrepreneurship and socio-economic benefits. Being researchers focusing on indigenous communities, we have to explore the shared and different ways in which this is communicated in doing self-reflection, in keeping a journal and conducting relevant, meaningful and regular meetings with our supervisor.

To ensure the research is conducted in an indigenous way, it is critical that we base the research activities in a sharing and knowledge-exchange method. Basing the methods on community generated advice will help the project and should aid in the production of a tangible product that could be left with the community after the project is complete. The goal of the knowledge-sharing phase is to implement an easily accessible and captivating way of sharing the results with the community. Apart from regularly

reporting to each of the nations' Council, the following activities will become part of the knowledge-sharing process:

1. Create a DVD/vignette/Documentary.
2. Develop a community report- to be approved for on reserve and off reserve dissemination.
3. Plan a day of celebration across and on each reserve.
4. Disseminate throughout the local media (print, radio, local cable TV).
5. Create curriculum/teaching material for students in local schools.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is absolutely critical to the success of this project, as Dr. Michael Hart (2015) said, to "become adopted" by your host community. Since we are dealing in a limited time to become adopted, the proper difference and respect must be used and following the timeline listed below will be of help:

At least 6-8 month prior to research taking place, regular meetings need to be conducted with community leaders and reports/outcomes must be shared with all.

Researchers must enroll in a language course to allow them to show respect and honor the people that they will be researching.

Proper cultural and sensitivity training should be received prior to research taking place.

Respect and honoring of traditional practices and places must be given at all times.

Being adopted not for the sake of research but for the sake of community should be one of the additional goals of any Indigenous researcher. This will not bias or cloud the results but provide a better understanding and ability to utilize the results.

## Conclusion

The study of Indigenous communities and their use of eco-economics is an area that requires far more research. The ability to research Indigenous communities, however, is an art in and of itself. To be adopted by the community takes significant time, but is crucial to gaining the data and understanding of the data that will benefit the community. Many researchers have sought to examine Indigenous communities through various lenses including a Western economic lens, but this falls short of the holistic picture that Indigenous communities paint for their community's interaction with Mother Earth. The Western approach of separating economics from environment or community does not work in an Indigenous setting, nor will it work with any attempt to research an Indigenous community's interaction with the economy.

This paper sought to present a concept research project to outline the complexities of studying Indigenous communities and their interactions with the economy through a conceptual co-operative. It is clear that the difficulties in studying Indigenous communities are multiple and the researcher's predisposition toward Westernizing Indigenous co-operative thought is quite overwhelming. Putting aside years of education and socialization on the part of the research is hard, but required if they are to understand Indigenous communities. As this paper points out, the researcher must be adopted by the community before the research even begins.



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## Notes

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