

# THE SOCIAL INNOVATION SHOWCASE: EXPERIMENTING, MOBILIZING, AND TRANSFORMING OUR SOCIETIES

## 40 YEARS OF ENGAGED RESEARCH ON SOCIAL INNOVATION

For nearly 40 years, the Centre for Research on Social Innovations (CRISES) has both observed and actively contributed to social experiments and transformative innovation, driving social, economic, and political change across various sectors in Quebec. With a legacy of engaged scholarship spanning generations of researchers, CRISES has become a model for partnership-based projects, also known as co-constructed, engaged, or action research, creating significant impacts for both research and practice.

Throughout the decades, various research programs have influenced the Centre's work, yet a consistent focus on social transformation has ensured coherence. Social transformation involves reconfiguring social relations, leading to alternative forms of production, consumption, organization, and connection that often challenge dominant models while remaining community-rooted.

As CRISES nears its 40th anniversary, amidst societal disruptions and crises, it is crucial to reaffirm a vision of socio-economic development rooted in solidarity and dialogue, and to restate our vision of social innovation shaped by decades of experimentation and collaborative research.

## THE ELEMENTS THAT SHAPE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

The Social Innovation Showcase, part of CRISES's 7th International Conference, highlights the essential elements shaping our understanding of social innovation. It illustrates, through clusters of tangible innovations and real-world experiences, how this vision materializes in practice.

Key features observed in the social innovations that CRISES had the privilege to document include :

- Structuring over time or, when experimental, carrying intent and potential for social transformation, always contextually aligned;
- Driven by groups committed to the common good or public interest;
- Transforming social relations at multiple levels—within a group, building, neighbourhood, city, etc.;
- Developing over the long term through trial-and-error cycles, where the historical dimension is crucial to understanding transformations;
- Transforming conditions of production, consumption, organization, and spatial relationships, often via democratic governance structures;
- Based on relationship-building, networking, and mobilizing diverse resources—including public funding, territorial connections, and alliances—which foster mutual reinforcement and convergence with other innovations and experiments;
- Relying on the combination of multiple forms of knowledge and co-production rooted in diverse expertise and lived experience;
- Enduring... yet also reversible.

## THE CENTRALITY OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND CLUSTERS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

Research spanning nearly four decades indicates that social transformation emerges not from isolated experiments but through the efforts of “networked actors,” the accumulation of experiences, the integration of human and non-human elements with territory, and the formation of collectives. It necessitates the convergence of different forms of knowledge: academic, technical, and experiential.

Based on this premise, we have identified social innovation clusters: groupings of innovations that collectively create new meaning, reshape actor relationships, and offer alternative pathways. In the Social Innovation Showcase, we highlight three clusters observed in Quebec context: the social economy movement, the autonomous community action movement, and solidarity finance. Each cluster is exemplified by two concrete experiences involving CRISES researchers.

These are not the only clusters in Quebec's experience. Others, such as those related to training and support, or to the commons, are also observable.

## CRISES AT A GLANCE

Founded in 1986, the Centre for Research on Social Innovations (CRISES) is an institutional research center affiliated with the Faculty of Human Sciences (FSH) and the School of Management Sciences (ESG) at UQAM. It is funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) as a strategic research cluster. CRISES brings together 52 regular research members from 12 Quebec universities, along with about 50 associate members and eight emeritus members. It also includes nearly 200 student members, who play a central role in its research and knowledge mobilization efforts.

The current scientific programming emphasizes the role of social innovations in promoting social, environmental, and epistemic justice, structured around four main research areas:

- Social Policies and Practices
- Territories and Living Environments
- Social and Collective Organizations
- Work and Employment

## THE COLLABORATORS BEHIND THIS SHOWCASE

An intergenerational team of researchers from diverse backgrounds made this Showcase possible, marking the first step toward a larger exhibition on social innovation, viewed through the theoretical and conceptual lenses developed at CRISES.

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