

Alternative Visions of 'Harmony': Exploring Gender and Participation in the Malcolm Island  
Community Resource Cooperative

by  
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## Abstract

The cooperative enterprise has seemed, to many contemporary 'green' theorists, to be a socially sustainable economic alternative to conventional corporate capitalism, based on the ideas of grassroots participation, democracy, egalitarianism, community, social equity and empowerment. I argue, however, that there has been no attempt in 'green' thought to analyze gender relations within the cooperative enterprise. Instead, 'green' theorists view the cooperative as a homogeneous social entity with a shared subjectivity; and assume that the cooperative's 'sustainable' attributes - decentralized, democratic, and equitable principles - will ensure gender equity and empowerment through social sustainability. Reviewing 'green' theories of cooperatives and social sustainability, this thesis challenges 'green' interpretations of participation and social sustainability that ignore members' gendered identities, relations, and interests, particularly in resource-dependent communities. 'Green' definitions of participation have tended to narrowly focus on *access* to the cooperative without paying attention to cooperative member dynamics. By focusing attention on the nuances of participation and the implications for equity and empowerment, this thesis explores the complexities and contradictions of gender and participation as they apply to a mixed-gender community resource cooperative on Malcolm Island, British Columbia. Using a labour-knowledge-authority framework, the case study of the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative (MICRC) illustrates that while the cooperative may be socially sustainable according to 'green' community and social economic ideals, actual participation in the cooperative enterprise is more complex, contradictory, and gendered than 'green' thought has typically assumed.

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Lastly, I wish to stress that the insights, interpretations (both of theory and fact), and the implicit values of this research are inevitably my own.

Mary Pullen

## CHAPTER ONE

### Who Participates in Alternative Visions of 'Harmony'?<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.1 'Green' Theory, Gender Analysis, and the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative

Since the advent of industrialism, the cooperative enterprise model has been envisaged as a means of fundamentally challenging capitalism as well as its economic and social inequalities. From Robert Owen<sup>2</sup>, to Peter Kropotkin<sup>3</sup>, to the 'green' (or ecological) advocates of the late twentieth century, the formation of decentralized, cooperative, and non-hierarchical economic enterprises has often been viewed as a panacea against Western civilization's social and ecological crimes.

In current debates of 'sustainability', many 'green' theorists have identified social inequality and corporate power as the sources of our contemporary environmental problems. Convinced that corporate strategies lead to social inequalities,<sup>4</sup> 'green' writers have supported alternative institutional arrangements with the aim of providing local communities with greater

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'harmony' encapsulates the geography as well as the ideas of this study. The title, 'Alternative Visions of 'Harmony'' centres on three main reference points. Firstly, 'harmony' is particularly significant to the historical context and utopian roots of this thesis's case study site on Malcolm Island, British Columbia (BC), and its main village, Sointula, which translated means 'place of harmony'. Secondly, the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative (MICRC) is an alternative vision of community economics focused on building relationships of 'harmony' between a growing community of interests, from the individual to the local community and the natural environment. Finally, 'green' theorists identify the cooperative enterprise as a participatory economic alternative that achieves greater 'harmony' (i.e. sustainability) between humans and their natural environments.

<sup>2</sup> One of the earliest advocates of workers' control, his famous 'Report on the Poor' (1817) sought to reform the evils of the industrial revolution through the establishment of cooperative communities. See Craig (1993) for a review of Owen's cooperative attempts in both England and North America (e.g. 'New Harmony').

<sup>3</sup> A nineteenth century social anarchist, Kropotkin defended the principles of communalism and mutual aid. He also argued for the establishment of cooperative communities. See, for example, Kropotkin (1987).

<sup>4</sup> See Tester (1992), Trainer (1996), and Mendis and Van Bers (1999) for discussions of the results of economic liberalization and the implications for governments (i.e. limits to regulate foreign capital). The impetus of this thesis was that unregulated resource extraction often results in the loss of local resources, and few benefits for local communities.

access to, and control of, land and coastal resources (Bookchin 1982; Sale 1991; Mies 1996).<sup>5</sup> These 'sustainable' alternatives seem to be predicated upon the decentralization and democratization of land control, natural resources, and industry, which are thought to simultaneously embody equality of opportunity and empowerment.

This thesis attempts to demonstrate that while the cooperative enterprise may be socially 'sustainable', according to 'green' community and social economic ideals, actual participation in the cooperative enterprise is more complex, contradictory, and gendered than 'green' thought has typically assumed.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, over the past decade, a growing critical literature has addressed this restrictive vision of participation in sustainability tropes. Lélé (1991: 615), for example, has asserted that 'decentralization' does not possess similar meanings or intentions as 'participation', and that both do not necessarily result in equity though he argues that "some form of participation is necessary but not sufficient for achieving equity and social justice." Likewise, Jackson (1994) has critiqued the assumption that participation 'increases' social sustainability and thus undoubtedly results in ecological sustainability (or vice versa). Central to both authors' arguments is the criticism that contemporary attempts to 'operationalize', or distinguish between various types of participation, have been too narrow-mindedly occlusive.

Applying these critiques to 'green' cooperative theories, I argue that definitions of participation have tended to narrowly focus on 'access' to the cooperative enterprise without paying attention to potentially "unexpected and unwelcome" member dynamics (Walker 1998: 138). It appears that 'green' theorists have rarely analyzed actual existing cooperatives, and in

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that 'green' theory is a homogeneous tradition. Clearly 'greens' have produced discourses with different and, in fact, opposite arguments. See, for example, Schumacher (1973) and Hardin (1996).

<sup>6</sup> Green theorists mostly use the tropes of community and social economics without defining them. It is generally assumed that social economics will occur at the community scale. In contradistinction, my thesis stipulates as problematic the uncritical use of these tropes, and instead adopts Quarter (1992)'s definition of the social economy as a 'third sector', with elements of both the private and public sectors. Specifically, it is a diverse economy of non-profit and other community-based enterprises.

this light, it is not surprising that they have been apt to overlook such organizational intricacies as: who participates in cooperatives? What form does their participation take? And, who ultimately benefits?

This thesis fruitfully delves into the work of feminists who have attempted to (re)theorize cooperative participation through a lens of gender in order to address these shortcomings (Oerton 1994, 1996; Rothschild and Davies 1994).<sup>7</sup> In research on mixed-gender cooperatives, feminist scholars have found that contrary to conventional (organizational) wisdom, gender power relations infuse even presumably non-hierarchical, social arrangements (Hacker and Elcorobairutia 1987; Nevo 1987; Hacker 1988; Theis and Ketilson 1994; Sylvester 1995).

Whether through gendered labour activities or differential authority in decision-making processes, this literature suggests that gender inequalities are as likely in cooperative institutions as they are in corporate firms. Given such evidence, I argue that 'green' theories of participation in the cooperative enterprise require critical analysis. In particular, 'green' claims of cooperative social sustainability need to be examined in relation to gender and the complexities and contradictions of member participation.

Like other feminist research on cooperatives, this thesis defines gender as an inextricable aspect of cooperative members' identity and relations. Attention to the construction of gender identities is crucial to interpreting the gendered practices and processes of cooperative enterprises. I suggest that cooperative members are 'situated' within particular geographical, historical, and socio-economic contexts that may directly and / or indirectly impact upon their participation. As McDowell (1997: 384), a noted feminist geographer, has remarked, "women and men are differently positioned in the world" and thus will have distinctive and varying

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<sup>7</sup> Mellor and Sterling (1988) suggest that this is not the first time feminism has inserted itself into cooperative thinking. As they comment, "one of the most interesting aspects of the development of cooperatives is the



experiences. By examining the 'situatedness' of female and male cooperative members' roles and experiences, a more nuanced understanding of participation and its implications for equity and empowerment can be achieved.

While others have studied gender in resource-based cooperatives, most research has been confined to the experiences of developing countries (Mehra et al. 1992; Mayoux 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Mehra 1993; Singh and Balooni 1997). Few studies have focused on gender and participation in resource-based cooperatives of advanced economies. Certainly, social scientific research on the theme of gender has burgeoned, some Canadian cooperators have noted that little has been written about women and gender relations in English-Canadian cooperatives (Conn 1990; Theis and Ketilson 1994).

In 1997, responding to downturns in British Columbia's forest and fishing industries, a group of Malcolm Islanders launched the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative (MICRC) as a means of providing local access to, and control of, the Island's natural resources (Burda et al. 1998).<sup>8</sup> Basing its efforts on a community forest initiative, this locally controlled natural resource management institution sought to create 'sustainable' economic opportunities on Malcolm Island, that would also represent community interests. Interestingly, this approach to community control of the Island's resource base is very much in character with the community's history of cooperativism (Anderson 1979; Fish and Lillard 1982; Wild 1995).

I contend that a gender analysis of cooperative participation on Malcolm Island has the potential to contribute to an understanding of the social sustainability of resource-based cooperative enterprises in so-called 'first world' contexts. In order to contribute to this empirical gap in the literature as well as engage with 'green' cooperative ideals, this thesis studies a mixed-gender community resource cooperative in the Canadian fishing community of Malcolm Island,

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appearance and disappearance of gender" (167). With regards to the latter, they find that in some cases workers' rights have taken precedence over women's rights.

British Columbia (BC) (see Figure 1). Such a feminist project, as Faith (1994: 14) observes, "serves to refract and highlight significant features of power relations" that may implicate, in this case the extent to which female and male cooperative members experience equity and empowerment through cooperative participation.

**Figure 1: Situating The Area of Study: Malcolm Island, British Columbia**



Source: Fish and Lilliard (1982).

## 1.2 Conceptualizing Gender Analysis

Gender analysis is a framework for understanding social relations through the lens of gender identities.<sup>9</sup> Rooted in socialist feminism (Baden and Goetz 1997: 37), this analytical approach

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the 'Island' refers to Malcolm Island, BC.

<sup>9</sup> Gender analysis is a highly porous research agenda infused in a number of other research agendas. See, for example, Schroeder (1993), Carney (1996), and Rocheleau et al. (1996) for feminist political ecology writings; Sen and Grown (1987), Moser (1989), Jacobson (1992), Ostegaard (1992), Pearson (1992), Mosse (1993), Parpart (1993), Young (1993), and Rathgeber (1995) for 'gender and development' (GAD) perspectives; Jackson (1994,

focuses on women, as well as men, in relation to each other rather than in isolation.<sup>10</sup> As

McDowell (1997: 391) conveys in her article on 'doing' feminist research,

[i]n order to understand the position of women as the subordinate 'other' to men, and the social construction of femininity as inferior to an idealized version of masculinity, it is important to undertake research about men and masculinity ... [w]e must include men in our samples in future research designed to elicit the comparative position of women.

Though her point may seem rather obvious, it nevertheless reveals a core aspect of feminist research: that is, the recognition that both women and men are gendered.

More importantly, feminists have emphasized that gender is not fixed or biologically determined, but instead is socially constructed and based on variable subject identities (McDowell 1997). For example, Moser (1989: 1800)'s research on gender in planning contexts illustrates that,

[g]ender-aware approaches are concerned with the manner in which such relationships are socially constructed; men and women play different roles in society, their gender differences being shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants.

In other words, she argues that men and women characteristically occupy different positions in processes of production and reproduction, and are thus affected by these processes differently. Jackson (1994) reiterates this gender perspective and also provides examples of social activities implicated by gender relations such as, access to resources for production; rewards or remuneration for work; distribution of consumption, income or goods; exercises of authority and power, and participation in cultural and religious activity.

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1995) for a gender analysis of environmentalism; Rothschild and Davies (1994) for gender in organization theory; and Whatmore et al. (1994) for work on gender and rurality.

<sup>10</sup> Identifying 'women' as an isolated analytical group raises a number of difficulties (Young 1993). First, studying 'women's position' in society suggests that there is one universal position that all women occupy in all societies. The truth is that not only can there be no simple statement of the universal 'position of women' but that even within most societies it is not possible to speak of women as a group sharing common interests. (Surely, however, this may be done so strategically). Secondly, conceptualizing women as an analytical category may lead to their marginalization as a particular group with biological and inherited handicaps.

Both Moser and Jackson, however, have structured their arguments around a binary distinction between men and women. This dichotomy has increasingly come under criticism by feminists, particularly of postmodern persuasion, who argue that women's (as well as men's) commonality should not be assumed (Gibson-Graham 1996a, 1996b). Drawing attention to these ideas of multiple femininities / multiple masculinities, McDowell (1997: 392) remarks that, "[i]n particular circumstances and places ... social divisions divide women's interests one from another, resulting in cross-cutting lines of difference that may unite or divide certain women at any one time." Other feminist research has also shown that gender identities are not 'essentially' fixed, and should perhaps be viewed as fluid and multiple (e.g. Liepins 1998; Reed 2000).

Within the scope of my research, this thesis primarily focuses on female members in the cooperative enterprise and compares them vis-à-vis their male counterparts. (By no means, do I assume that female and / or male cooperative members possess singular, coherent identities). I investigate how gender identities, constructed through, and influenced by, local labour practices and community social norms in resource-dependent communities, position men as well as women in differential locations of power in community resource cooperative enterprises. Specifically, I focus my analysis on gendered labour, knowledge, and authority in the MICRC. This research enables alternative representations of the cooperative enterprise to emerge, and thereby informs a re-conceptualization of the theoretical understanding of cooperatives and social sustainability in 'green' thought.

### **1.3 Research Questions and Objectives**

Based on the discussion above, the following research questions emerge:

1. How is the cooperative enterprise linked to social sustainability in 'green' thought?
2. What is problematic about this coupling of cooperatives and social sustainability?

3. How do MICRC members' gendered identities affect participation in the cooperative?
4. How do gender power relations manifest themselves in MICRC members' cooperative participation?
5. What would the cooperative enterprise look like if it were run on principles of gender equity?

Based on the above research questions, the following objectives emerge. Firstly, this thesis attempts to examine female and male member participation in the cooperative enterprise. By comparing women's and men's experiences, this study explores how cooperative member relations in the MICRC relate to normative constructions of cooperative gender relations in 'green' thought. This methodology affords an empirically based critique of 'green' thought. Secondly, I seek to investigate the extent to which gendered practices and processes affect members' experiences of equity and empowerment. Thirdly, I attempt to suggest how cooperatives may be re-conceptualized in discussions of social sustainability. Finally, I endeavour to characterize how an ideally, gender equitable cooperative enterprise might function.

#### **1.4 Thesis Organization**

In this first chapter, I have focused on the theoretical limitations of 'green' claims, which state that the cooperative enterprise is a socially 'sustainable' alternative to conventional corporate capitalism. Specifically, I have critiqued 'greens' narrow interpretation of participation, and subsequently adopted a critical feminist approach that uses gender analysis to study the intricacies of cooperative participation and member dynamics. This gender-aware approach serves as an analytical framework for the chapters that follow.

In chapter two, I examine in more detail the ideas and literature introduced in chapter one. The chapter begins with a brief historical overview of the cooperative enterprise, followed

by a review of various literatures' (organizational, development, planning, 'green', and feminist) contributions to, and interpretations of, gender, social sustainability, and the cooperative enterprise. Inspired by recent feminist research on the contextual specificity of women and men's experiences in a gendered society, I specifically frame cooperative member relations within a gendered labour, knowledge, and authority framework. This structures my feminist critique of 'green' theories of cooperatives and social sustainability.

Turning from theoretical concerns to more practical matters, chapters three and four present the research methodology and background (historical) context of my case study of the MICRC on Malcolm Island, BC. Delineating the research strategy and feminist methods of my study, chapter three presents an in-depth and self-reflexive account of my fieldwork and research. Chapter four then focuses on the coastal, resource-dependent community of Malcolm Island and its attempt to gain access to, and control of, local natural resources through a community-controlled resource cooperative enterprise. In particular, this chapter traces the unique cooperative history of Malcolm Island, as well as the recent dilemmas of reduced access to local fishery and forest resources, and related economic and social impacts on the community.

Chapter five is the first of two chapters based on a gender analysis of participation in the MICRC. Focusing on equity, or access to cooperative participation, this chapter examines the gendered experiences of twenty MICRC members. The chapter begins with an investigation of the gendered labour activities and community social norms that have shaped women and men's gender identities, roles, interests, and relations in the family and local community. Next, I suggest that members' gender identities influence their motivations for cooperative involvement as well as their participation in the MICRC. This leads to an exploration of the different shades of members' 'access' to cooperative participation.

Chapter six focuses on gender power relations, aims to shed some light on how social sustainability is inextricable from issues of 'empowerment'. This chapter thus shifts its focus

from concerns of the *equity of participation* to the *empowerment of participation* in the cooperative enterprise. The distinction lies in differences between access and impacts of that access concerning women and men's participation in cooperative endeavours.

In the last chapter, I review the findings of my case study. Specifically, I focus on the inequities, complexities and contradictions of gender and participation in the MICRC. I then attempt to re-conceptualize the cooperative enterprise within 'green' social sustainability debates, and review its relevance as an alternative institution for natural resource management. Finally, I conclude with several suggestions for cooperators as well as policy-makers, on how a mixed-gender community resource cooperative enterprise might ideally function, based on gender equity.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Feminist Critique of 'Green' Theories of Cooperative Enterprises and Social Sustainability

#### 2.1 Towards a Critique of 'Green' Literature's Alternative Vision of 'Harmony'

To many contemporary 'green' theorists, the cooperative enterprise has been eagerly proposed and adopted as a socially 'sustainable' economic alternative to conventional corporate capitalism. Participation is seen as a way of reducing inequalities of power within society. Based on 'green' narratives of participation the cooperative enterprise is often envisioned as a democratic business structure that promises equity and empowerment (Bookchin 1982; Plant and Plant 1992). These claims are problematic because 'green' definitions of participation tend to narrowly focus on 'access' to the cooperative enterprise without paying attention to potential member dynamics. Davis and Bailey (1996: 260), for example, argue in their critical study of 'common property' arrangements in Canadian fishing communities that

it would be simplistic and irresponsible to ignore the implication for social justice within local coastal community social structures of management proposals that may accomplish little more than further entrenchment of relations of exploitative appropriation, ascriptive exclusion, and class relations.

While 'green' literature has largely focused on the ecological or environmental benefits of maintaining a cooperative enterprise against the backdrop of the conventional capitalist firm, I argue in this thesis that 'green' writers and advocates have generally failed to engage with issues of gender power relations within the cooperative enterprise. This problem is particularly to resource-based communities of advanced economies, as most of the interest has been limited to so-called 'third world' case studies. Yet as McDowell (1992: 400) states, "...the shift of



emphasis in feminist scholarship away from women towards gender, allows issues about the social construction of and geographical variations in gender . . ." to become the focus.

In what follows I will discuss the implications of coupling social sustainability with the cooperative enterprise, and present a critique of 'green' literature's assumption that access to, and control over, the cooperative enterprise and its decision-making processes are presumably open to all that are interested. First, I will discuss the concept of sustainability in its understanding of human-environment relations. Second, I will review the history and theory of the cooperative enterprise, followed by an overview of cooperative enterprise initiatives across communities on the planet. Third, I provide a feminist critique of the assumed neutral links between the cooperative enterprise and sustainability. Finally, this chapter comes to an end by providing an overview of the implications of labour activities on knowledges and authorities.

## **2.2 Social Sustainability and Alternative Visions of 'Harmony'**

Over the past thirty years, the trope of sustainability has become firmly entrenched within intellectual narratives, development programs, and human-environment relations. As best defined by Robinson et al. (1990: 39), sustainability is "the persistence over an apparently indefinite future of certain necessary and desired characteristics of the socio-political system and its natural environment." Although the process of achieving sustainability is theoretically based upon three interdependent dimensions, referred to as the ecological, economic and social, my focus is on the social dimensions of sustainability as it is often neglected in sustainability debates.

Social sustainability refers to the level of social well-being or "the continued satisfaction of basic needs - such as food, water, shelter, as well as higher-level social and cultural necessities such as security, freedom, education, employment, and recreation" (Brown et al. 1987: 716).

The definition of these 'needs', however, must emanate from people themselves, in order "to represent an ongoing process of self-realization and empowerment" (Redclift 1992: 397).

The definition of social sustainability in this thesis combines Brown et al.'s definition, which addresses the concept of equity or the principle of fairness (ie. equitable access to resources), with Redclift's notion of empowerment, as individuals have choices and control in everyday aspects of their lives.<sup>1</sup> When social sustainability has been used by other academics such as Gardner (Gardner and Roseland 1989a, 1989b), Roseland (1997), and Robinson (Robinson et al. 1990; Robinson and Van Bers 1996), equity and empowerment have been crucial elements in proposals for the reduction of inequalities in development.

Often it is argued that these elements are best achieved at the 'grassroots' level. With power devolved to a more "human" scale, local communities are able to participate effectively in local development decisions. Those that are closest to the context and the lives of people affected are able to make better-informed decisions that will more likely be consistent with their personal and communal needs and values. Indeed, Robinson and Van Bers (1996) remark that local development initiatives build on local knowledge, traditions, and skills, and are better placed to meet local economic requirements and ensure equality of opportunity. All in all, grassroots participation is seen as an integral aspect of the achievement of sustainability, despite the fact that often, individuals closest to a situation cannot see beyond their self-interest (Marvin and Guy 1997; Rowson 1997).

Indeed, while green theorists and advocates tend to use different terms (ie. decentralization and democracy) to make their arguments, they regularly call for devolution of

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<sup>1</sup> Other concepts and / or indicators of social sustainability include, for example, sustainable livelihoods, cultural sustainability, social cohesion, and social capital (Berkes 1998a)

power to the local scale (Barns 1995; Doherty and de Geus 1996).<sup>2</sup> For example, in his classic work *Small is Beautiful*, Schumacher (1973) supports a communal, alternative life-style based on small-scale living and locally derived decisions. He argues that the local community should act as the locus for participation and decision-making. His arguments, however, jump from participation to sustainability without filling the gap with testable propositions. These contestable ideas have uncritically been adopted by many contemporary 'greens', as more and more, 'green' visions of a future, ecological society are based on decentralized, participatory democracies that privilege local knowledge over rationalist or scientific 'expertise'.<sup>3</sup>

Applying these tropes to their critiques of current economic institutions and ideologies, 'greens' argue that significant changes to our current economic system are necessary. While I do not debate this claim, I do find problematic the assumptions upon which 'green' alternatives are based. As I will critically review in the following sections, 'green' theorists seek alternative forms of local community organization based on non-hierarchical social arrangements and participatory democracy, which are thought to better embody equity and empowerment. The question is, do they really? Before addressing this question, however, I wish to turn to an introduction of one economic alternative advocated by 'greens': the cooperative enterprise.

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<sup>2</sup> In their study of environmental activists in British Columbia, Salazar and Alper (1999) find that all of the interviewees supported (and idealized) community organizations that employed face-to-face consensus decision-making

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Buege (1997). Murdoch and Clark (1994) indicate in their article on 'sustainable knowledges', that the term 'local knowledge' entered the sustainability discourse from the literature on 'Third World' development and "focuses attention upon the categories, meanings and cultural practices that 'local' people use to make sense of their world. Where science is seen as standardized, de-contextualized and universal, local knowledge is strongly rooted in place" (117). See, for example Kloppenburg (1991). Murdoch and Clark go on to argue that "local knowledge is not always sustainable knowledge" (125), demonstrating that "'sustainable knowledge' must be a mixture - of the social, the scientific, the local, the technical, the natural, and perhaps even the magical - that refuses *a priori* to privilege science" (129)

### 2.2.1 A History of the Cooperative Enterprise as an Institution of 'Harmony'

From its emergence in the mid-1800s to the present, the modern cooperative enterprise has evolved as an organizational structure based on the social philosophy of cooperation (Craig 1993). While it originally arose as a reactionary institution to nineteenth century industrial capitalism and associated class exploitation, the ideals of attaining member access to, and control over, specific opportunities and decisions, have remained pivotal to cooperative visions of social harmony even today.<sup>4</sup> In 1995, for example, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA)<sup>5</sup> officially defined the cooperative enterprise as "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise."

According to the literature, the first successful cooperative was founded in 1844 by the *Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers* in Lancashire, England. Since then cooperative activities have metamorphosed into a globally significant and diverse movement, ranging from successes like the Mondragon industrial complex in the Basque region of Spain, to the 'caisse populaire' (people's bank) network in Quebec, Canada.<sup>6</sup> Common to most cooperatives are guiding principles that shape the cooperative structure such that its users (customers and employees, for example) are the owners and controllers of the business, rather than investors (see Figure 2 below). This form of 'economic democracy', defined by Knox and Agnew (1994: 413) as "an egalitarian form of political-economic structure in which a serious attempt is made to democratize the economic sphere in general and workplaces in particular," (ideally) entitles

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<sup>4</sup> The cooperative enterprise was originally based on the utopian socialist ideal of workers' control. Early proponents include Robert Owen, Charles Fourier and Henri Saint-Simon. See Manuel and Manuel (1979) and Beecher and Bienvenu (1983) for discussions of these authors' cooperative ideas.

<sup>5</sup> The ICA is an umbrella organization for the worldwide cooperative movement.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the cooperative movement and form, see Melynk (1985) and Craig (1993).

**Figure 2: ICA statement of the guiding principles of cooperatives<sup>7</sup>**

*1<sup>st</sup> Principle Voluntary and Open Membership*

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Principle Democratic Member Control*

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote), and cooperatives at other levels are also organized in a democratic manner.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Principle Member Economic Participation*

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

*4<sup>th</sup> Principle Autonomy and Independence*

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

*5<sup>th</sup> Principle Education, Training and Information*

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

*6<sup>th</sup> Principle Cooperation Among Cooperatives*

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.

*7<sup>th</sup> Principle Concern for Community*

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Source: ICA (1995).

<sup>7</sup> These principles were articulated at the 1995 Congress and General Assembly of the ICA, held in Manchester to celebrate the Alliance's Centenary. These principles are the guidelines by which cooperatives put their values

the opportunity of democratic group decision-making.<sup>8</sup> This type of structure is believed to ensure that the cooperative serves its members, and allows them to participate in decisions that enable them to grow and gain more power over their lives (Fairbairn et al. 1990: 15).

For instance, two empirically-based studies, one by Rothschild-Whitt (1979) and the other by Craig and Pencavel (1992), conceive the cooperative as an alternative business based on service to the community, and oriented towards the fulfillment of social needs and objectives rather than profit. Implied is a focus on value fulfillment, more than material incentives, as Rothschild-Whitt (1979)'s study links Weber's concept of 'value-rational' behaviour with the cooperative enterprise, and Craig and Pencavel (1992)'s study of the Pacific Northwest plywood sector finds that cooperative enterprises (in comparison with conventional institutions) adjust earnings, rather than employment, when changes occur in input and output prices. It comes as no surprise then that cooperatives represent an increasing emphasis upon the importance of alternative, grassroots approaches to development, starting from the empowerment of local communities.<sup>9</sup>

As discussed earlier, 'green' writers and advocates have readily adopted the cooperative enterprise as a socially 'sustainable' community-based economic alternative. Two 'green' discourses stand out for their linking of cooperatives and social sustainability. The first is based on 'small-scale' arguments, and includes a number of diverse strands. Its critique is of 'growthism'. This 'green' discourse is expressed by social ecologists / anarchists, notably

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(self-help, mutual responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity) into practice.

<sup>8</sup> This explains why the cooperative enterprise is also described as a "collectivist-democracy" (Rothschild and Whitt 1986) or "flatter, less or non-hierarchical" (Oerton 1996) organization.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, community economic development (CED) literature on cooperatives: Ross and Usher (1986), Alderson and Conn (1988), MacLeod (1989), Newell (1994), Perry and Lewis (1994), Wilkinson and Quarter (1996), Quarter (1992); as well as common property literature: Berkes (1989) and Berkes and Folke (1998). It should be noted, however, that not all cooperative structures are necessarily oriented towards the local scale. For example, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (Prairie marketing cooperative) and Mountain Equipment Co-op (consumer/retail co-op) are regional and national cooperatives, respectively.

Bookchin (1982), and bio-regionalists, such as Sale (1991) and Plant and Plant (1992). All tend to posit scale as one of the major issues to be addressed for sustainable development, as it relates to the ownership of production processes.

The second 'green' discourse is based on ecofeminist critiques of patriarchy, which is seen as a major impediment to developing sustainability along feminist principles. Ecofeminists criticize the global economic military and industrial system for being based on economic growth and a free market ideology (Braidotti et al. 1994; Shiva 1997). This particular 'green' discourse supports non-hierarchical, non-competitive relationships. While there are divergences among authors, capitalism, when identified, is often related to patriarchy's fundamental propensity to dominate and control the environment, and particularly women.<sup>10</sup>

It remains to be seen how these ideals are transposed in ideas of sustainability. Though the cooperative may be small-scale and democratically structured, it is unclear whether 'greens' anticipate the relationship between men and women members, such that decisions are accountable and responsive to the interests of gender. Indeed, local knowledges are not free from social domination - they too are gendered or differentially empowered (Feldman and Welsh 1995). Overall, 'green' theorists tend to assume gendering practices are absent in a cooperative context. But first, I provide an overview of the theoretical contributions of cooperative enterprise and of development and planning literatures to provide a clearer understanding of the implications of gender power relations concerning equity and empowerment.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Merchant (1980, 1995), Plant (1989), Diamond and Orenstein (1990), King (1991), Lahar (1991), Plumwood (1991), Warren and Cheney (1991), Hessing (1993), Kettel (1993), Braidotti et al. (1994), Mies (1996, 1997), Shiva (1997), and Warren (1997).

### 2.2.2 Contributions of Cooperative Enterprise Literature

As this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of gender power relations and differences in the cooperative enterprise, a good starting point is the perspective of the literature on cooperative enterprises. Craig (1993)'s *The Nature of Cooperation* has studied women's empowerment in terms of the history of several cooperatives and their extant social inequalities. He contends that 'power' is

... not only understood as something groups of individuals have; rather, it is a social relationship between groups that determine access to, use of, and control over the basic material and ideological resources in society. Fundamentally, then empowerment is a process aimed at consolidating, maintaining or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular context (1993: 51).

The implication of this definition is that 'power' is socially contextualized between people in communities. I suggest, however, that limiting the analysis to this standpoint is misleading. Certainly, from the perspective of literature on cooperative enterprises, cooperatives are seen to empower people. Interestingly, while in an earlier study Craig states that within cooperatives power has gravitated towards management, and by extension of the gendered skill base, to men rather than women (Craig and Steinhoff 1990: 51), such a conceptualization of power leads to measuring it simplistically in terms of the distribution of access of men and women to goods and services in the short term.

The issues of knowledge and authority in cooperative processes are consequently ignored, as are the long-term implications for gender power relations. Moreover, other studies, such as Mayoux (1993, 1995a, 1995b)'s work on mixed-gender cooperatives, find that empowerment claims are false, arguing that increased participation (thought to bring about empowerment) mostly increases women's workload and offers no significant increase in control over income or other benefits. These findings correspond with other work on participatory structures, such as Mosse (1994)'s study of the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) process, in



which he argues that 'structural' gender relations of knowledge and authority are central to understanding differences in participation.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is safe to state that the trope of 'power' for the literature on cooperative enterprises is in fact limited to *consumer* power.<sup>11</sup> Moreover this line of thinking has much in common with 'green' thought, as it also assumes that there is gender neutrality implicit in cooperative enterprises, as decisions are usually predicated on issues of management and patterns of consumption. But such perspectives hide gender differences, which themselves conceal the consequent asymmetries of gender power relations.

Indeed, researchers, scholars and planners and most importantly, members of cooperatives are most often not aware, or not able to act on these gender power asymmetries. At a very basic level, creating such awareness helps to recognize that issues of management are usually deemed to be in the realm of men's activities thus reinforcing men's gender needs and strategic control. On the other hand, patterns of consumption are usually deemed to be in the realm of women's practices thus reinforcing women's practical gender needs for household and community subsistence. From a feminist perspective, 'strategic concerns' are about social positioning, and 'practical concerns' are about material conditions (Moser 1989; Young 1993; Rathgeber 1995). Institutionally, such practices often push issues of production and the use of resources away from women's participation, which in turn confers upon men the power to control the direction and functioning of cooperative enterprises.

Certainly women influence decisions and the functions of cooperative enterprises, however, asymmetries in the types of participation they undertake reveal gender power relations. For instance, despite empowering aspects such as 'flexible time' arrangements that favour women's labour participation in some mixed-gender cooperatives, in most cases, cooperative

enterprises are geared to full time paid labour involvement (CCA 1991; Theis and Ketilson 1994). Thus, although cooperative enterprises are deemed to empower members in terms of the material aspects of social sustainability (i.e. distributional issues of access and control), the above feminist critique of cooperative enterprise literature (and indirectly, 'green' thought), brings to the fore the ideological dimensions of such endeavors. This awareness is in turn relevant to understanding access to natural resources and economic opportunities.

### **2.2.3 Contributions of Development and Planning Literature**

Despite pointing out the importance of gender power relations, feminist contributions to cooperative (organizational) literature and community development are themselves problematic. For instance, the rubric of 'participatory development' - an umbrella term for many of these writings - has as a central tenet the aim of 'inclusion'. Yet, the nature of such 'inclusion' is often simply interpreted normatively against the idea that everyone must have access to 'development', not just men or 'outside' experts. Furthermore, such terms are often simply stated in order to make planning initiatives meet new expectations, rather than readily adapt to changing conditions and emerging issues.<sup>12</sup> While it is not within the scope of this thesis to elucidate the rationale of 'development' or 'planning', what follows is a discussion of how even feminist literature that is couched in development and planning tends to have difficulties with these contradictions and theoretical consequences.

For the sake of clarity and the purposes of this thesis, from a feminist perspective, gender/development literature includes 'Women in Development' (WID) writings as well as later critiques by 'Gender and Development' (GAD) theorists. This section focuses on these two

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<sup>11</sup> See Bold and Ketilson (1990) for further discussion.

branches to illustrate their shortcomings with regards to understanding knowledge and authority in context.

Premised upon studies such as Boserup (1970)'s classic *Women's Role in Economic Development*, WID began as a strategy to better 'integrate' women into male power structures, through improved access to development initiatives and resources, such as education and credit institutions. As progressive as the WID approach seemed at the time, it tended to put emphasis on providing women with opportunities to participate in male-defined and male-dominated social and economic structures. Increasingly, feminists began to question the assumptions implicit in these structures (see Beneria and Sen 1981). Of those critical of WID, such as radical ecofeminist Shiva (1989: 81), it is observed that:

[i]nsufficient and inadequate 'participation' in 'development' was not the cause of women's increasing underdevelopment. It was, rather, their enforced by asymmetric participation in it, by which they bore the costs but were excluded from the benefits, that was responsible.

This critique is echoed by Braidotti et al. (1994: 80), who writes that "... the demand for equity soon became tied to the notions of women as a valuable 'resource' to be 'harnessed' for economic development." By the mid-1980s, a transition in focus from the 'integration' of women into 'development', to women's empowerment and the recognition of gender power relations was embodied in the emerging framework of 'Gender and Development' (GAD). This approach emphasizes the importance of examining the gender division of labour in specific societies, and in particular, the "invisible" aspects of women's productive and reproductive work (Waring 1997), and the relation between these labour patterns and other aspects of gender inequality (Pearson 1992, Parpart 1993, Rathgeber 1995).

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<sup>12</sup> In the context of 'gender', Mies (1996: 354) comments that, "usually [gender is] just added on to whatever issue is being discussed or policy planned. Some feminists have characterized this method of filling in the 'gender aspect' (or, as I heard it once, the 'women's component') as 'add "gender" and stir'."

From a social change perspective, in the eyes of GAD, the 'Women in Development' (WID) perspective, while it focuses on 'access', occludes structural gender relations. This is evident from the perspective of planning literature, as Moser (1989) develops a gender 'needs' analysis based on practical and strategic differences, proposing that this is how women participate. Young (1993) critiques WID policies and programs by focusing on several case studies (agriculture, manufacturing and informal economy sectors) and develops a GAD framework upon which to base new endeavors. Interestingly, Ross and Usher (1986)'s study of community-based informal economies, points to the fact that the informal (or less formal) units of cooperatives are more akin to households than to firms in terms of the internal organization of work and social relationships. And MacGregor (1995: 39), in a feminist critique of the planning profession and related literatures, argues that

"[i]n the rationalist paradigm, other forms of knowledge and understanding are considered less legitimate than scientifically tested and technically-derived facts ... and these other forms of knowledge that lie outside the paradigm generally have been associated with feminine values and activities, such as intuition, experience and emotionality. In response, some feminists have proposed alternative theories of knowledge that specifically describe 'women's ways of knowing'."

What these nuances point to is the complexities of grasping the gendering of knowledge production. Kloppenborg (1991: 528) reviews feminist claims of knowledge production, arguing that:

it is the *locality* of such knowledge production which most completely intimates the many dimensions of its character. Such knowledge is *local* in the sense that it is derived from the direct experience of a labour process which is itself shaped and delimited by the distinctive characteristics of a particular place with a unique social and physical environment. (author's emphasis)

In Feldman and Welsh (1995: 39)'s critique of Kloppenborg (1991: 37)'s work, the authors situate local knowledge in the complexity of the household and the agricultural-labor process of small family farms rather than simply in locality. Poignantly, their work conveys "...

how differential power relations are embodied in this division of labour and thus confer on women less active participation in decisions regarding production choices.” From a GAD perspective, Rathgeber (1993: 220) comments on ‘expert’ knowledge in that:

[w]hile a romanticization of the past is undesirable, it has become increasingly clear that the wholesale rejection of community-based knowledge and practices advocated by development ‘experts’ in the past, was not in the best interest of indigenous peoples nor indeed, compatible with the concept of sustainable development. As custodians of large segments of traditional knowledge, women suffered disproportionately from this rejection since their bases of authority were eroded or eliminated and for the most part were not replaced with new sources of authority.

Men’s knowledge, usually seen as ‘expert knowledge’ in planning efforts, has direct relevance to the study of the MICRC as women and men’s local, historical, and ecological knowledges have a gendered quality to them. Authority is embodied in those involved in the activities that were central to the issues being discussed, and in large measure, the interpretation of the validity of particular knowledges was central to guiding peoples and members perceptions and motivations with regards to participation. This line of inquiry finds impetus in Vosko and Bueckert (1994)’s study *Women in Port McNeill and the Vancouver Island Land Use Plan*. Their work focuses on women’s perspectives and strategies for enabling sustainable local economic development on the North Island. Due to the perceived exclusion of women’s issues in a regional planning process, their report was the product of a series of focus group sessions with women in Port McNeill, British Columbia. The findings and recommendations explicitly state the necessity of incorporating women’s knowledge and expertise in future processes of land use planning, economic development and environmental policy-making.

In terms of similarities, feminist development and planning literatures harbour the same limitations as cooperative literature. Their foci are problematic, as feminist development and planning literature also limit themselves to the confines of initiatives, and thus also to the short

term. Furthermore, akin to 'green' literature, development and planning literature aims to integrate women in development, which as a result, increases women's workloads, and limits the efficacy of their participation at the outset. This thesis argues that it is important to not take lightly these limitations and thus critiques empowerment literature to discern how these similarities influence the reading of structural power relations with respect to cooperative enterprises and the use of resources.

#### **2.2.4 A Cross-Community Review of Cooperative Enterprises and Gender Studies Contributions**

The accepted view that cooperatives embody a single shared subjectivity and gender neutrality has been challenged from a number of directions, most poignantly by feminists. The feminist movement strives to enhance women's status and promote equality between the sexes. One of the basic assumptions underlying this movement is that power differences exist between women and men.

Theories of cooperative behaviour in mixed-gender settings tend to highlight and reinforce the presumed gender determinism of men's and women's behaviours in cooperative activities. Garza and Borchert (1990), for example, argue that gender identities encourage men to compete and women to cooperate, regardless of an organization's gender composition.<sup>13</sup> Intersecting with this argument is the conceptualization of gender-specific organizational affinities, which couple men with hierarchical corporate environments and women with democratic cooperative enterprises.<sup>14</sup> Albeit, this particular theoretical privileging of gender and

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<sup>13</sup> For empirical work specific to cooperative organizations, a report prepared by the Centre for Research of European Women (CREW) indicates that internal competition and organizational hierarchy were evident in only a few cases of female-oriented cooperatives studied: those that included male employees (1986: 11).

<sup>14</sup> Take for instance, body-based or essentialist arguments in some ecofeminist literature (cultural/radical ecofeminism, in particular) which identify women as more likely than men to care about nature and better

certain organizational structures is fiercely critiqued as being essentialist as well as problematic in that it favours both men's and women's homogeneous affiliations (Oerton 1996: 24).

More specifically, with regards to the cooperative enterprise, many feminists proclaim that the cooperative is an empowering economic institution for women.<sup>15</sup> During the 1970s and early 1980s, feminism was drawn to the transformative potential of the cooperative enterprise - a structure supposedly able to address (and eventually reduce or eliminate) class, race and gender inequalities, particularly in paid and unpaid labour (Oerton 1996: 5). A reciprocal cross-fertilization between the women's movement and the cooperative movement has continued to this day. Studies on women's housing, retail and banking cooperatives directly (and indirectly) illustrate this parallel between feminism and cooperatives.<sup>16</sup>

In Canada, the cooperative housing sector has had a positive influence for women in terms of impacts and initiatives (Simon 1986; Conn 1990; Yasmeen 1990; Theis and Ketilson 1994). The same can also be said of the consumer cooperative movement in Japan (Craig and Steinhoff 1990) as well as women's banking circles and credit cooperatives in developing nations (Gladden 1992; Albee 1996; Chen 1999). Other studies show the cooperative to be a sustainable economic alternative providing economic opportunities for women in resource-dependent

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prepared to do so than men. Critics of this woman-nature nexus, such as Biehl (1991) and Eckersley (1992), suggest that the gender-typing of environmentalism does *not* liberate women, rather it acts as an inhibitor to the emancipatory process. Furthermore, Jackson's (1993, 1994, 1995) gender analysis of different environmentalisms finds that women's environmental relations and abilities to achieve sustainability should not be understood in isolation from men's. She argues that not all women 'naturally' care for the environment, and that men may also have a vested interest in the health of the planet. See Liepins (1998) for a thorough discussion of the implications.

<sup>15</sup> Due to the fragmented and varied nature of empowerment theory, I wish to clarify here that I am referring to 'embedded individual' empowerment, characterized as empowerment through organizational participation (Rocha 1997: 35-36). This is different from the 'socio-political', or individual/community empowerment 'green' theorists tend to assume in cooperatives (discussed earlier in this chapter). For research specifically on 'embedded individual' empowerment through cooperative participation, see Bold and Ketilson (1990).

<sup>16</sup> The link between feminism and cooperative theory is not necessarily a recent phenomenon (Mellor et al. 1988). Dating as far back as nineteenth-century utopian socialist writings by Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, it is possible to locate 'feminist' critiques of the evils of competitive capitalism. Furthermore, their works acknowledge and emphasize the contributions of domestic labour in cooperative communities, also a significant aspect of feminist theory.

communities. For instance, Campbell (1996) demonstrates that a women's brazil nut cooperative provides women with access to and control over their own cash income as well as increases their decision-making power within the household. And Rubinoff's (1999) study of Goan fisherwomen's small, cooperative marketing groups also indicates that women achieve economic success, increased status, and reinforced egalitarian gender relations in Goan fishing households. This does not mean, however, that women's cooperatives always challenge gender (i.e. masculinist) norms and institutions.

In Wacjman's (1983) study of Fakenham Enterprises, a women's shoe manufacturing cooperative in Norfolk, U.K., financial difficulty and ideological conflict within the cooperative served to reinforce the masculinist notion of the 'businessman' amongst its membership. This refers to the essentialist argument which positions men as somehow better able to compete, and secure the successful survival of an enterprise (Oerton 1996: 24). Consequently, as Wacjman (1983: 182) illustrates,

the cooperative's ultimate demise left the women embittered and pessimistic about the possibilities for change. Whatever the potential for political radicalisation in a worker-controlled enterprise, a failed attempt of this kind may actually increase workers' sense of powerlessness.

Thus contradicting the many positive images of women participating in single-sex cooperatives, Wacjman's portrait of powerlessness at Fakenham resists and destabilizes assumptions of gender and empowerment in cooperative contexts.

Further rethinking of these assumptions is also echoed in studies of mixed-gender cooperatives. For years, development planners (particularly in the so-called 'third world') perceived the cooperative to be an effective strategy for promoting women's participation in agricultural and development initiatives. This approach, otherwise known as 'women in development' (WID), applied a liberal feminist framework to development, seeking to integrate



women into male power structures in order for development to be more effective.<sup>17</sup> It has been noted in several studies of women's participation in mixed-gender cooperatives, that although women may participate in cooperatives through their attendance figures, they do not gain access to the decision-making process or join in discussions regarding cooperative enterprises. For example, in the case of the Integrated Social Forestry Program of Cebu, in the Philippines, although women attended meetings, they seldom participated in the discussion (Mehra 1993).

Most pertinent to this thesis are the following contributions. Mayoux (1993) critiques feminist participatory strategies that ignore the fact that women and men have different needs and priorities in cooperatives because of the division of labour and power structures, both within the family and within society. Mayoux (1995a) argues that cooperatives by themselves do not assure gender inequalities will be addressed. Mayoux (1995b) argues that gender inequalities in resources, time availability and power, influences the activities, priorities and framework of participatory projects just as much as 'top-down' development and market activities. Mayoux primarily bases her arguments from her own research of co-operatives in India, Nicaragua, and Kenya. She notes that statistics on co-operative and peasant movements indicate a continuing marginalization of women in mixed-sex participatory organizations.

Michels (1968)'s observation of the inherently hierarchical structure of organizations is perhaps the most frequently stated case against the possibility of successful cooperatives, which can also be carried over to social sustainability arguments. He remarks, "[i]t is organization which gives birth to the domination of the elected over the electors, of the mandatories over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization says oligarchy" (Michels

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<sup>17</sup> Ester Boserup's (1970) empirical study of women's invisible, yet productive, roles in the development process, helped to establish the precepts upon which WID policies are based. It was also at this time that the United Nations declared 1976 to 1985 to be the 'Decade for Women', in which international planning and policy circles were to focus on increasing women's access to education, employment, and material benefits such as land and credit.

1968: 15). Furthermore, in *Beyond Hierarchy: Gender, Sexuality and the Social Economy*, Oerton (1996) critiques the assumption that women in single-sex and mixed-gender cooperatives will be able to overcome obstacles normally found in more hierarchical organizations, and will therefore enjoy equality with their men counterparts. From her study of various cooperatives in Britain, Oerton (1996: 83) argues that

... workers in flatter organizations are highly circumscribed by gender and sexuality, and that working in a cooperative or collective does not offer women or men much opportunity to circumvent such intractable constraints ... Furthermore, it has been seen that the positioning of women as subordinate arises not simply from the way that women's roles as wives and mothers are constructed within patriarchal family households, but also because of the gendering and sexualizing processes and practices that are to be found in the labour market *and in organizations*, whether they are sites of formal hierarchy or not.

This analysis suggests that structural and discursive processes and practices, which position women and men in unequal power relations, shape gendered experiences in the cooperative in ways that reflect and reinforce men's power positions vis-à-vis women. It also points to avenues of change in "that both women and men workers in flatter organizations can strategically and symbolically subvert gendered and sexualized power relations, albeit in very different ways" (Oerton 1996: 86), which is directly relevant to this thesis.

### **2.3 Linking Cooperative Enterprises and Social Sustainability: A Feminist Critique**

In Callenbach (1975)'s *Ecotopia*, cooperative enterprises figure within a competitive market system and an ecologically regulated society. Callenbach (1975: 118-119) describes how the Ecotopian economy operates under competitive market principles:

Ecotopian enterprises generally behave much like capitalist enterprises: they compete with each other, and seek to increase sales and maximize profits, although they are hampered by a variety of ecological regulations...However, the fact that the members of an enterprise actually own it jointly (each with one vote) puts certain inherent limits on what these enterprises do.

The limitations that Callenbach evokes are related to a desire on the part of the members to keep the size of their organization below 300 members, and trade-off higher production and profits against more congenial working conditions and relations. For Callenbach, that these decisions are made democratically, based on members' needs and interests, leads most green writers to conclude that the cooperative enterprise is a socially sustainable enterprise.

This assumption, however, is problematic. Although green theories link cooperatives with issues of social equity and empowerment (specifically at the local community level), their articulation with gender has largely been ignored. For example, the bioregionalist Sale (1991) has discussed workplace democracy and community control in his vision of an ecological and participatory society. And Plant and Plant (1992) remark that the pursuit of 'equilibrio', or harmony, in the Mondragon cooperative complex, is a vital process that "balances a growing community of interests, from the individual to the community and the environment" (Plant and Plant 1992: 8). Yet, while Bradley and Gelb (1983: 64) have indicated that the success of Mondragon is partly due to the highly integrated nature of the local community, it is primarily the 'Basqueness' of Mondragon that has determined its success and consequently a barrier to its replication." Moreover, Benello (in Krimerman et al. 1992: 96) states that:

[p]art of the answer lies in the unique culture of the Basque region. Members of the staff of Mondragon with whom I have talked... have doubts about whether the model can be exported, arguing that the cohesiveness and communitarian traditions of the Basque culture alone make it possible.

Surprisingly, these authors have made no explicit mention of the politics of gender interests or needs within the cooperative enterprise. Though cooperatives help integrate women into the labour market, they only tend to reproduce women's asymmetrical position in terms of employment status compared to men. For example, in perhaps that most well-known mixed-gender system of industrial cooperatives - Mondragon - women fare somewhat better in

cooperative than in private firms in terms of employment, earning, and job security. However, women's position in non capitalist workplaces is as disadvantaged as in capitalist workplaces (Hacker and Elcorobairutia 1987; Hacker 1988). This research demonstrates that women workers in the Mondragon complex of industrial cooperatives remain at the bottom of pay and occupational hierarchies. In most cases, power gravitates to management (men) and members, particularly women members, are largely irrelevant and powerless.

In Hacker and Elcorobairutia (1987)'s and Hacker (1998)'s studies of Mondragon, the argument is made that gender stratification is also apparent or enhanced through technical knowledge and the use of technologies. It is argued that, as most technology and administrative apparatus has origins in patriarchal military institutions, the hierarchical organization of technology stands in contradiction to the ideology and core elements of cooperative structure. Indeed, access to technological knowledge and skills are gendered, and this leads to gender stratification in other parts of the cooperative's processes.

The eco-anarchist or social ecologist does not exclude gender but takes an antagonist perspective, as authors like Bookchin (1982) and Benello (in Krimerman et al. 1992) promote cooperatives as inherently anti-hierarchical organizations. In Benello's classic essay, 'Participatory Democracy and the Dilemma of Change' (1969), he states that "work [needs] to be re-defined so as to be made meaningful, by allowing everyone involved a say in what is produced, how it produced, and how income from production is used" (in Krimerman et al. 1992: 42).

In these works, there is a tendency to uncritically assume the cooperative enterprise to be equitable and empowering for all. Some do advocate decentralization (e.g. communes and communal services) and alternative forms of organization based on non-hierarchical social relationships. But theorists argue that by adopting small, community-scale social arrangements

which foster participatory democracy and decision-making based on consensus, the decisions are made from the lived experience of the community.

More pertinent work is found in the ecofeminist movement which proposes to live in harmony rather than in hierarchy with nature and humanity (see, Adair and Howell 1989; King 1989; Plant 1989; Hessing 1993). They support alternatives that favour cooperative, non-hierarchical, organic and decentralized forms of social organization, in particular, cooperative enterprises managed by women. For instance, radical ecofeminists, like Mies (1996, 1997), suggest that producer-consumer cooperatives are based on a different concept of labour, within the confines of a 'new moral economy'. This schema aims not only to reduce ecologically dangerous agricultural inputs such as pesticides, but also to guarantee a regular income to small producers (specifically women). Yet, while ecofeminists support women in cooperatives, their focus tends to be only on single-sex (women-only) organizations. Furthermore, ecofeminists tend to thoroughly 'essentialize' women with stereotypical assertions of women's cooperative behaviour - i.e. women are more cooperative and men are more competitive.<sup>18</sup>

#### **2.4 Contextualizing Theoretical Contributions with 'Situated Knowledge and Authority' Research**

Focusing specifically on women's labour - especially caring labour and manual labour - Hartsock (1997) suggests that the character of labour structures and shapes one's understanding of their surroundings. While I likewise argue that labour develops particular knowledges, I do not feel comfortable placing epistemic superiority on women's knowledge over men's knowledge in the MICRC as other feminists have done (see Merchant 1980). Informed by her position as a non-Western feminist, Narayan (1989: 268) critiques such Anglo-American feminist epistemologies

when she writes that "[t]he thesis that oppression may bestow an epistemic advantage should not tempt us in the direction of idealizing or romanticizing oppression and blind us to its real material and psychic deprivations." I thus argue throughout this thesis that men and women's distinctive experiences and positions in a gendered society create certain 'situated knowledges' based on one of the central notions of feminist epistemology, namely, 'experience'.

Situated knowledge is proposed as "a substitute for decontextualized, disembodied, ungendered, 'objective knowledge'" (Duncan 1996: 3). Situated knowledge theory, in particular, is associated with the work of Haraway (1988) and Harding (1987, 1991). Haraway (1988) argues for a politics of location and insists that all knowledge claims are partial and situated: "[f]eminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object" (Haraway 1988: 583). It recognizes the specificity (e.g. geographical, historical, social) of the conditions of production of knowledge claims. Following such an approach, Sachs (1994: 119) studies women's environmental activism and argues that:

... women have particular standpoints based on the gender division of labour in rural areas and the particular forms that sexual domination assumes in such areas. Rural women do not have a singular standpoint, their knowledge is situated in their localities and daily activities.

With particular attention to knowledge, many ecofeminists perceive women as the one's in charge of the reproduction of local knowledge in communities. Banuri and Marglin (1993: 11) state that "[t]he conservation of local knowledges and systems of value in modernizing societies is generally believed to have been entrusted to women who are often viewed as the source of cultural continuity in society." This view is rejoined by Mosse (1994: 514)'s findings on participatory structures as he writes that "[a] 'systematic hierarchization' condemns women's

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<sup>18</sup> Essentialism is here understood as a biologically deterministic view of women that posits their needs as secondary to socially constructed imperatives premised on a linear interpretation of biological functions

interventions and knowledge to the unofficial, private, domestic - an order equally internalized and expressed by women themselves."

Hartsock (1997)'s approach to grappling with knowledge favours a 'sexual division of labour' instead of a 'gender division of labour' because she feels that divisions of labour cannot be reduced to purely social dimensions, and because of the need to acknowledge the biological component of human existence. Though I am critical of this approach because it privileges female knowledge, which essentially replaces one hegemony with another, I concur with her recognition that:

... in any society with systematically divergent practical activities, one should expect the growth of logically divergent world views. That is, each division of labour, whether by gender or class, can be expected to have consequences for knowledge.

Thus when studying gendered knowledge "[o]n the basis of an account of the sexual division of labour, one should be able to begin to explore the oppositions and differences between women's and men's activity and their consequences for epistemology" (Hartsock 1997: 221).

Ecofeminist writers also focus on situated knowledges, but usually take a similar stance to Hartsock's feminist standpoint theory, which privileges women's knowledge because of women's historical and social position as the 'oppressed', and in which I am hesitant to use as the basis of my arguments. It is problematic because it simply replaces one system of knowledge with another. Similar to Hartsock (1997)'s approach, Curtin (1997: 88), takes her inspiration from feminist standpoint theory and writes that

practices, as I understand them, are much more than sets of individual actions. They are fundamental ways of categorizing, experiencing, and valuing the world. In turn, the requirements of a practice generate distinctive forms of knowledge ... epistemic attitudes derive from doings.

All in all, cooperative enterprises enable women to overcome obstacles and inequalities that are more common in hierarchical organizations, the labour market, and society, in general.

In practice though, as I will elaborate, the cooperative enterprise is much more conditioned, shaped and influenced by gender power relations than assumed. As Craig (1993: 217) argues, the cooperative enterprise is a male institution in a patriarchal world that gives little consideration to the differences (e.g. in access and control) between gender. Although cooperatives may have policies of equity and equal opportunities for both men and women, their practices may differ. In order to expose and analyze the gender dynamics of women and men's differential position in cooperatives, it is necessary to examine issues of gendered participation, labour, authority, and knowledge. This research compares men and women's experiences in the cooperative enterprise on Malcolm Island. In later chapters, I will elucidate these intricacies, moving through theory and praxis.

To address the shortcomings evoked above, and in light of the ideas stemming from 'situated knowledge', I build my analysis upon women's lives and experiences, by focusing on divisions of labour in the household, the community, and the cooperative. I draw upon these works and develop an analysis based on gender divisions of labour, knowledge and authority. I study the relation between labour patterns and other aspects of gender inequality. Namely, drawing upon a labour-knowledge-authority framework, I analyze men's and women's situated activities and knowledges, and their participatory impact upon the empowerment transacted in the cooperative enterprise.



## CHAPTER THREE

### **(Dis)Locating Power Relations: Feminist Research and Methods**

#### **3.1 Methodological Underpinnings of Feminist Research**

Like other feminist scholarship that has interrogated the highly abstracted and singular representations of the cooperative enterprise through the analysis of gender power relations, this study focuses on women members in the cooperative enterprise, and compares them vis-à-vis their male counterparts. Such research helps to determine the extent to which gendered practices and processes are crucial in affecting members' experiences of equity (access to participation) and empowerment (impact of participation) in cooperatives. This approach enables alternative representations of the cooperative enterprise to emerge, and thereby informs a re-conceptualization of the theoretical understanding of cooperatives and social sustainability in 'green' thought.

This chapter outlines the qualitative research process underlying my analysis of gender and social sustainability. Its purpose is to introduce the research methodology that infuses the case study of the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative (MICRC). In the first section, I describe the design strategy, and rationale. Next, I review the data collection methods and analytic procedures employed for the comparison of theory with praxis. Finally, I touch upon issues of power relations within research (i.e. between the researcher and the researched), concluding with a short discussion on the importance of self-reflexivity in feminist research, illustrated by my own fieldwork.

### 3.2 On the Road to Research: Defining a Strategy

The first consideration of this methodology is to determine the most suitable research design and strategy for the purpose of conducting qualitative research. This decision provides a "road map" from which to systematically explore the phenomenon of interest (Marshall and Rossman 1995: 40). Given that I wish to comprehend existing social relations within a mixed-gender, community resource cooperative enterprise, and that this research is based on "complex social phenomena" in a contemporary, "real-life context," a single-case study is preferable (Yin 1994: 13). This methodology allows me to assemble empirical evidence within a framework that criticizes 'green' cooperative thought. In essence, this thesis' research strategy leads to challenging the validity and reliability of social sustainability claims implicit in green writing.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the fairly narrowly focused geographical (case study) context of my research, the selection of an appropriate site was limited by design to British Columbia (BC), Canada, as discussed in chapter one (see also Figure 1). During the summer of 1997, while working as a research assistant on northern Vancouver Island, British Columbia, I was serendipitously introduced to the community of Malcolm Island. After speaking with several residents on Malcolm Island, I was made aware of an attempt to establish a community forest to be managed by the MICRC, and I thus chose to study the MICRC because of its proclivity towards a critical exploration of 'green' thought.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, quite exceptional to this case study is Malcolm Island's cooperative history. In 1901, a group of Finnish immigrants formed a utopian socialist settlement on Malcolm Island, following many of the ideals that characterize social sustainability (e.g. local self-sufficiency, social equity and justice, mutual aid, and sustainable livelihoods). Therefore, the Island

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there is no 'typical' mixed-gender, community resource cooperative; therefore, the specific findings of this empirical research are limited to my case study site. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), by providing a detailed description of the study's context - which I attempt to do in both this chapter and chapter four - a certain type of transferability is envisaged. This is also argued by Yin (1994), who distinguishes between logical generalization (possible through case study methodologies) and statistical generalization.

community offered both a present and past upon which to test my contentions. Furthermore, the MICRC membership represents a range of interests, from 'resource-extraction' attitudes to socialist and environmentalist points of view. There is thus a high probability that a rich mix of people, history, interactions, and values present the MICRC to be a suitable and desirable case study site for research on social sustainability in a mixed-gender, community resource cooperative enterprise.

### **3.3 Data Collection: Process, Extent, and Limits**

In light of accepted wisdom about generating 'facts', opinions, and insights for analysis of gender equity and empowerment, data from the MICRC membership and the community of Malcolm Island were collected using a variety of methodological procedures and information gathering techniques (Yin 1994). This study is based on in-depth interviews of twenty MICRC members and nine local community organization representatives, as guided by feminist research methods that focus on the social context and participants' lived experiences (Reinharz 1992). In addition, I conducted a review of community documents and archival records. By drawing upon these data sources, I found that both past and present cooperative experiences and community issues emerged, and that 'green' literature could be challenged on its occlusion of gender power relations.

In the first phase of data collection, performed in early February 1998, I examined a series of background materials on the history and evolution of Malcolm Island. Specifically, I consulted transcripts of oral history tapes; old photo albums and scrapbooks; original and

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the 'Island' refers to Malcolm Island, BC.

translated sections of the Aika newspaper;<sup>3</sup> and community-based journal articles, all available at the Sointula community museum: also known as 'Grandma's Attic'.

I later returned in June 1998, to collect MICRC documents (i.e. minutes of meetings; letters to government officials; and the proposal for consideration of a community forest on Malcolm Island), other studies of Malcolm Island, and clippings from the local community newspaper, the 'Island Echo'.<sup>4</sup>

The more substantive part of my field research, however, took place in August and September 1998. This third phase of data collection focused on interviewing local community and MICRC members. The aim was to gain a thorough understanding of their lives, experiences and perceptions of the community, with regards to their relations to the MICRC.<sup>5</sup> In total, twenty-nine individuals were interviewed over the two-month period: ten female MICRC members, ten male MICRC members, and nine knowledgeable representatives of local community and regional organizations.<sup>6</sup>

The intent of my study was *not* to secure a probability sample that would generate statistically generalizable results; rather, a purposive non-probabilistic sampling strategy was chosen in order to interview a set of MICRC members who reflected a range of potentially

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<sup>3</sup> First published on May 6, 1901, the Aika (which is Finnish for 'time') was the first Canadian-Finnish language periodical. It was conceptualized, edited and published by Matti Kurrika, the visionary leader of Malcolm Island's early utopian socialist settlement, with articles largely drawing upon his own personal ideals (utopian socialism, Tolstoyism and theosophy) and their application to the experimental community at Sointula, Malcolm Island. For cogent excerpts see Halminen's (1936) history of Sointula (written in Finnish) and its translation in Salo (1978)'s MA thesis on the millenarian nature of Sointula in the early twentieth century.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to several individuals for making much of this material available. In particular, I would like to thank Annemarie Koch, Mary Murphy, and Debbie Blair for their assistance.

<sup>5</sup> Although the MICRC is the primary focus of this study, I triangulated my data with supplemental information on other Malcolm Island cooperatives, namely the Sointula Cooperative Store, the Sointula Credit Union, the now defunct Treising Reforestation Cooperative, and a short-lived fishing cooperative in the late-1940s. I wanted to identify interviewees' patronage and / or experiences with these other locally based cooperatives; and establish a sense of, as well as reasons for, Malcolm Island's cooperative tradition.

<sup>6</sup> The third set of interviews included: a director of the Interacting Resource Society (IRS); a Mount Waddington Community Resource Board representative; the Mount Waddington Regional District (MWRD) Economic Development Officer; the General Manager of the Sointula Credit Union; the General Manager of the Sointula Cooperative Store; a Malcolm Island Environmental Protection Society (MIEPS) representative; a former member of the Treising Reforestation Cooperative; a North Island College - Sointula campus representative, and a former member of the Sointula fishing cooperative that operated from 1945 to 1948.

important attributes.<sup>7</sup> During the initial stage of obtaining access for the interviews, I made direct telephone contact with the MICRC chairperson, whom I had met the previous summer and with whom I had already discussed my research.<sup>8</sup> A meeting was then organized to introduce myself to the four other directors and to elicit their interest and cooperation. Following this meeting, an introductory letter (see Appendix I) was sent through a MICRC mail out to its membership, outlining the aims of my research, requesting their assistance, and promising confidentiality. A similar letter was also distributed to local community and regional organizations (see Appendix II).

Research participants were selected through a process of chain referral, or what is also known as 'snowball' or 'network' sampling. This technique required that each MICRC member interviewed suggest other potential participants for the study. It is acknowledged that this sampling procedure may have led to problems of representation of the MICRC (Babbie 1994). In particular, my reliance upon members' networks may have produced a biased sampling of specific populations within the cooperative. As a corollary, 'others' outside those networks may not have been interviewed. There is also the possibility that my 'original' research participants may have steered me towards only those members they wanted me to interview. However, I would argue that the sample of twenty MICRC members is a heterogeneous cross-section of the cooperative (e.g. forestry interests, environmentalists, fishers, non-natural resource related professionals, homemakers, community volunteers, longstanding Finnish residents, 'newcomers' to the Island, etc.),<sup>9</sup> that offers ample opportunity to challenge the 'green' assumption that there is a universal cooperative member needs to be challenged.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Purposive' or 'judgmental' non-probability sampling is a method in which the researcher uses his or her own judgement to select sample members (Babbie 1994).

<sup>8</sup> As mentioned earlier, in the summer of 1997, I was a research assistant for the 'North Island' segment of Dr. Maureen Reed's study, 'Women Confronting Economic Transition in Forestry Communities'. It was during the course of this project that I became acquainted with the individual in question.

<sup>9</sup> By no means am I suggesting that my sampling design is any more representative of the MICRC.

In general, each MICRC interview lasted about an hour, although a few took considerably longer (up to three hours). Most were held in the interviewee's home, though some were conducted either at a local café, the participant's workplace, or my research base in Sointula. Prior to each interview, MICRC members were instructed that participation was voluntary and that all information they provided would be kept strictly confidential. In addition, it was explained that they did not have to answer any awkward question(s) and that they could terminate the interview at any time. These guidelines were also printed on the consent form that respondents were asked to sign before each interview. While respondents were also asked beforehand if they objected to being tape-recorded, only one requested that she not be recorded. Ultimately, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format that provided enough flexibility to explore not only pre-determined questions and themes, but also topics which originated with the research participants themselves (see Appendix III). This afforded an opening for the finer nuances of MICRC members' experiences to emerge.

In addition, data were also collected through nine interviews with local community and regional organizations. In contrast to the MICRC interviews, these were focused on gathering general information about the mandate of each organization, its history, and its role in the community, and were not tape-recorded. Finally, additional community data were also gleaned from more informal methods, such as listening to the concerns of fishermen when (former) BC Fisheries minister, Dennis Strieffell, visited Sointula; and conversing with local residents over tea and coffee.

Arguably, a large-scale sample mail survey of MICRC members using structured questionnaires would have been less time-consuming. However, mail surveys on Malcolm Island have had disappointingly low response rates.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Clark (1996)'s Malcolm Island community forest feasibility study achieved an eight percent return rate, as only twenty-

eight of three hundred and fifty questionnaires distributed to all households were returned. Likewise, in 1997, sixteen out of a possible three hundred and fifty questionnaires were returned for Renwick & Associates and M Marketing Consulting (1998)'s viability study of a Sointula food processing facility (a five percent return rate). In both cases, researchers had better success with face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and / or community focus groups.<sup>11</sup> However, Murphy (1997)'s research elicited a twenty-nine percent response. This higher response rate is likely explained by the fact that she is a long-time Malcolm Island resident, and that in many cases the survey was administered in person. Given this historical response fatigue and the time constraints of my fieldwork, I decided to forego the use of a mail survey questionnaire.

### **3.4 Discussing the Data Specific Analytical Method**

Since the purpose of this case study is to determine the extent to which gender power relations affect MICRC members' experiences of equity and empowerment in the cooperative, an analytical method was required that would lead to a better understanding of these phenomena.

Qualitative data, however, do not readily fall into "fixed formulas" of analyses (Yin 1994: 102). The insights of this thesis thus primarily rely on the subjective interpretations I have drawn from the empirical data available. By 'pattern-matching' (Patton 1990; Miles and Huberman 1994) the MICRC qualitative data with social sustainability claims found in green literature as well as feminist research on cooperatives, issues of gender - in particular, gendered participation, gendered labour, gendered authority and gendered knowledge(s) - were analyzed.

Inasmuch as the experiences of female MICRC members conform to the experiences of male MICRC members, then 'green' social sustainability arguments are upheld. Concurrently, if

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<sup>10</sup> According to Babbie (1994), mail survey response rates should aim to be at least fifty percent.

obvious inequalities are evident between female and male MICRC members, then gendered practices and processes do significantly affect equity and empowerment, and green cooperative assumptions will need to be revised.

In order to accomplish gender analysis, I first semi-transcribed field notes from the tape-recorded conversations, selecting phrases that either connected with previous literature or suggested alternative patterns of interest. These field notes were then read through and coded using various descriptors and themes from 'green' and feminist discourses, as well as those that emerged from the interviews themselves. I transferred this coded field data onto color-coded index cards, based on a categorization of 'between gender' and 'within gender'. This method aims to reflect a sensitivity to the issues of commonality and distinctiveness, amongst and between, the female and male members in the cooperative, which I surmised would provide some insights into the varied experiences and perspectives of gender. I thus sorted through the cards to identify salient themes and recurring patterns, and organized the information in a gender analysis matrix.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, I engaged the data (the reality of social phenomena) with 'green' and feminist cooperative ideas (theory), in order to develop an understanding and assessment of gender and social sustainability in the cooperative enterprise. This assessment is the subject matter of chapter five, which focuses on gender equity and participation in the MICRC, and chapter six, which highlights the issue of gender empowerment, examining the practices and processes of labour, authority, and knowledge in the MICRC.

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<sup>11</sup> In Clark (1996)'s study, forty-two individuals were personally interviewed and twenty people attended a 'community input' workshop. And, in Renwick & Associates and M Marketing Consulting (1998)'s study, eighteen local entrepreneurs were personally interviewed and fifty-nine Sointula residents agreed to a telephone survey.

<sup>12</sup> For practical discussions of gender analysis tools and frameworks, see Rao et al. (1991), Ostergaard (1992), and Thomas-Slayter et al. (1993).



### 3.5 Feminist Research and Fieldwork Reflexivity

In (dis)locating previous received (read masculinist) notions of the "disembodied, disinterested Cartesian observer" (Duncan 1996: 2),<sup>13</sup> many feminists have sought to re-articulate traditional concepts and relations of power in social scientific research and fieldwork (Harding 1987, 1991; Haraway 1988; McDowell 1988, 1992; Reihartz 1992; England 1994; Gilbert 1994; Katz 1994; Kobayashi 1994; Nast 1994; Staeheli and Lawson 1994; Code 1995; Alcoff 1996; Fortmann 1996; Gibson-Graham 1996b; Sparke 1996; Hartsock 1997). As a result, 'reflexivity' has become an essential feature of the feminist research process (Rose 1997).

The implication is that there is a conscious attempt by the researcher to render explicit the processes by which the data were produced. From this perspective, a researcher's gender, race, class, age, culture, etc., and perhaps how s/he suspects that this has shaped the research project, need to be detailed explicitly. Harding (1987: 9) observes that "... the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests." Before moving on to the analytical part of the thesis I attempt here to self-consciously reflect upon my own research and fieldwork on Malcolm Island.

As with other settlements, many resource-based communities are challenged by significant changes in all areas of community life. One of the most important changes is the decline or disappearance of traditional economic sectors, whether due to environmental mismanagement (e.g. over-harvesting), government regulation, restructuring of resource industries or all of these (and other factors) combined. Several years ago, I became convinced

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<sup>13</sup> Here, Duncan is referring to the dominant paradigm of universal and impartial scientific knowledge (usually based on white, bourgeois, heterosexual males), that has (until recently) been left unquestioned within most social research traditions. Instead, as she argues, knowledge must be understood as "embodied, engendered and embedded in the material context of place and space" (1996: 1). Similar feminist ideas are expressed in Harding (1987, 1991)'s work on 'standpoint theory' and Haraway (1988)'s concept of 'situated knowledge'. Other epistemic critiques of scientific rationalism can also be found in new philosophy and / or sociology of science debates. See, for example, Latour (1987) and Woolgar (1988).

that British Columbia's resource sector 'crisis' was not the fault of environmentalists but the "dark side" of an overbuilt system of resource extraction and production.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, I developed a scholarly interest in sustainable, community-based natural resource management. Having been trained as an economic / development geographer, and obtained a B.A. from Queen's University, I approached this subject matter from a community economics perspective, researching various 'green' alternatives to global corporate capitalism. I found limits in the way in which 'green' theorists simply tended to shift responsibility from the ('evil') multinational corporations down to ('good') community-based alternatives (e.g. the community resource cooperative) without considering social issues, like gendered access to, and control of, resources and decision-making processes.<sup>15</sup>

As a feminist and environmentalist, I felt that this omission of 'gender' not only condoned the patriarchal biases inherent within the resource industry, but it also dealt a significant blow to otherwise innovative 'green' ideas. It was with these realizations that I began my research on the issues of gender equity and empowerment in the cooperative enterprise, using the MICRC as an example.

From a practical perspective, as I had never lived on Malcolm Island, I immersed myself in the community as of August 9<sup>th</sup> 1998. I came to the Island as an 'outsider,' and left feeling somewhat the same.<sup>16</sup> In such a relatively short time frame and the fact that I was seen as being

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<sup>14</sup> Harrison (1994) uses the term, the 'dark side', to refer to the negative effects (e.g. unemployment, regional economic marginalization, environmental degradation, etc.) of flexible production systems, in general. In the context of BC resource industries, however, this image remains pertinent. Corporate strategies for greater 'flexibility' in terms of labour relations and production efficiency continue to focus on the profit perspective, which has, as M'Gonigle (1997: 19) comments, "long been underwritten by the twin subsidies of environmental erosion and social inequity."

<sup>15</sup> These issues were first introduced and explored in two graduate level courses with Dr. Maureen Reed: 'Environmental Sustainability' and 'Gender, Environment, and Development'.

<sup>16</sup> This was particularly striking in an introduction I had with one MICRC member early on in my fieldwork. While standing in the checkout line at the Sointula Co-op Store, the member introduced herself and indicated that she was interested in being interviewed for my project. We briefly discussed the logistics of getting together for an interview and I told her I would be contacting her soon to set up a date; but before we parted, I asked her how she knew that I was the researcher. Her response was (more or less) that "in this community you know who comes and goes, and what their business is for being here." As an 'outsider', I had become the latest attraction in town!

from the 'city', my 'outsider' position was to be somewhat expected. As Payne (1996) argues in an essay on the community study as a method, when a researcher conducts fieldwork that is outside of her/his 'home' territory, it may take several years in order to gain the acceptance of local community members. Despite developing a rapport with many MICRC members and other Malcolm Islanders, I was still basically positioned as an 'outsider'. As far as I can tell, however, being in such a position did not fundamentally impede my fieldwork. In fact, I found it actually enabled some participants to speak openly about rather political issues and actions with regards to the MICRC. For example, as one MICRC member commented, "the [MICRC] meetings you know are often so technical, so I usually have nothing to say ... I guess this [interview] makes up for it (laughs)". In earnest, the respondent felt he was saying more during this interview regarding ideas and issues in the MICRC, than he had ever voiced at any of the meetings. This remark, however, does not eliminate the fact that there were also several voluntary participants that seemed skeptical and slightly reticent when interviewed. These examples illustrate that building trust can be difficult; nonetheless, it is an intrinsic aspect of the role of the researcher, and is paramount to the success of any qualitative research project.

Specifically, research participants may often feel that academic research has little to offer them, and indeed may even do them harm (McDowell 1992; Marshall and Rossman 1995). To assuage these worries, each participant was assured at the beginning of the interview that no one but me would ever listen to the interview tapes. I also gave them the opportunity to ask any questions or provide any comments about my research or about me, both before and after the interview. These reassurances led to questions, which were in turn helpful in determining the limits of the research process, such as "why did you choose this research topic?" What is your stance on (certain issues)? And, who is funding your research? In discussing the last question, I found that the fact that I did not have a research grant seemed to imply that I had not been "co-opted" (Reinharz 1992: 29) and that perhaps I could be trusted. Nevertheless, it is difficult to

know what effects were produced by my being a fairly young (I was 23),<sup>17</sup> university-educated female researcher from Vancouver, particularly when I interviewed male MICRC members employed in primary industries, such as forestry or the fisheries.

Part of their standoffishness may be attributed to the response fatigue mentioned above, and to a research 'boom' in the region. Indeed, the impact that previous research on northern Vancouver Island may have had on my project is of concern. At least ten other studies have taken place on northern Vancouver Island since 1990.<sup>18</sup> The perceived abundance of projects might also have played a part, as in 1998, the Central Coast Land and Coastal Resource Management planning process was already underway,<sup>19</sup> and a new regional research facility, the Inner Coast Natural Resource Centre (ICNRC) had opened in the neighbouring community of Alert Bay.<sup>20</sup>

During the period I conducted my fieldwork, perhaps due to this research 'boom', I had anticipated some level of research 'burn out' in the initial stages of the interviewing process. To my surprise all the MICRC members contacted (except one) were willing to be interviewed.<sup>21</sup> Despite this anticipated reticence, I designed my interview to be as open as possible (see Appendix III). My interviews therefore revealed different ideas, perceptions and experiences than those mentioned in past research projects, perhaps as a reflection of the frustrations of some

<sup>17</sup> On one occasion an individual I was scheduled to interview walked by me, said "Hello", and then proceeded to ask a colleague of his to notify him when the "UBC student" arrived. When I introduced myself as *the* UBC student, the individual apologized and explained that I did not look old enough to be working towards a Master's degree.

<sup>18</sup> See, Hine and Bock (1992), the Commission on Resources and Environment [CORE] (1994a, 1994b, 1994c), Vosko and Bueckert (1994), McVeigh Consulting (1995), MLA & Associates (1995, 1997), and Reed (2000). In addition, reports by Clark (1996), Murphy (1997), and Renwick & Associates and M Marketing Consulting (1998) focus specifically on Malcolm Island.

<sup>19</sup> A multi-stakeholder integrated resource planning process established in 1996 by the provincial government, to provide recommendations for land-use policies. A representative from MIEPS took part in the process (for a limited time) and local residents were given the opportunity to participate through workshop sessions.

<sup>20</sup> According to an ICNRC newsletter, the centre is "a coalition of educational institutions, First Nations, business groups, non-profit societies and local governments having an interest in North Vancouver Island and its natural resources ... in the position to undertake major research and development projects" (ICNRC 1998).

<sup>21</sup> The individual, who refused my request for a personal interview did so because he was quite busy. He did, however, concede that he would be willing to take part in a focus group (if offered).

of the MICRC members who had participated in other studies, mainly the dread of regurgitating the same information from one researcher to the next.

As a result of my research design and strategy, nineteen of the twenty MICRC interviews administered were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. This data recording strategy was vital for gathering information, which would otherwise be lost in a standardized interview. I recognize, however, that the presence of a tape-recorder is unlikely to fade into the background or be totally forgotten by interviewees; therefore, there was the possibility that some of the participants' responses may have been self-censored. Nevertheless, these recorded interviews provided detailed insights into the subjective experiences and perceptions of the MICRC members interviewed, in line with the objectives of this thesis.

As this section has explicated, my research and fieldwork have been shaped by my position in 'the field' as well as by my own subjectivity. Adopting an alternative methodology of self-reflexivity, I have explicitly uncovered the situated, specific, and embodied nature of my 'self' and consequently, my research project. As the author of this thesis, however, I ultimately wield the "power of interpretation" (Gilbert 1994). Of course, such power is not to be taken lightly, and I have attempted throughout my research and analysis to challenge any 'biases' or latent assumptions, which may falsely represent the world(s) of the researched. However, this relational aspect of power in research (i.e. between the researcher and the researched) is equally relevant to the process of reading. As McDowell (1992: 10) comments, "[e]ach reader brings to the text her or his own set of experiences which influence the interpretation of what we write." This highlights the fact that once my thesis is distributed, my 'power' may be dissipated by how others choose to interpret it.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, I do not expect all MICRC members and Malcolm

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<sup>22</sup> Rose (1997) distinguishes this relational aspect between author and audience as one example of the failure of 'transparent reflexivity'.

Islanders to agree with my analysis, but awareness of the framework and limits of my endeavour are vital to the appreciation of my efforts.

### **3.6 Towards a Background Context**

Through an engagement with the various intricacies of the qualitative research process, this chapter has sought to define the research and fieldwork undertaken for my case study of the MICRC. I have attempted to discuss openly the strategies, decisions, and limits regarding my research methodology, and tried to uncover the social location from which I conducted the research. Of particular importance here, is the recognition that my research topic, my methods and my findings have all been shaped by a multiplicity of concerns that are inherent to my own female subjectivity and positioning in the field. The gender analysis that follows in later chapters is therefore informed by this "situated knowledge" (Haraway 1988) of the MICRC and its membership. Before I assess gender and social sustainability in the MICRC, and relate it to 'green' thought, it is necessary to further consider the background context of this case study. The next chapter provides a detailed case history of Malcolm Island and residents' attempt to gain access to, and control of, local resources through the launching of the MICRC.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Trying to Participate in 'Harmony': The History and Politics of Cooperation on Malcolm Island, British Columbia

#### 4.1 Introduction

In 1990, British Columbian author Rosemary Neering traveled across the province, gathering and recording stories of small-town life in British Columbia. Her book, *Down the Road* (1991), provides a succinct and parallel view of the essence of resource-based communities. Like shadows upon a landscape, single-industry resource towns dwell under the forbidding darkness of uncertainty. With their histories of vulnerability amplified, biophysical environments degraded, and economic and social well-being slipping away, many of these communities are now desperately searching for viable and sustainable alternatives of resource use and economic development.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter presents the story of Malcolm Island, British Columbia (BC), a small coastal community located off the northeastern shores of Vancouver Island. Here residents have recently struggled with reduced access to the community's economic mainstays: commercial fishing and, to a limited degree, forestry. In response, a group of Malcolm Islanders formed a community-based resource cooperative in January 1997, to act as a vehicle for a community forest proposal. As we shall see, this approach to community control of the Island's resource base is very much in character with the community's history. In what follows, I will explore the unique history of the community, focusing on the island's Finnish heritage and utopian roots, as well as its cooperative tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> See the 'Rural Planning' special issue of *Plan Canada* (1989), Barnes and Hayter (1994), Seasons (1994), Telawski (1995), Myers (1996), Ecotrust (1997), Hayter and Barnes (1997), Egan and Klausen (1998), Pierce and Dale (1999), Cashmore et al. (2000), and Hayter (2000) for a fairly broad cross-section of Canadian communities coping with economic uncertainty. For examples from the United States, see Bernard and Young (1997).

## **4.2 Crusading for Cooperativism: A Historical Overview**

To reach Malcolm Island, one needs to board the Tri-Island ferry, which leaves from Port McNeill (on Vancouver Island) or Alert Bay (on Cormorant Island) six times daily all year round. As the ferry approaches the terminal in Sointula, Malcolm Island's main settlement, waves of history ripple through the landscape: old weathered net lofts, the Cooperative Store, the former Finnish Organization Hall, and quaint, colourful homes dot the southern shoreline. To a non-Malcolm Islander, these material manifestations of the community's past retell of its fascinating Finnish roots and fisheries-based background. Yet these histories, to a large degree, also permeate the social psychology and traditions found on Malcolm Island. In particular, Malcolm Islanders' attempts to live and work cooperatively, self-reliantly, and independently from the 'outside' world (Wild 1995).

Surrounded by the deep blue-grey waters of the Broughton and Queen Charlotte Straits, Malcolm Island is a place of relative isolation and beauty. Away from the grinding clamour and disquiet of urban scenes, its location - five kilometers from the east coast of northern Vancouver Island (see Figure 1) - has long attracted those seeking a more remote and 'rural' lifestyle. This is particularly reflected in the origins of the community. In 1901, a group of Finnish immigrants working as coal miners in Nanaimo, BC, selected the island as a suitable site for a utopian socialist 'colony'. The spirit of cooperativism it fostered has since shaped a significant part of Malcolm Island's history and present character. I will now turn to a historical overview of this Finnish utopian settlement and its cooperative legacy on Malcolm Island.

### **4.2.1 A Finnish Utopian Settlement**

Inscribing 'Utopia' onto nineteenth century geographies of the world, Oscar Wilde once wrote that "[a] map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it



leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing" (Wilde 1954: 34).<sup>2</sup> With its vast and remote spaces, British Columbia has often seemed to lie precisely within this imaginary geography. Since the 1860s, utopian settlements have continuously peppered British Columbia's landscapes and human history (Bowman 1970; Brown 1995, 1996). "No other region," according to Scott (1997: 9) "can outdo BC for its abundance of alternative, utopian settlement attempts in as short a time frame." I wish to focus solely on the Finnish utopian 'colony' at Sointula, Malcolm Island, in the early years of the twentieth century.

Between 1880 and 1914, over 350 000 Finnish immigrants arrived in North America, fleeing from the poverty and political instability of their homeland (Lindstrom-Best 1985).<sup>3</sup> Many were drawn to Canada, a nation offering them work (particularly on the Canadian Pacific Railway) and open settlement. These opportunities were in sharp contrast to the urban unemployment and rural overpopulation devastating Finland and its economic purses at the time. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, Finnish immigrants were settling parts of northern Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia (Lindstrom-Best 1985; Saarinen 1999). In fact, as of 1911, the Canadian census listed 15,497 persons of Finnish origin living in Canada. By the First World War, Finns comprised 17 percent of the total overseas emigration to Canada (Lindstrom-Best 1985: 6).

Working their way across the country, groups of Finnish immigrants slowly came to settle along the coast of British Columbia. As "economic migrants" (Scott 1997: 10), many turned to Robert Dunsmuir's coal mines, located near Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, for employment (Anderson, J. 1969; Anderson, D. 1979; Neering 1991; Wild 1995). Despite their

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<sup>2</sup> 'Utopia' is an imaginary human society existing under seemingly perfect conditions. First coined by Sir Thomas More (1516), the word is compounded from the Greek words for "not" (*ou*) and "place" (*topos*) and thus means "nowhere" (Mangel and Guadalupi 1987).

<sup>3</sup> During the nineteenth century, Finland was undergoing immense changes. In 1809, after centuries of Swedish rule, Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia. Increasingly, over the century, the Russian government attempted to assimilate the Finnish population into the Russian Empire. By 1899, the Russian

willingness to work in labour intensive industries, the 'Nanaimo Finns' had little patience for the "unbearable harassment and miserable working conditions in the coal mines" (Homer quoted in Fish and Lillard 1982: 31). Repudiating the worker exploitation experienced at the hands of Dunsmuir (and the capitalist economic system as a whole), a collective of Nanaimo Finns began to formulate and organize around the idea of establishing a worker's commune elsewhere in the province. This potential 'counter-community' was to be based on many of the socialist principles and reforms that their Finnish compatriots had been working towards in Finland, at the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Looking for a leader who could bring their ideals into being the Nanaimo Finns enlisted the help of a young, Finnish author, and newspaper editor, by the name of Matti Kurikka. A prominent figure within the Finnish socialist movement of the 1880s and 1890s, Kurikka's journalistic career and Tolstoyist beliefs were familiar to many of the Nanaimo Finns.<sup>5</sup> In the spring of 1900, they invited Kurikka (who had since left Finland to found a utopian community in Australia) to come to British Columbia to help establish a utopian 'colony' (Kolehmainen 1941, Wild 1995). By the fall of 1900, Kurikka had arrived in Nanaimo, and preparations for the BC Finnish utopian 'colony' were underway.

The first major development for the collective occurred in the spring of 1901, when Matti Kurikka and Matti Halminen selected Malcolm Island, based on their reading of provincial maps and preliminary reports prepared by government surveyors, as a suitable settlement site "sufficiently isolated from contaminating influences" (Anderson 1979: 191). This decision launched the group into action, and within six months, a joint stock company had been formally incorporated as the *Kalevan Kansa Colonization Company* (KKCC); the

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government passed a conscription bill that directed a majority of Finland's able workforce into compulsory military service in the Russian Imperial Army (Lindstrom-Best 1985).

<sup>4</sup> See Oberg (1928) and Ross (1988) for the implications of the Finnish romantic-nationalist movement upon the Nanaimo Finns.

<sup>5</sup> See Wilson (1973-74, 1978, and 1981) and Wild (1995) for a biography of Matti Kurikka.

provincial government had granted Malcolm Island to the KKCC; and members of the collective had begun settling the island.

Reflecting their Finnish ancestry, as well as their intentions of creating a space of social harmony, a town-site, located on the south side of the island, was promptly named Sointula, which in Finnish means 'place of harmony'.<sup>6</sup> From the outset, the settlement was to be an "independent, self-sustaining enterprise" based on the principles of common ownership and shared labor (Fish and Lillard 1982: 33). Every member was to have an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the KKCC cooperative settlement and enterprise. As Katri Riksmann, an original female settler and KKCC member, once remarked:

[the KKCC] emphasized that women would be equal with men. At that time women had no property, voting or wage rights whatsoever. On Malcolm Island we would receive the same wages as men, would have the right to speak at meetings and to vote. And we had to work, everyone had to work (Wild 1995: 54).

This feminist undercurrent within the KKCC may be attributed to Kurikka, the KKCC's official president and leading visionary, whose personal views opposed the subservient role of women in society.<sup>7</sup> In the broader context, however, Kurikka's ideal of equitable participation was more focused on developing Sointula as the "prototype of a new socialist society" (Ross 1988: 283), which would "show the way to freedom for the working class," than solely on the emancipation of women (Wilson 1973-74: 56). And for the majority of cooperative members, the community was simply a place that permitted cultural, social and economic freedom, which they had not found elsewhere.

<sup>6</sup> Woodcock (1958) and Ross (1988) point out that Sointula was nationalistic in its goal of recreating on the shores of the Pacific a new homeland founded on Finnish traditions. For instance, the 'Kalevan Kansa', which in Finnish means 'the people of Kaleva', invoked images of the *Kalevala*, a famous collection of Finnish folk poetry by Elias Lönnrot, in which a peasant group fights against tremendous odds set by nature in a far northern forested land (Wargelin-Brown 1986, Ross 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Kurikka developed his feminist beliefs while attending the University of Helsinki, under the mentorship of Minna Canth, a well-known nineteenth century Finnish suffragette. See Wild (1995, 1998) for Canth's influence on Kurikka's views of marriage, women's rights, and the raising of children.

As with many utopian experiments, history proved that the 'colony' was long on ideals and short on practicality (Naess 1988; Brown 1995). Plagued by a serious lack of housing, growing debts, a disastrous fire, and the near-impossibility of making money from either logging or fishing, the KKCC was soon on shaky ground (Neering 1991). This was further exaggerated by the rather heterogeneous membership of the 'colony', as internal tensions and organizational difficulties reflective of members' varied perspectives and aims were becoming increasingly commonplace. As it turns out, few were really 'converted' to the cause of cooperation, or motivated by a genuine desire to work and sacrifice their personal interests for the good of the new commonwealth (Kolehmainen 1976). This can be described as the 'shadow side' of utopian experiments. Ultimately, these problems together provoked the rather hurried demise of the utopian settlement at Sointula.<sup>8</sup>

By May 27, 1905, the dream was over, harmony had long since been eroded. When creditors confiscated sawn lumber that had been intended to salvage the colony's finances, the company was forced to liquidate, and the land was returned to the provincial government (Wild 1995).

Sointula and its ideals, however, did not die. Many Finnish settlers stayed or returned once they had saved enough money to buy land and build homes (Neering 1991). Most made their livelihoods from fishing, as will be discussed later; and today, Sointula is the largest and most influential community on Malcolm Island. It is home to a majority of commercial and industrial businesses, the government wharf, the schoolhouse, a satellite campus of North Island College, the community museum, a branch of the regional library, the community church, and an estimated seven hundred of the Island's one thousand residents (Hilliard and Associates 1995:12). But I am getting ahead of myself. Before, reviewing contemporary community

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<sup>8</sup> Slomiak (1997) explains the reasons for failed utopian experiments, using the Kerista Community as an example. The 'shadow side' (a term from Jungian psychology) refers to the set of behaviours and attitudes in people which

conditions, I wish now turn the reader's attention to the legacy of cooperativism on Malcolm Island.

#### 4.2.2 Cooperative Legacies

Every recorded event is a brick of potential, of precedent, thrown into the future. Eventually the idea will hit someone in the back of the head. This is the duplicity of history: an idea recorded will become an idea resurrected. (Michaels 1996 :161)

At a general level, "[t]he cooperative spirit of the Finns has been recognized as an influential force in the shaping of their lifestyle not only in Finland but also in North America" (Jalava 1981: 93). The cooperative enterprise is certainly a legacy of European social idealism. Fowler (quoted in Heino 1971: 57) wrote that "[t]o the Finns who came to America in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cooperative movement in America owes a debt of gratitude, for it was the Finns who brought to America the clearest understanding of economic democracy." Indeed, as writes Adamic (quoted in Heino 1971: 55) in his book *From Many Lands*: "... if two Finns are seen together they are either on the way to the sauna or to form a cooperative." Admittedly, as Ross (1988: 491) comments:

[e]specially in the smaller Finnish-American rural communities the 'Co-op Store' became the leading local business enterprise. Most importantly, it was a vital element in the broader pattern of Finnish-American radical culture, which sustained tight-knit, exclusive, and relatively self-sufficient communities that, in their essence, must be described as utopian.

Despite remaining a close-knit distinctive Finnish settlement, until mid-century, Sointula like other 'Finn towns', moved away from utopian ideals all the while focusing on the cooperative movement.

The first cooperative enterprise to appear after the downfall of the utopian settlement was the Sointula Co-op Store established in 1909. Built to serve the consumer needs of the

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are hidden, covert, secret, unconscious or destructive. Slomiak identifies the challenges or 'shadows' of community

community, every resident was a member (Wild 1995). And although there are varying claims about its exact place and status in the history of cooperative ventures in Canada, it is believed to be the oldest consumer cooperative in continuous operation in Canada (Fish and Lillard 1982: 75).

As the community began to evolve in the early decades of the twentieth century, many of the Finnish settlers turned to gill net fishing as a means of subsistence.<sup>9</sup> Despite statistical shortcomings, we may acknowledge that in the 1920s, Finns played an important role in the coast's first fishing unions and co-ops (Woodcock 1958: 213). The United Fishermen of BC (1917-1924) and the BC Fishermen's Co-operative Association (1928-1932), for example, were both based at Sointula (Scott 1997). Also of mention is a local fishing cooperative lasting from 1945 to 1948, which was comprised of 30 to 50 gill-netters. As a former member told me they had all their own net lofts and fish tenders; and that eventually "they figured that they would get bigger and better and amalgamated with the Vancouver Fishermen's Coop in 1948."

By the 1960s, young idealists from urban Canada and the United States were moving to Malcolm Island, and in many ways, the 'newcomers' outlook on life was similar to the original Finnish settlers. Many of these so-called 'back-to-the-landers' were socialistic, self-sufficient, and fiercely independent (Murphy 1989: 58). It was soon realized, however, that they had to earn of living. And while "men's jobs" were plentiful (e.g. in fishing and forestry), there wasn't much in the way of work for women (Wild 1995). Consequently, in around 1974, Jane McClendon started a tree planting cooperative - the Treesing Reforestation Cooperative (Wild 1995). At the outset it was stated that half of the membership had to be women and all members had to be Malcolm Island residents. Yet as Wild (1995: 189) remarks,

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living as: the equality trap; the harmony trap; power-seeking; and peer pressure.

<sup>9</sup> As a local fisher commented: "Sointulans became very good fishermen. As someone from the rival village of Alert Bay is reported to have remarked, 'Them Finns got more salmon than salmon got fins'" (Burrows 1995). Fishing was also a common means of livelihood for Finns in other settlements, such as Lund, Sunbury, Kyuquot and Finn Slough.

[a]t first positions on the board of directors were filled by women but one by one they found other jobs and the nature of the cooperative began to change. Soon it became necessary to hire people off island. Originally a true cooperative with no paid management, a new, all-male board of directors decided that they should be compensated for their responsibilities. On the verge of becoming a business rather than a cooperative, Treasing dissolved in 1988.

After the demise of Treasing, there was a hiatus in new cooperative efforts. That is, until the MICRC was launched in 1997.

Preliminary analysis of my interviews of MICRC members, indicates that men's and women's membership and / or patronage in community or service-based cooperatives, such as the Sointula Cooperative Store, Sointula Credit Union, and the (informal) Sointula Preschool Coop, tend to be defined by their gender-specific roles. Of the twenty MICRC members I interviewed almost all (19) have been members or participated in other cooperatives on Malcolm Island.

As table 1 on the next page illustrates, more women than men in the MICRC also participate in the island's service-based cooperatives. From the interview responses, women generally preferred these cooperative services because they were locally based. With their access to and from the Island constrained by the ferry schedule, most of the women found shopping at the Co-op Store more accessible.

Yet women shopped at the Co-op Store until they next travelled to Port McNeill or Campbell River, where prices may be cheaper and a larger selection of products available. More of the male respondents were reticent to contribute the \$100 family membership in the Sointula Cooperative Store as they anticipated little or no dividends on their investment. On the other hand, men's patronage in the Co-op Store was usually influenced by purchasing items related to their jobs (e.g. fishing products) and general household maintenance (e.g. home repair work).

**Table 1: Participation of MICRC Female and Male Members in Other Malcolm Island Cooperatives**

Cooperative Institution	Number of Women	Number of Men
Sointula Credit Union	9	7
Sointula Cooperative Store	7	3
Sointula Preschool	5	0
		Source: Pullen (1998).

The Sointula Preschool Cooperative also strongly reflects women's socialized/gendered roles. Five of the women interviewed, whose children had been born and raised on Malcolm Island, had participated in the preschool, whereas for the six men whose children had grown up on the island, not one mentioned participating in the preschool. These findings demonstrate women's gender specific role as mothers (e.g. child-rearing role) in this cooperative. These variegated cooperative enterprises and experiences point to the necessity of studying the actual experiences of the cooperative enterprise. These cooperative efforts demonstrate a sense of personal and community exploitation and a lack of employment opportunities on the island, trends which had also led to the formation of the other cooperative enterprises. Before commenting on the formation of the MICRC, I now turn to the events that led to the formation of the MICRC.



### 4.3 From Prosperity to Paralysis: Dilemmas of 'Access' for the Coastal Community of Malcolm Island

Lying in one of the most prolific areas in British Columbia for salmon and other wild seafood species, Malcolm Island's economic heart has historically been in the commercial fisheries (Renwick & Associates and M Marketing Consulting 1998). Developing into an important and influential commercial fishing centre, the village of Sointula remains the second largest commercial fishing fleet in the region after Port Hardy.<sup>10</sup> This is also reflected in the fact that three fish and / or seafood processing plants are also located on Malcolm Island: Lionsgate Fisheries, McMillan Fisheries, and Coast Select.

These endeavours point to a century long, proud seafaring tradition that has shaped social relations, the daily and seasonal rhythms of life, and the very identity of islanders, both as individuals and as a community.<sup>11</sup> Its economic and social well-being have always been inextricably linked to the region's land and marine resources; and with a hardworking and fiercely independent population, many of the island's residents are commercial fishers.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, for the purposes of this study, I define Sointula and Malcolm Island as a fishing community and economy. Indeed, as Nadel-Klein (1988: 5) state, "[w]e may speak of a fishing economy when fishing constitutes a resource significant enough that its elimination would mean a sharp drop in the standard of living, or a serious change in the community's way of life and its sense of identity."

<sup>10</sup> See Cannery Day Exhibit 1998, for a description of Finns unique contribution to both Canadian culture and the BC fishing industry in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The invention of the wooden drum in 1931 by Sointula Finn Laurie Jarvis helped to revolutionize the fishing industry (Cannery Day Exhibit 1998; Wild 1995). Incorporating their socialist heritage into the fishing culture Sointula gillnetters formed the independent union, the United Fisherman of BC, in 1917. In 1932, members of the Finnish community formed an independent Finnish fisherman's union which later became amalgamated into the union known today as the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (Cannery Day Exhibit 1998).

<sup>11</sup> See Miller (1978) and PEMC (1979). The latter is a Western Profile Series program that documents Sointula twenty years ago and refers to the fishing community as 'prosperous', and with virtually no unemployment.

<sup>12</sup> Fishermen who reside in Sointula primarily fish for salmon with about 70 gill net vessels. Many other license types are held by Sointula fishermen including salmon seine and troll, halibut, groundfish trawl, shrimp, prawn and dogfish (Renwick & Associates et al. 1998: 13).

In recent years, the promise of prosperity and stability offered by industrial fishing and forestry has diminished (Ecotrust 1997; Wolf and Zuckerman 1999). Declining stocks, and programs designed to reduce the size of the salmon fleet have played a role in the down turn in the fishery. With regards to the latter, Burrows (1995: 3), a local Sointulan fisher and occasional writer, states that "[u]nlike many industries which lose workers through mechanization, most of the job loss in fishing has taken place because of political decisions made in Ottawa."

For example, in 1996, the federal government announced a plan to halve the 4 200 boat BC fishing fleet by buying back vessel licenses and restricting those that remained to specific areas of the coast rather than allowing coast-wide travel. This 'Mifflin Plan' was condemned for the further concentration of industry control in the hands of operators of large vessels with sufficient capital to buy several licenses, while squeezing out small-vessel owners (Ecotrust 1997).

In the months following the implementation of the Mifflin Plan, the fears of coastal communities were recognized. A significantly large numbers of licenses were surrendered in rural communities, "where fishers in a failing industry tended to be in more desperate need of cash and to have fewer economic alternatives than those in urban centres" (Ecotrust 1997: 60). The result had a devastating impact on the economic base of coastal villages, like Sointula.

As the front page of the Island Echo, Malcolm Island's local paper, read in June of 1997:

'Death knell of the Sointula Boats':

Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup>, a dismal and drizzly morning found some of our local fishermen at the Sointula Breakwater unloading troll gear by the truckloads onto the Tyee No. 1. As a result of the Mifflin Plan, combination boats lost their right to fish by more than one method unless another license is stacked onto the boat. The Gear Buy Back Program, which was implemented by the D.F.O. for combination boat fishermen, gave them the option to sell their trolling gear to the government.<sup>13</sup>

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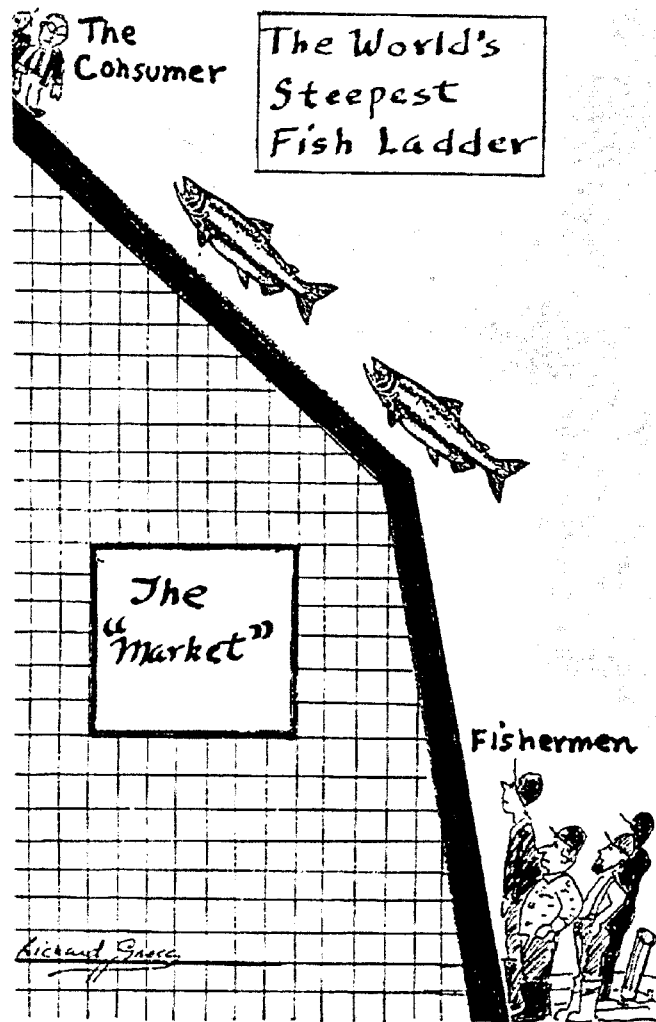
<sup>13</sup> D.F.O. refers to the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Indeed, between 1996 and 2000, almost 1600 commercial salmon licenses were voluntarily retired provincially and the fleet was further reduced through license stacking policies. The overall effect was a reduction of forty percent in the size of the commercial salmon fleet, which currently stands at about 2600 licenses (BC Stats 2000). The buyback provided short-term relief of the pressure on weakened salmon stocks, but contributed to a decline in the industry's output and significant socio-economic impacts on coastal communities dependent on the salmon fishery (Ecotrust 1997).

For instance, employment in the commercial fishing industry was estimated at 2300 in 1998, less than half the number of jobs in 1997 (5500), continuing a long-term trend toward fewer jobs in this industry. Between 1984 and 1998, the number of jobs in commercial fishing fell forty-four percent, with most of the decline occurring during the 1990s (BC Stats 2000). 1998 and 1999 were extremely challenging years for the commercial salmon fishery, as the catch dropped to its lowest level in a century (BC Stats 2000). Furthermore, the coho and chinook salmon stocks were the focus of conservation measures introduced in 1998, and continued into 1999, with limited or no harvest opportunities. As one interviewee reflected on this 'crisis': "[n]ormally, all the hundred or so boats that are here are gone, this wharf is usually empty all summer for two straight months, and this year [1998] it's been full for two straight months."

Compounding these factors, particularly with respect to commercial fishing, fishermen in all of BC have been faced with low prices for their salmon catch caused by market supply and demand factors (Renwick & Associates et al. 1998: 11). While a local cartoonist tried to make light of this situation, it is not nearly so humorous in reality (see Figure 3 on the next page).

Figure 3: Fisheries According to Local Cartoonist Richard Gross



Source: Burrows (1995: 30).

Not only have these problems further eroded the incomes of Sointula fishermen but also the many dependent service industries and businesses on the Island. Another aspect of the local fishing crisis is that for a majority of finfish and shellfish catches from the region, most are transported south for further processing and marketing by the major companies (Renwick & Associates et al. 1998). Furthermore, the market share once held by the BC seafood industry has been eroded by three primary factors. First, the doubling of world salmon production by Alaska (wild) and numerous farmed salmon producing countries around the world over the last

10 years. This increased production has led to weak demand and world market prices for finished goods, at levels that are similar to 20 years ago. Second, the capacity of the BC fishing fleet and the processing sector continues to be too large relative to the resources available to provide adequate financial returns to the owners of vessels, licenses and plants. Finally, the two species of mainstream seafood that used to provide profitability to fishermen, processors, and marketers - sockeye salmon and herring roe - have been dependent in large part on the Japanese market. This key market is depressed due to internal economic conditions and substitute seafood products at lower prices.

These events have fostered a sense of community consciousness and self-reliance, and the distinctiveness of being islanders has led many residents to recognize that they share a common destiny and thus are willing to work towards a common goal. As I recorded it, the common issues and visions are: issues such as the collapse of the fishing industry, community economic decline and dependency on external businesses and markets, need for community control of forestry and fishery resources, and future employment opportunities (suitable to the island).

It was specified, however, that Malcolm Islanders do not wish to attract outside firms to locate on Malcolm Island. Instead they wanted to achieve their goal through the establishment of a community-controlled enterprise. Of direct relevance, the *Official Community Plan* (OCP 1995) and *Interacting Resource Society: Community Survey of Malcolm Island* (Murphy 1997) mention opportunities to expand and diversify local Malcolm Island businesses and service industries, possibilities which may be analyzed in terms of the MICRC's evolution.

#### 4.4 Attempting to Gain Community Control of Local Resources: The Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative

The MICRC is an unincorporated, mixed-gender cooperative enterprise established for the purpose of gaining access to, and control of, Malcolm Island's land and marine resources and economic benefits. In particular, I focus on the MICRC's community forest initiative.<sup>14</sup> The proponents of the initiative called for greater community control over resource management and better access to economic benefits generated from the resources. The attempt to establish a Malcolm Island community forest was based on a desire for local input and control over the management and harvesting of Malcolm Island forests; and access to resources on Malcolm Island for local processing and generation of employment and revenue for the community.

In the early 1990s, the idea of creating a community forest on Malcolm Island was envisaged by two women from the community that had been involved with the CORE process, a regional land use planning process for Vancouver Island. These key initiators sensed that the community of Malcolm Island needed to diversify its fishing economy, through a 'grassroots' initiative that would unite the community around an issue. Knowing that *Interfor's* tenure on Malcolm Island was up (International Forest Products Limited, a major British Columbia based forest company that logs and operates sawmills in the predominantly coastal forest regions of British Columbia, namely Vancouver Island and the Central Coast), and that the land was thus returning to the Crown, the two women saw an opportunity to propose community forest tenure on the island. As one of them commented:

We thought that people would be more responsive to creating some kind of sustainable industry on [Malcolm] Island that would make it possible for the people on [Malcolm] Island to stay here and have some economic base from all the spin-offs of a community forest, and at the same time deal with environmental issues.

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<sup>14</sup> A community forest is an arrangement, in which the Ministry of Forests makes areas available for forest management by a community. See Duinker et al. 1991 and Harvey and Usher (1996) for examples of community forest tenure in Ontario, Canada.

Aware of other community forests in British Columbia, notably in Revelstoke, Mission, Lake Cowichan, Nootka Sound, and Prince George, which had successfully diversified community economies and created new jobs, both women felt that a community forest on Malcolm Island would lead to a "stabilized" local economy. Interested persons were therefore invited to become part of a 'community forest options' group.

In 1995, Clark Inc. (1996) conducted a Malcolm Island community forest feasibility study, which was funded by Forest Renewal British Columbia (FRBC). At the time, however, the community forest entity was not a recognized form of tenure in the British Columbia *Forest Act*; therefore Clark (1996)'s report recommended two alternative tenure options for Malcolm Island: either Crown-granted land, or a 'community forest agreement' held by the community on Crown land.<sup>15</sup> Yet even these options remained problematic. As Clark (1996) noted, a majority of timber supply areas were fully committed to other Ministry of Forests programs (e.g. small business program) or major forest corporations. Therefore, the opportunity of obtaining Crown land on Malcolm Island was far more complex than was anticipated by the 'community forest options' group.

Clark (1996) further recommended that Malcolm Islanders seek municipal incorporation instead of cooperative incorporation, in order to have a better chance of acquiring Crown land for a community forest. Yet on July 29, 1996 after considerable discussion the group voted to form a cooperative enterprise as a mechanism to secure a community forest, or at least obtain land for a community forest. Interestingly, a local researcher who developed a Community Forest Options manual for the MICRC (in 1996) found no evidence in British Columbia of

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<sup>15</sup> A provincial forest tenure review did not occur until Fall 1997, when it was announced by the (former) BC Minister of Forests, David Zirnelt, that a Community Forest Pilot project was going to be established under the auspices of the New Democratic Party (NDP)'s Jobs and Timber Accord.

another community-based community forest cooperative. In this respect, many of the MICRC's members perceived themselves as 'trend-setters'.

On January 23, 1997 the MICRC held its inaugural meeting. A five-member MICRC (interim) Board of Directors was elected (by acclamation) and the MICRC bylaws delineated. Membership in the MICRC includes anyone sixteen years of age or older who has been a resident of Malcolm Island for at least six months and has purchased a \$10 membership share. Other monetary contributions included \$100 from the Sointula Credit Union and \$2000 donated by the Mount Waddington Regional District (MWRD) Economic Development Commission.<sup>16</sup> The Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative Charter was also drawn up, to respect the values and goals of the people of Malcolm Island. As such, the MICRC would manage the resources of Malcolm Island to provide or promote:

- Local democratic control of the Malcolm Island forest areas for the benefit of the residents,
- An array of values, experiences and benefits to current and future generations,
- Local sustainable employment in order to redirect and retrain members of Malcolm Island's fishing community,
- The maximization of forest resources beyond timber: forest botanicals, eco-tourism, firewood, log salving for local sawmills, shake and shingle, to mention only a few possibilities,
- The reinvestment of profits into the community.

It is interesting to review the balance of resources on Malcolm Island. While the island's forests are ecologically very important, close to 60 percent of the island has already been logged

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<sup>16</sup> Census Subdivision 'A' also includes unincorporated settlements on the central coast of the mainland and the islands of Queen Charlotte Strait (BC Stats 1996). The MWRD covers an area over 21,000 square kilometers on northern Vancouver Island and the mainland coast. The purpose of the Regional District is to provide planning and development services for the region's residents (Mount Waddington Regional District brochure: n.d.).



almost exclusively by clearcutting in the last fifty years. Of the remaining stands about 30 percent are over 140 years old, and 22 percent over 250 years (Clark 1996: 11).

In terms of operations, therefore, alternative forest-based activities and employment (e.g. harvesting, marketing and value-added processing of forest botanicals, mushrooms, other wild foods and medicinal plants) were envisioned by the MICRC, more so than timber extraction.

It should be noted that the MICRC membership is neither socially nor economically homogeneous. It is comprised of seventy-five members (35 females and 40 males) that reflect the diversity of Malcolm Islanders. The membership includes longstanding families and newcomers, capitalists and socialists, and loggers and environmentalists. Naturally, this diversity fosters differing opinions on the evolution of the island's economy and the use of the island's resources. After all, this is a very small community made up of independent and self-reliant people.

Since the MICRC's inception, there have been various attempts at acquiring a land base or alternative forest tenure. In February 1997, a land grant proposal was drafted by the MICRC's two key initiators.<sup>17</sup> The general hope was that Malcolm Island would receive Crown-granted land in order to establish its community forest, instead of waiting for new community forest tenure legislation by the provincial government. The result, however, was half a year of being diverted back and forth from the Ministry of Forests to the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks.

Later in 1997, the MICRC made another attempt at securing land on Malcolm Island by applying for a woodlot license. In this case, however, one of the MICRC's Directors was awarded the woodlot, having applied as a private interest. For many members, this was seen as a conflict of interest. Nevertheless, the MICRC's last hope lay in a joint application for community forest tenure with the Mount Waddington Regional District (MWRD), an

administrative area within which lies Malcolm Island. In 1998, at the time of my research, the MICRC membership was waiting patiently for what they hoped would finally be good news. At the time, the cooperative enterprise had been officially in place for about 18 months. As presented so far, there are many parallels between 'green' thought and the attempts by Malcolm Island residents to build institutions to counter the negative implications of the capitalist system. But we do well to recall, as Crow and Allan (1994)'s sociology of community claims, that "[i]t has been noted already that our perception of contemporary community life are frequently distorted by misperceptions of the patterns of social relationships that made up community life in the past" (Crow and Allan 1994: 22). Mayoux has further argued that women seldom are empowered through programs of 'participatory development' and that such projects are problematic in that,

participatory development is premised on the possibility of consensus between participants about needs and aims. In many cases this is likely to be problematic (i.e. defining 'needs'). Secondly, different participants are likely to have different priorities and consensus may not be possible (Mayoux 1995b: 241).

It is in this light that the thesis now moves on to the analysis of gender and power relations in the MICRC. It is important to stress that the next two chapters explore gender participation, knowledge, and authority not only in the context of the MICRC, but also in the context of Malcolm Island. The discussion and analysis focuses sometimes on one, sometimes on the other, and sometimes on both at the same time. But since the thesis is couched in a self-reflexive situated framework, the connections and distinctions made between gendered situations in the MICRC and on the Island are delimited on one hand, by my impressions, findings, and questions while I was there, and after leaving the Island. And on the other hand, by the reality that it is impossible to conceive of the MICRC as a closed system that evolved regardless of what was happening on the Island. Therefore, the analyses of gender identities and

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<sup>17</sup> Essentially, a contemporary version of the original land grant given by the province to the Finns in 1901.

gender power relations that follow in the next two chapters are bound by my involvement and my interactions as well as by the personal politics of the people in the MICRC, on Malcolm Island, in the region, in Victoria, in Ottawa, in decision-making centres, etc. The consequences for my thesis are not definite, but act as the springboard for the descriptive and analytical work that follows.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Exploring Equity of Participation in the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative: A Gender Analysis Perspective

#### 5.1 Interpreting Gendered Participation

In the 1990s, Malcolm Island was significantly affected by government regulations (e.g. the Mifflin Plan), which limited the community's access to, and employment in the coastal fisheries. Searching for alternative employment opportunities, a 'community forest initiative' was proposed; and, in keeping with the community's history it was formed as a cooperative enterprise.

This chapter explores the gendered experiences and perceptions of participation in the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative (MICRC), Sointula, British Columbia. Using the precepts of 'green' literature, as discussed in chapter two, one would be lead to discern that participation in the MICRC is equitable based on 'access'. This view is problematic because as we will see in this chapter men's and women's experiences of participation present different shades of 'access'.

'Participation' requires qualification. Webler (1995: 62), for instance, defines equitable participation as fairness, which refers to "the distribution among participants of opportunities to act meaningfully." Furthermore, the quality of participation, or what Craig and Steinhoff (1990: 55) define as 'effective participation' - "a regular process in which members thoughts, ideas, and aspirations can be communicated to other members and decision-makers of the organization" - points in the right direction. For the purpose of this thesis, it is reasonable to define participation in terms of the 1) attendance at meetings, 2) participation in discussions, and 3) the capacity of participation in the MICRC (i.e. as a member, a director, and / or on a committee).

Studying these facets of participation is crucial to answering the question: is the MICRC equitable in terms of how female and male members participate in the cooperative?

In this thesis I qualify participation by studying men's and women's experiences and motivations that have led to particular initiatives and groups in the cooperative. As we shall see, particular attention to the MICRC illustrates that access to the cooperative is largely shaped by gender-specific roles, interests, and relations in the family and community. In other words, women are active participants in the cooperative, but generally participate in ways that directly correspond with the roles and functions of gendered activities in the community.

Through a comparison of female MICRC members and their male counterparts, I analyze how 'green' theories represent 'equitable access' to cooperatives through an empirical study that aims to address the problematic neglect of gender identity. This provides an opening for alternative conceptualizations of the cooperative enterprise, since, as Hanson and Pratt (1995: 18) have observed that "gendered identities, including aspirations and desires, are fully embedded in - and indeed inconceivable apart from - place and that different gender identities are shaped through different places." As was stressed in chapter two, small-scale 'green' theorists and ecofeminists have either ignored gender identity within mixed cooperatives or have assumed that because the cooperative is (ideally) egalitarian and non-hierarchical, equitable participation will automatically occur. This view neglects to address gender power relations. In distinction, I argue in this thesis that by focusing on women's and men's experiences in a mixed-gender community resource cooperative, I am able to explore the extent to which participation in the MICRC is equitable, and to what extent it is socially sustainable.

The issue of gendered participation is much more complex than a generalized overview affords. The extent to which female and male members experience equity in the MICRC needs to be analyzed through the lens of gender roles and relations on Malcolm Island. Studying these

roles in 'grassroots' struggles for environmental, economic and social well-being helps to determine how women and men participate in the cooperative.

## 5.2 Gender Subject Positions and Roles in the Community

In Ackelsberg (1988: 303)'s research on women's activism, she notes that "networks and community associations develop from women's responses to issues that confront them not as isolated individuals but as members of households, and more important, as members of the communities in which those households are embedded." On the basis of historical and empirical evidence, women have had an influential and active role in the community, particularly in the coordination of local social movements and organizations. An historical example of this is documented in Lindstrom-Best (1988: 157)'s study of Finnish immigrant women in Canada. Her findings indicate that from the meetings of a "socialist women's" sewing circle:

[i]n 1912, [Sointula] women, geographically isolated in their small fishing village on an island in the Pacific Ocean, decided that the only way women could be heard was if Finnish-Canadian women organized their own nation-wide women's conference and founded an independent women's socialist organization. The Sointula women did not consider themselves cut off by their isolation, but felt very strongly that they were a part of a socialist women's movement in North America.

By adapting a women's gendered activity and informal organization (i.e. the sewing circle) into a Finnish-Canadian socialist women's movement, this group of Sointula women resisted the stereotype of female passivity typically assumed in small, remote resource towns (Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988; Gibson-Graham 1996a). Whether this contradiction is a lingering aspect of the original community's utopian socialist vision of an egalitarian social order, or a culturally ingrained attribute, it is important to note that little has changed over the years.<sup>1</sup> As a resource-based community, 'traditional' gender roles and associated spatial and labour divisions have

tended to guide men and women's participation in 'alternative development' or 'grassroots' initiatives on Malcolm Island.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Reed (1995) summarizes, where communities are heavily dependent on a single resource for their well-being, economic circumstances become predominantly intertwined with the social character of these places, such that family and community life are typically shaped by the conditions within these resource communities.

For most of the community's history, gender roles have been shaped by the different positions men and women have assumed in processes of production and reproduction. Unfortunately, no official labour force statistics are recorded specifically for Malcolm Island because of its unincorporated status;<sup>3</sup> however, the hamlets of Sointula, Mitchell Bay, Rough Bay west to Pulteney Point, and Kaleva are all part of census Subdivision 'A' in the Mount Waddington Regional District (MWRD). Based on available data, Table 2 on the next page provides an overview of the employment opportunities for the district, which may be used to characterize broadly the employment distribution on Malcolm Island. Table 2 illustrates that a significantly higher percentage of primary industries sector employment is found in the Mount Waddington region (27.2%) as compared to the province (5.7%), reflecting the nature of the regional economy and its dependence upon resource extraction activities for employment. These percentages however may be different today, reflecting the employment shifts that have occurred since 1995, in particular primary industries such as forestry, fishing and mining.

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<sup>1</sup> Lindstrom-Best (1988) notes that Finnish women who emigrated to Canada (between 1880 and 1930) were primarily from Ostrobothnia - a region of Finland which had high rates of literacy (both female and male) and a strong sense of village culture.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that my use of the term, 'traditional', specifically refers to locally "*longstanding and prevalent gender roles*" (Gibson-Graham 1996a: 218, authors' emphasis), which do not necessarily conform to typical (or 'traditional') resource community gender roles. See Gibson-Graham (1996a) for a discussion of 'traditional' ideas of gender identity in resource towns.

<sup>3</sup> An 'unincorporated' settlement refers to a population without a formal governing body. At the time of my final phase of fieldwork (August/September 1998), several Malcolm Island residents were trying to gain community support for municipal incorporation. Several challenges were identified: the small tax base, increased costs and responsibility for the community's infrastructure, and the possibility of more regulations and bureaucracy. Like previous attempts at incorporation on Malcolm Island this attempt also failed.

**Table 2: Distribution of Labour Force (Mount Waddington Regional District)**

Employment Sector	Percent of Mount Waddington	Percent of British Columbia
Self-employed	12	14.5
Primary	27.2	5.7
Manufacturing	12.9	10.4
Services	49.1	70.6
Government	6.7	5.9
Construction	4.1	7.5

Source: B.C. Stats (1996).

Table 3 on the next page classifies interviewees' responses according to their employment histories. The table illustrates that employment is predominantly oriented towards a male workforce, which has been employed in resource industries such as fishing and forestry. There are exceptions, particularly in commercial fishing and its related activities, as women have contributed to household incomes over the years with part-time or seasonal work, namely as deckhands, shore workers, boat cooks, and fish plant processors and packers. As with Porter (1985: 107)'s findings in the Newfoundland fisheries, MICRC women that have worked in the fisheries (both past and present) have also had considerable economic "leverage" in the household. In recent years, women's contributions to household incomes have been necessary, even vital, to maintaining the family's lifestyle.



**Table 3: MICRC Interviewees Responses to Question of Employment Histories**

	Number of Women	Number of Men
Forestry	1	6
Fisheries	4	6
Ecotourism	1	1
Value-Added Forest Products/Silviculture	1	4
Health / Educational / Financial/Food Services	10	0
		Source: Pullen (1998).

As Little (1994: 17) construes: "[t]he particularly high incidence of part-time work amongst rural women is important and says much about the choices available to women together with the constraints and pressures that they are under." She also notes a limited range of employment opportunities (see also, Egan and Klausen 1998). As quoted by Malcolm Island resident, Laila Butcher, in *Coast of Faces* (Steltzer and Kerr 1979: 95): "In Sointula there's nothing else to work at but the Co-op store, the café, a small variety store, and the post office. Most girls need to go elsewhere to make a living for themselves."

From table 3 (above), it is apparent that despite women's seeming concentration in the last category, women interviewee's breadth of employment histories is broader than the males,

who seem to be neatly dispersed across the resource sectors. A nominal appreciation of employment history is misleading. Indeed, female interviews revealed that female employment is more volatile, and that job transition seems to be constant, whereas male interviewee's employment has been based primarily in either forestry and fishing.

From fieldwork experience, for 5 of the 10 male respondents, employment rotated seasonally between forestry and fishing. Particularly, men worked in the forests or on the boats in the spring and fall seasons, fished in the summer, and in the winter, had either been unemployed or picked up odd jobs. Findings from the interviews indicate that an ideology that defines men's employment in opposition to women's employment prevails. As JIM, a long-time fisher on Malcolm Island comments:

[i]n Sointula, the history in the fishing industry (or at least in the past 15 years) is that women do the same jobs as men on the boats. Women have not been trivialized in the community, women's work is highly respected and valuable, and in the past 15 years women's work has become more integrated with men's work.

Certainly, women can act like men, take on men's roles and carry out duties as if they were men but this implies that men's gendered activities are the yardstick. This biased view has indubitably meant that women have had a share of employment in extraction and processing, but contrary to 'green' theories' assumption of gender neutrality, there is an implicit asymmetric sexual segregation of men and women's participation in community's activities.

It is important to note that Malcolm Island differs from other resource towns, given its evolution as a community rather than as a company town or camp (Lawrance 1976, Wild in *Sointula Revisited* 1996). An early settler, Arvo Tynjala, best described this in a *Cultural Communities of British Columbia Oral History* Project (Tynjala/Kennedy Call No. 1016: 1 & 2), stating that:

[e]ven though I have been in Sointula ever since it was started ... I never realized that there was anything exceptional about Sointula. Most communities, whatever they are ... they're usually formed around some kind [of] industrial development ... but in Sointula it was a different thing. The people went there first, and then

started wondering what they were going to build. There was no industry or anything to draw them to live there. They went on their own, and then started building the community. And that's ... really the difference.

This characteristic was similarly reflected in my interview results, when I asked why each respondent chose to live on Malcolm Island. Against expectations of what one would characteristically find as reasons for settling in a resource-based community, that is, expectations predicated on men's employment (Parr 1990), male and female interviewees indicated that the reasons for living on Malcolm Island had been a mutual decision between themselves and their spouse / partner based on Malcolm Island's "rural nature", "island life", "community character", and "healthy environment", rather than simply employment for the male head of the household.<sup>4</sup> There was thus an explicit array of efforts to re-balance gender roles and power relations in the evolution of this community, which was made evident earlier when I broached income-producing activities in the community's history.

Linking these findings with gender identity and roles in resource communities, women MICRC members interviewed seem to implicitly destabilize normative (or fixed) social constructions of gender. Duncan (1996: 5) asserts that "social relations, including importantly, gender relations, are constructed and negotiated spatially and are embedded in the spatial organization of places." Concerning social sustainability, this is a community that differs from the typical male-dominated, patriarchal company resource town (Egan and Klausen 1998, Gibson-Graham 1996). As one young female entrepreneur commented, "women are very strong here and men have accepted that. There are no constraints because of the way the community is. Women are well respected here" (AMANDA). More poignantly another female interviewee stated, "[t]he women will be the first ones to work together, before the men... I think they'll be

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, in Little (1994)'s study, she demonstrates that the 'husband's job' is the main determinant for a family's move to a rural area. In the case of Malcolm Island, while one female respondent declared that it was her spouse's / partner's recreational / sport fishing that motivated their move to Malcolm Island, it is interesting that four of the male respondents stated that they permanently moved to Malcolm Island because of their spouse / partner.

the leaders in change of anything" (ELMA). In terms of subject positions, despite the utopian ideas of the community, women are perceived as agents of change in the community, which implies that here again, that women are builders of community, which is a gendered subject position commonly ascribed to women (Parr 1990, Gibson-Graham 1996a).

From a labour and identity perspective, in comparison with their male counterparts, women's identity is less integrated with their part-time and seasonal employment in resource-related industries (O'Connor et al. 1999). While men's identity in forestry towns is strongly shaped by their occupation - in this case employment linked to resource extraction (Carroll 1995) - women's paid 'work' as a source of gender identity is largely displaced by their unpaid roles in the family and the community (Little 1994, Teather 1996).

This may be likened to what Porter (1985: 106) calls "the ethos of "fishermen" [as] a rugged *male* identity" (Porter's emphasis). As we shall see, these gender roles have implications for the spatial division of labour and employment. Indeed, resource extraction activities (more often undertaken by men) primarily occur off Malcolm Island, while women's labour tends to be located on the island (e.g. paid employment, housework, and community volunteering). Consequently, a spatial division of labour has emerged, which has ultimately affected men and women's commitment to, and participation in, community life. Similarly, Gill (1990)'s study of the BC mining community, Tumber Ridge, finds that shift work, which is a characteristic of resource industries, performs a similar separation, opening up spaces for women's involvement in community affairs. For WAYNE, a retired forester, "it is a lot easier for the women because they are here all the time and the men are away in the woods or fishing". Despite his awareness of women's gendered roles in the community, this view reflects an inherent sexual segregation, notable in his qualification:

I think it's a character of living here. We don't have very complacent women. This is a fishing community. The men go fishing, the women take care of what goes on in the community when the men are gone. It just evolved that way.

Despite the tenacity of this 'traditional' view, recent changes in coastal fisheries have affected spatial and labour divisions in the community.<sup>5</sup> For example, while the employment histories of all ten male MICRC members interviewed reveal that each one was either once, or is still, employed in resource-based industries, at least seventy percent of the sample has made a transition in either their occupation or their employment status since the early 1990s.

Of the six male interviewees who earned at one time or another, part or all of their income from fishing, three had sold their licenses in recent years as a result of fishery sector downturns and government programs (e.g. the Mifflin Plan in 1996). An interesting sign of the times, reflected in the interview data, is that fifty percent of the male respondents were full-time, yet mainly seasonal, self-employed small business owners in forestry-related operations or eco-tourism. This illustrates the increasingly fluid nature of gendered activities. Men and women's gender identities are more complex, and thus shifting the focus from an historical perspective to a contextual study of participation in the MICRC is required.

### **5.3 Motivations for Involvement in the MICRC**

Members' motives informed their experiences of participation in the cooperative. It therefore is necessary to understand the motivations behind member's participation in the MICRC to grasp the intricacies of gender identities, roles, and relations. The primary reasons for joining the MICRC, according to both male and female MICRC interviewees, were to obtain access to and control of local resources, as well as to have a voice in the community.

Analysis of the responses points out that despite these common motivations, the MICRC's membership was factionalized into two groups, each with differing opinions on the

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<sup>5</sup> See Pahl (1984) for a discussion of the changing patterns of work in the late twentieth century. In particular, he presents a case study of economic transition, household coping strategies, and divisions of labour on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, England.

activities to be chosen for the community forest, and with regards to the most suitable economic structure to carry out those activities. One was more altruistic and community-minded, which I have defined as the 'community sustainability' group, and a second faction of 'loggers', that was interested in immediate personal employment in timber extraction and other resource uses, in distinction to MICRC's focus on non-timber forest products, and conservation through 'sustainable' use of Malcolm Island's forest resources. Within these two groups, the gendered interests and motivations of the MICRC members need to be analyzed and their impact on participation delineated, in order to assess the gendered realities of participation.

In response to actual changes in local economic and environmental conditions (e.g. fisheries collapse, etc.), a core group of MICRC members interviewed - largely represented by women (two-thirds) - supported a community-based resource cooperative enterprise which could act as an alternative to unsustainable and rootless, 'outside' corporations. In line with the MICRC's mandate, their motives focused on the social benefits of the MICRC (e.g. 'sustainable' economic opportunities). As one of the co-founders remarked: "...that unless the community got together and did something we would be probably just disappear and disintegrate" (DOROTHY). Indeed, the MICRC's objectives are predicated on community issues and concerns originally identified by the female co-founders of the cooperative. A female 'Community Forest Options' researcher involved in the MICRC, had some part to play in furthering this way of thinking.

These motivations and efforts highlight the feelings of anti-corporatism and the community's specificities with regards to access and control of resources. Reacting to the environmental and social consequences of past 'outside' corporate control of local resources, several interviewees argued as PETER did, that

[o]ne of the weird paradoxes about this Island is because the government did parcel it off and gave it to MacDonald Forest products, which became Whonnock, which became Interfor. Most of the Island if you fly over is clearcut.

I mean most of this Island is gone. And talk about community involvement ... that was no one's decision here.

Also from AMANDA's perspective, the 'big business' mentality on the North Island is such that

We've been programmed to believe that you can't be environmental and still make money. And I don't believe that. In fact, the way we're going ... I saw the whole fall down that was going to happen with the big companies pulling out of the North Island because they got all these huge machines in and raped and pillaged as quick as they could, they eliminated tons of jobs through mechanization and then they split. And then they said you can't be environmental and make money. The fact is, if they had done selective logging there would have been jobs forever, and a lot more jobs than they've been providing, if they had taken out the grapple-yarders and stuff.

Certainly this view was not shared by all. Yet a community-based cooperative was thought by those involved to offer local democratic control and access to environmental decision-making processes, as illustrated by DOROTHY's comments:

I also have a strong belief in the concept of the Forest Co-op and still feel that the people of Sointula should have some legal rights over the trees and harvesting on the Island. And although co-ops tend to have an extremely high rate of burn out, I am an idealist and see co-ops as a body with a greater listening ear to all its members rather than a hierarchical model of power. I don't know if it always works out that way in reality, over time.

Despite the inertia implicit in the community, people are seeking alternative employment opportunities with 'sustainable' initiatives:

Just to try and get people to work together against corporations. Basically to try and be in control of our own resources and get some access to the land to do things with the land, right here where we live, besides logging because there are no trees left. (ELMA)

Corresponding with a shared view of MICRC members, is the following motivation:

We are not going to be able to solve our problems until we have the power to choose the methods we want to make work. So, I see the co-op as a mechanism to get us out from under the thumb of the big companies. (JIM)

For the 'community sustainability' group, the idea of a cooperatively run, experimental community forest, which could serve as an example of forestry conducted in an "environmentally sensible manner." Similar concerns for "healthier" and "environmentally-

sound" community development are apparent in such motivations as sustainable employment opportunities and the consideration of quality of life issues for both current and future generations; as exemplified in the following women's responses:

I had some altruistic goals, in other words I thought it would be good for the community - good for people in the community but also for the physical environment. That it could provide employment opportunities for my children, or my children's friends. And, I even had a hope that it could provide me some employment. (DOROTHY)

I want my kids and grandkids to be able to live here like I have, to have the same quality of life, and you want to have something, some kind of infrastructure to keep the community going ... I don't think you need to make a profit. I think you need to put the emphasis on wanting to live here, surviving here, the quality of life and work. (ELMA)

I liked the idea of working together towards the common good of the community, having a say on what happens here with our resources, and to have work here and money stay on the Island. There is no future here, otherwise, for the younger generation. (LILI)

But these sentiments are shared across gender, as LILI's husband, STAN, states:

[t]he younger generation is leaving [Malcolm Island] because there are no economic opportunities for them. What can they do here? The cooperative would become a vehicle to enable future employment opportunities for Islanders.

Overall, those categorized as the 'community sustainability' group in the MICRC mentioned that the benefits of their participation were focused on "helping the community".

According to these members the cooperative structure is the most suitable for addressing these motivations, as it is perceived to not only offer access to, and control of community resources, but also local economic benefits. As one co-founder of the MICRC states,

"[o]ne of the chief benefits of working in a community cooperative is that you see any money that is made put back into the community, and that is what I wanted primarily to come out of a cooperative" (BARBARA).

While all ten female interviewees supported the cooperative structure, only 50% of the male members I interviewed voted to incorporate as a cooperative. Those males who supported the



cooperative, like DANIEL a young MICRC member, perceived the benefits to be similar to a long-term investment, stating that

[y]ou should get a value out of it, a dollar value of some sort if its through employment or dividends. At the time, I was just starting to get an interest in our own community, going to meetings. And the first meeting was just amazing, it was quite interesting, it seemed like it was on the edge, on the leading edge of what was happening in forestry. And we needed something for our vision - a structure that meant no matter how much money you had in the organization you only still had one vote, it was important for us that no one, that there would be no unbalance in power, everyone would have an equal amount of say.

There were also negatively reinforcing reasons to be involved in the MICRC. The remaining 50% of male interviewees, representing the 'logger's voice' - a small, yet influential group - opposed the formation of a cooperatively owned community forest. For the majority of this group, the primary motivation for being involved in the cooperative was related to the impact a community forest would have on their livelihoods. For instance, HARALD, who operated a small forestry-related business, was particularly interested in which direction the MICRC was heading, as community forest tenure or government-granted land would directly affect land allocated to the Ministry of forests (MOF)'s Small Business Forest Enterprise Program (SBFEP) on Malcolm Island.

According to him, small forestry-related businesses on the Island largely depend on this MOF program. Poignantly, his motivation was,

[t]o be involved in the decision-making process, in anything that so intimately affects my day to day life in forestry. And when I see people... formulating decisions with a resource that I depend on I want to be involved.

He also conveyed his appreciation of the variegated reasons for being involved:

But you see, the very basis of a co-op is that the members must have the same, fairly specific goals and ambitions and involvement. And I saw right from the very beginning this outfit does not have that. Some are interested in preservation; some are addressing harvesting. We all have different goals and aspirations here and so, I could foresee it wouldn't serve best as a co-op.

And also his frustration with the initiative's direction:

But it was a majority decision. And I am always reluctant when I am involved in something like this, that to withdraw entirely because when you are involved - even when you are unhappy with the majority decision - you do have a certain voice and a certain ability to control the eventual decision.

Yet, he was clear on his appreciation of his voice within the initiative:

Even if it is only one vote, you have the potential to influence other people's decisions and if you withdraw entirely you have no voice. You have no say at all. So I stayed involved in it, although I was not completely happy with the decision to form it as a cooperative.

The openness within the MICRC to be represented and have a voice in resource decisions was also stated by another forester: "if you don't participate you got no voice" (OTTO). Certainly while some women had positive reinforcing motivations and some men had negative reinforcing motivations, the idea and goal of a consensus was pervasive.

While the 'loggers' group perceived consensus as a problem in the context of a cooperative enterprise, the 'community sustainability' group argued that the cooperative would ultimately bring together and encourage discussion between those with differing opinions, perspectives and aspirations. As one female participant stated:

[i]t seemed that such a cooperative might have the potential to help people experiment with cooperative values and also get some of the different belief systems out on the table in an open forum. Mainly, the potentially conflicting belief systems about resource use and preservation, which will have to be addressed. (HILARY)

Despite their objections, the 'loggers' were genuinely interested in labour and economic opportunities that might be accessible through the MICRC. As HARALD added,

[s]econdary to that was an interest in getting access to any work that might arise from community forestry, I wanted to be involved in it from a business point of view to be able to work on projects, or be a harvester, or a worker within the forestry co-op, for my income... I was looking at it as a source of employment as well as having some control.

This view of ensuring the control of resources on the island is reflected by another small business owner, JOHAN, who operated a family-owned mill, with the statement that,

I am interested in wood, forests, and whatever. I saw some jobs and saw some access to the wood on this Island. The only way it is going to work for me is if I can get an assured wood supply or something. So, what I would like to see is a guaranteed wood supply for us so - I could expand and spend some more money, but I know I could do well if I had the wood coming in.

Alan Fitzgibbons and Associates (1995: 44): "Ministry of Forests staff are of the view (supported by local opinion) that as much as 95% of Section 16 wood leaves the North Island, and that the only fibre available to local mills on any kind of regular basis is non-quota logs or cants salvaged from older timber sales or road deactivation."

All in all, the MICRC seems to have attracted much attention by people across a variegated array of intentions and interests. There are, however, at the level of motivations, already some discernible gender distinctions as evoked in this section. While a review of these motivations has given weight to a critique of the assumed gender neutrality in 'green' perspectives, these nuances become even clearer when we study the vicissitudes of participation in the MICRC.

#### **5.4 Organizational Membership in the MICRC**

On Malcolm Island, women have historically played a critical role in community organization and management.<sup>6</sup> At a generalized level, while women's gendered motivations embrace the sustainable management of natural resources, the provision of sustainable employment, and quality of life for future generations, some men's gender interests have clearly been rooted in resource extraction. In this section, analysis of meeting attendance and participation in discussions, as well as men and women's capacity of participation (i.e. as a member, a director, and / or on a committee) in the MICRC will be used to illustrate the gendered nature of participation in the cooperative enterprise.

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<sup>6</sup> Examples of women's leadership in the community include: the founder of the Treering Reforestation Co-op in the 1970s and the current Regional Director for Census Subdivision 'A'.

Unlike other mixed-gender, resource-based cooperatives that predominantly consist of male members (as discussed in chapter two) the MICRC is relatively gender-balanced. It is composed of thirty-five females and forty males, of which two females and three males act as the Board of Directors. This quantitative equity appears in line with the first guiding principle of cooperatives, as defined by the International Cooperative Association (ICA) (see Figure 1). That is, the MICRC offers seemingly voluntary and open membership "without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination" (ICA 1995). The MICRC has no policies, which implicitly (or explicitly) exclude women or men from becoming members of the MICRC. These guidelines contrast from many Third World examples, in which land tenure and resource rights tend to restrict women's participation in resource cooperatives (Mehra 1993, Staudt 1978). This quantitative gender symmetry also leads participants and researchers alike to believe that the MICRC membership is 'equitable' or equally accessible to both women and men who wish to become members.

Using quantitative measures of organizational membership as an indicator of gender equity in the cooperative enterprise, however, allows only for the comparison of female with male participation rates in cooperatives. It offers little insight into the gendered experiences and perceptions of members' cooperative participation. Indeed, Mayoux (1995b) demonstrates that while women may technically be members of resource-based cooperatives, they are in many cases excluded from cooperative activities and decision-making, and are instead members for the sake of increasing cooperative membership representation and numbers (i.e. to appear to be a larger organization). These quantitative measures satisfy visual equity criteria, yet neglect functional equity. Indeed, several studies of women's participation in mixed-gender cooperatives, have contributed the insight that although women do participate in cooperatives as

evidenced in their attendance figures, they do not automatically gain access to the decision-making process or join in discussions regarding the cooperative.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of meeting attendance, findings from my MICRC member interviews as well as a review of the MICRC Minutes of Meetings indicate fairly equal participation of female and male members at MICRC meeting discussions. Judging by the attendance figures there seems to be only marginal gender differences, demonstrated by the fact that more men attended meetings. This can likely be explained by a contribution often offered in studies of gendered organizational participation (Conn 1990; Craig 1993; Mayoux 1995b). In this view, women have greater time constraints related to their varied gender roles in the household as well as in the community. Particularly, Moser (1989) defines this as the 'triple role' of women: reproductive work, productive work and community managing. This is directly relevant to household strategies and the operation of gender relations with regards to women's access to, and experience of, participation in the cooperative. Indeed, in relation to their gender roles in the family and community, 7 of the 10 female MICRC members interviewed defined time availability as a significant constraint to their participation (attendance) at MICRC meetings, as compared to 4 of the 10 male interviewees. The strategies used to address this constraint, however, were much the same: either they talked with other members or reviewed meeting minutes in order to keep apprised of the activities and decisions regarding the MICRC.

Further evidence of women's varied roles is also discernible from the interview data, as 19 of the MICRC interviewees perceived an unequal division of labour in the household. It may be surmised that within the MICRC membership, female household members do most of the 'housework', even though many female members are also employed in the paid workforce. This

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<sup>7</sup> See Mayoux (1993) and Mehra (1993)

points to the problematic nature of gender neutrality, which resonates throughout 'green' theories.

For those interviewees that attended MICRC meetings, most stated that they participate in discussions. Only one female interviewee mentioned that she feels uncomfortable speaking at meetings. However, after reviewing the MICRC Minutes I concluded that except for a few women who consistently participate in MICRC discussions, male members (and not necessarily the same men at every meeting) tend to be more vocal and to control the discussions. This had implications for the representation of women's gender interests in the cooperative.

This structural asymmetry is somewhat reflected in the issues raised at meetings. While discussions of the MICRC's objectives, such as "sustainable forest practices", "sustainable employment opportunities" and, "consideration of future generations" are not explicitly gendered, the debates regarding the technical aspects of running a resource-based cooperative show gender differences in discussion participation. Several male members already involved in the forest industry provided information on how to obtain a woodlot licence, market forest products, and manage a community forest.

In many instances, the MICRC meetings had thus shifted to a focus on forestry-related extraction considerations, although the MICRC's mandate explicitly stated that alternative forest activities (e.g. forest botanicals, non-timber forest products, 'value-added' products) were to be the basis of the community forest operations. This is illustrated in the following example. During one MICRC meeting in the summer of 1997, members were trying to find possible avenues of obtaining community forest tenure. For one male logger, the answer seemed quite simple. He asked whether anyone had thought of making a Section 16.2 bid proposal, in that this form of application might be one that the community would be more likely to acquire.<sup>8</sup> It

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<sup>8</sup> According to Alan Fitzgibbon and Associates (1995: 44)'s Kingcome Timber Supply Area Socio-Economic Analysis "an estimated 37 SBFEP registrants for the local area (mostly from Port McNeill, Port Hardy or Sointula)

was quickly noted, however, by one of the female directors, that a Section 16.2 timber sale is based on volume, and would not necessarily meet the community objective of sustainable forest management, versus straight harvesting potential. Although his suggestion opposed the MICRC's mandate, the topic of Section 16.2 was revisited on a number of occasions by the same male logger as well as others with similar interests, as if they had not heard what the female director had said earlier. Finally, it was decided that the cooperative would follow the traditional process of applying for small parcel forest-land, and a woodlot application would be the best option for the MICRC (MICRC Meeting Minutes 1997).

This example demonstrates that dominant masculinities define social relations and discussions in the MICRC, which revisits the sexual segregation evoked earlier, where men's needs and interests are the de facto yardstick of cooperative participation.

With regards to the capacity of members' participation (i.e. as a member, as a director, and / or on a committee), a cursory review of the interview results indicates little difference in members' participation in all levels of the MICRC. For instance, in terms of general membership, 7 of the 10 women interviewed were strictly members with no other responsibilities, compared to 6 of the 10 men. Similarly, at a higher organizational level, the five member Board of Directors was fairly evenly composed of two females and three males, whose responsibility was to implement MICRC members' decisions regarding the community forest initiative. A female director also assumed the role of chairperson for the MICRC.

Strictly comparing men and women's organizational participation, the MICRC can be presented as equitable, particularly when one considers women's leadership in the MICRC compared to other examples of mixed-gender community resource cooperatives (Campbell 1996, Mayoux 1995b, Singh and Balooni 1997). Co-founded by the MICRC's two female

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are eligible to compete for Section 16 sales ... these registrants are generally smaller operations and often do not have the capital required to competitively bid on large volume sales."

directors, the cooperative also demonstrates women's decisive role in coordinating, forming, and managing 'grassroots' initiatives for community well being on Malcolm Island.

As evoked earlier, Webler (1995: 38) argues about 'right' discourses in citizen participation models that,

[f]airness is key to producing a forum where equality and popular sovereignty can emerge and personal competence can develop. When participation is fair, everyone takes part on an equal footing ... not only are people provided equal opportunities to determine the agenda, the rules for discourse, and to speak and raise questions, but also equal access to knowledge and interpretations.

In the case of the MICRC, such 'fairness' was difficult to maintain. Of the two factions within the cooperative, which were detailed earlier, the Board of Directors predominantly represented the gendered interests of the 'community sustainability' group in the MICRC. A 'logger' was on the Board of Directors, according to several interviewees, simply because the 'logger' group called as many foresters and labourers in the community to join the cooperative and vote in "one of their own". They wanted to make sure their voice was represented at the directorial level. While men were organizing their politics, women were doing the work on the initiative. The 'community sustainability' group was active in developing the community forest proposal, researching and getting information, meeting with government officials, etc. Of the various committees formed within the cooperative (i.e. a committee to choose a consultant for the community forest feasibility study), most primarily consisted of the MICRC's governing body, as well as several female members who volunteered to do research or establish contact with government ministries and officials. As described earlier, women comprised a large segment of this group, however, men with similar interests as the women were also involved in the group. The 'logger' group, on the other hand, was really not active in cooperative activities beyond attending meetings. These gendered involvements in participation leads us back to a discussion of the failure of 'green' thought to deal with the 'social sustainability' and assumed gender neutrality within the cooperative enterprise.



### 5.5 Dispelling the Myth of Gender-Neutrality in the MICRC

While the 'community sustainability' group laboured to receive land for a community forest, their initiative was later shown to only benefit the gendered interests of the men's 'logger' group. This is evident in the MICRC's attempt to obtain a woodlot license on Malcolm Island, a license that the 'logger' director eventually reserved legally for himself. This mirrors other studies of women and men's labour and gender interests, in which women's unpaid labour is exploited while men's paid labour benefits at the expense of women's gender interests (e.g. Schroeder 1993).

Despite this outcome, most interviewees implied that equity, or fairness, is intrinsic to the cooperative enterprise. Interviewees were asked to compare the differences in participation between men and women in the MICRC. Interestingly, in almost all the interviews the common response was there were no gender differences, thus implying the MICRC was a gender-neutral space. The male interviewees were the most emphatic on this point. As STAN stated, "of course, it depends on the cooperative, but not in this cooperative." Adding, "I think that this Island is probably one of the very unique places that recognizes that there isn't a hell of a lot of difference between men and women, we're all human beings."

In analyzing the interview results, it is apparent that there were some difficulties with questions of gender differences. Many felt defensive about the feminist slant of my study. One man adamantly said that there may be differences in the cooperative, though not 'in principle', commenting on how men have more logging experience which may affect women's opportunities in the cooperative. A couple, whose household income depended on local / regional forestry-based opportunities, agreed that,

[i]f there was a division it would be those involved in forestry and those not involved in forestry. Limitations to getting involved depend on work and where it takes you to and your priorities. Women have had ample opportunity in fishing and silviculture on the Island.

Yet the division of labour between "those involved in forestry" and "those not involved in forestry" is gendered, and differences in attendance, participation in discussions, and organizational specificities are readily apparent in the MICRC, as interviewees' life histories demonstrate.

Women also overwhelmingly responded that there were no differences, though many described the sexual segregation of men and women's roles in a potential community forest. For instance, as LILI remarks, "each can offer different skills, different labour skills, ie. men - the more physical side and women could train, etcetera.". On the other hand, JANET noted differences in commitment to the MICRC in that "women are more willing to slog along for a longer period of time without immediate benefits. Like I went to meetings, my husband never bothered."

But gender differences are not equal to gender inequalities. It would seem that along with 'green' illusions, the MICRC members' ideals of social sustainability for the cooperative enterprise also were therefore gender-blind, under the pretense of neutrality. For women, it seems as though women were actively involved and participating in the cooperative (ie writing reports, organizational arrangements, etc.), but it was in their role as wives, mothers, and 'community managers' that their work was directed. That is, for most women, focus was placed on finding future employment opportunities (particularly for future generations) that would be environmentally sustainable, so that their children (and children's friends) could remain on Malcolm Island and the community would retain its rural lifestyle and quality of life.

Reconceptualizing equity in the cooperative, the MICRC exhibits multiple and conflicting interests which contradicts 'green' theories of common interests and goals of participation in the cooperative enterprise. Differentiation implicit within the cooperative has an impact on members' participation. There are gender distinctions as men's resource extraction gender interests differ from female's gender interests for the environment and future generations.

All in all, the cooperative is not a gender neutral space. Gender power relations exist. 'Green' thought simply focuses on *access* to participation. In this view, the cooperative is viewed as equitable, based on participation rates and the non-existence of policies barring women's participation in the MICRC. But the *quality* of participation is often neglected in green cooperative theories. As this chapter has demonstrated, men's gender interests of resource extraction, personal employment, immediate economic benefits, a preference for corporate structures versus female's gender interests of 'sustainable' resource use and employment, quality of life and consideration of future generations, anti-corporatism (particularly 'outsider' interests) and the cooperative model; all indicate that the MICRC was marked by inequality from a gender analysis perspective. Gender power relations are implicated in tensions between forestry versus community, and non-forestry interests, whereas male gender concerns and histories consistently dominate. For example, social relations in the MICRC were more gendered and less neutral than 'green' theory assumes. These tensions affect participation, in particular, with regards to the issues and aims of the cooperative.

As proposed at the beginning of this chapter, men and women characteristically occupy different positions in processes of production and reproduction, and are thus affected by these processes differently. Indeed,

[t]he recognition of difference, of multiple locations, and the inherent instability of gendered subjectivities, means that feminisms must replace a single feminism. It is becoming clear that adequate theorizing about women's position must simultaneously include racial, class, ethnic and other differences as they contribute to an unstable gendered femaleness in specific historical and geographical circumstances (McDowell 1992: 412).

The importance of understanding gender divisions of labour is not only related to gauging the amount of work done by men and women, but also to recognizing that men and women do different work. Local gendered labour activities and community social norms play a significant role in the shaping of cooperative members' identities, as well as determining their access to

participation in the cooperative enterprise. While this chapter has focused on the issues of access to participation in the MICRC, there are limits to what we can learn from an analysis of equity. Too often assumptions are made on the basis of equity alone, as is evidenced in 'green' cooperative theories. Equity and empowerment are not the same. Chapter six therefore looks at the latter issue, and its relevance in the MICRC.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Empowerment in Participation: Gender Power Relations in the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative**

#### **6.1 Establishing a Focus on the Gender Power Relations of Participation**

As discussed so far in this thesis, women and men's reasons for setting up a cooperative enterprise on Malcolm Island was anchored in a belief that the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative (MICRC) would afford opportunities of 'access'. This thesis has so far nuanced the experiences of members' participation in light of 'green' literature, to validate the contention that the cooperative enterprise was not gender neutral. The analysis brought forth the need to delve further into the consideration of gender power relations, in light of a critique of 'green' thought.

Indeed, 'green' literature has it that when women participate in the cooperative (or are able to increase their participation within it), these women benefit materially and socially, and are thus 'empowered'. The analysis so far has focused broadly on gender equity and less on power relations, in terms of members' endeavours, and of social sustainability. This chapter explores the critique of gender neutrality further through a study of empowerment in a mixed-gender community resource cooperative on Malcolm Island. The aim of the analysis of gendered participation in the MICRC is to make it clear that the inter relations between the social context and participation is of fundamental importance.

The impetus to form the MICRC was embedded in issues of social sustainability. Theis and Ketilson (1994: 18)'s summarize the drive to participate by stating that "[t]hose who embrace the social change and empowerment philosophy of cooperatives say their organization

gives them an opportunity to work towards things they believe in.” With this understanding in mind, in chapter five, social sustainability was analyzed in terms of equitable participation, and men and women’s gender identities. In this chapter, focusing on gender power relations, I aim to shed some light on how social sustainability is inextricable from issues of ‘empowerment’. This chapter thus shifts its focus from concerns of the *equity of participation* to the *empowerment of participation* in the cooperative enterprise. The distinction lies in differences between access and impacts of that access. As Theis and Ketilson (1994) point out, while “[e]quality of access is one criterion by which to judge equity in cooperatives” (Theis and Ketilson 1994: 1). But “equality of impact is more important.” (Theis and Ketilson 1994: 1). For the purposes of this chapter, I thus conceptualize these distinctions by using the term ‘empowerment’, a choice I clarify further in what follows.

‘Empowerment’ is defined as “a process aimed at consolidating, maintaining or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular context” (Craig and Steinhoff 1990: 191). Certainly, empowerment implicates considerations of ‘power’ surrounding the acquisition of skills, knowledge, experience, and self-efficacy. As Craig (1993: 192) proposes, “to empower implies the granting of power or the delegation of authority (legitimate power) to others.” Here empowerment is analyzed in terms of gender differences of knowledge and authority implicit in the labour practices on Malcolm Island. Indeed, men and women’s gendered labour, in particular, members’ involvement in resource-related industries tends to influence their access to, and the impact of, their participation in the MICRC. These gender differences of labour produce gendered knowledges, and influence whose authority is validated.

This chapter suggests that authority in the MICRC is largely based on paid labour and knowledge, and *not* solely on positions of authority within the cooperative enterprise. I establish this focus to distinguish from conventional views that define organizational participation and

'formal' authority in decision-making processes as the principal indicators of empowerment (Rosenfeld et al. 1998). Men and women, by their different locations within the paid and unpaid workforces and systems of knowledge, bring different authorities to bear on the cooperative enterprise. In turn, they experience the cooperative enterprise differently. As the rest of this chapter will illustrate through several theoretical, institutional, and experiential analytical lenses, the multiple gendered knowledges and authorities implicated in labour lead to a highly differentiate reading of the particularities of men and women's 'authority' in the MICRC.

## **6.2 Foray into Theoretical Contributions on Gendered Knowledge and Authority**

Common sense dictates that gendered practices carry economic implications, since men and women's activities are paid and others are non-remunerated. Although critiqued by Alderson and Conn (1988, 1993) and Waring (1997), conventional theoretical wisdom defines 'labour' solely as 'paid employment'. Without delving into these debates, I contend that one's paid or both paid and unpaid 'labour' impacts one's authority, in particular through the specific knowledges intrinsic to one's gendered activities. These associated authorities ultimately influence participation in community-based enterprises for social change, such as in the cooperative enterprise.

With these considerations in mind, I accept Lips (1991: 5) definition of gender power relations as " . . . disciplinary power - a system of power that transcend particular female-male relationships and the intentional acts of dominance, or attempts at equality, that occur within those relationships." For Lips, gender power relations are about institutionalized sexism, which is of direct relevance to this thesis's study of the MICRC. Indeed, and I paraphrase, Lips writes that participation in accepted gender power relations can hardly be avoided and takes many forms, many of which are unrecognized, unintentional, but supported by participation or

avoidance of the overall system of gender power relations. Hence, with regards to social change, institutionalized power relations between men and women affect and are perpetuated by relations of participation, largely in terms of peoples' knowledge and authority, or what Lips calls the "accumulation of individual behaviors." (Lips 1991: 6).

Focusing on the study of social change through an analysis of labour and its influence on empowerment in the MICRC also requires the following qualification. In light of the above mentioned nuances, with regards to the values people place on labour, I suggest that to get a clearer perspective on the empowerment of participation, we need to be cognizant of the gendered processes of those whose knowledge and authority are validated specifically in the MICRC. The implication is that we need to be aware of the possible analytical merits of distinguishing between formal and substantive rights (Prior 1995; Kobayashi and Ray 2000, 402-3). Defining the two is a way of distinguishing first, established rights within a given society from how rights are interpreted by people, power, and authority in a society. Second, the distinction separates legal instituted rights of non-discrimination from attained rights. In the case of the MICRC and Malcolm Island, formal rights of non-discrimination were stipulated when the institution was set up, yet substantive rights were attributed to certain groups within the cooperative enterprise over time. Such awareness leads to an understanding of the invisibility of 'unpaid' labour in the MICRC, and of the realities of members' access to resources in the social context of Malcolm Island.

The need to understand the nuances, experiences, and contradictions of authority became quite clear to me when I entered the 'field' armed with organizational definitions of authority. Interviewees' responses - voting rights, leadership roles, and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes - seemed to always point me to concerns for the potential for equity and empowerment with regards to members' participation in the cooperative. Underlying gender



dynamics, an issue raised at other points during the interviews, ultimately impacted these considerations of 'formal' rights and authority. That is, I was made aware that gender power relations of knowledge and authority probably undermined members' (in particular, women's) empowerment.

As broached above, the intricacies of gender power relations become apparent even in a general overview of the dynamics of the MICRC. It seems to me that the complexities surrounding 'empowerment' are dealt with incompletely in the literatures that focus on knowledge and authority. With particular attention to feminist theory, as Alcoff (1996:14) states: "What feminist theory has inserted into the critical project of our era is the sexually specific body, as a mediating element of knowledge, a constitutive component of reason, and a condition of the right to know." What follows is thus a feminist perspective on some of the relevant theoretical contributions that mention gender power relations. The aim of this overview is to comment on the limits of these contributions with regards to ascertaining the importance of studying equity considerations in terms of gender power relations.

### **6.3 Feminist Perspective on the Gender Differences of Knowledge and Authority of Malcolm Island**

On Malcolm Island, expertise is mostly viewed as being based on men's forestry labour, experiences and knowledge. In light of this asymmetry there was in the participants a belief that, as LILI stated, "the cooperative should allow interested parties equal time, if possible, depending on expertise." This view may be seen to be based on democratic principles, and may be characterized as using the rhetoric of the ideal of 'equality of opportunity'. To analyze how this gendering in the cooperative enterprise occurs, I use the notion of 'situatedness', presented in chapter two.

Understanding the relationship between gendered labour and knowledge opens up a discussion of the reasons for, and consequences of, gender power relations in the cooperative enterprise. In this section I characterize the practices and processes that reinforce gender inequalities in the MICRC as largely being based on the connections between 'situated' knowledge and their resultant authorities. I also look at the stereotypes that influence gendered authority in the cooperative.

With regards to the interrelations between gendered labour, knowledge and authority, for the purposes of this chapter, labour was either defined as paid or unpaid, and knowledge was understood as related either to forestry, fisheries, subsistence or to recreational activities. The analysis of this chapter focuses on the changing relations of authority implicated in the changing valorization of differing knowledges at the community level. I suggest, that in terms of the operations and functioning of the MICRC, the dynamics of institutional participation at the community level (as in readapting fisheries knowledge and a valorization of forestry knowledge) oriented gender power relations dynamics towards forestry issues rather than fisheries issues, in spite of the variegated knowledge and authority positions of the participants. For example, the circumstances in fisheries were dire during my fieldwork. In 1998 MacMillan Ltd. offered to sell its fish processing facility for one dollar to the community of Malcolm Island, and in that same year Coast Select, a family run fish processing and smoking operation on the island, was also trying to sell its facility.

Specifically, I thus conducted research at a time when one might presume that fishing knowledge was less valued in the community, as people with such knowledge were being retrained or were experiencing situations where they had to adapt their fishing knowledge to other activities. All in all, authority positions were affected, which in turn shifted balances of gender power relations, and affected emerging employment and institutional opportunities.

These considerations point to the fact that gender differences in the MICRC are intrinsically related to gendered labour, knowledge and authority relationships and experiences inside and outside the cooperative enterprise. By studying the impact of participation, the analysis in this chapter aims to illustrate the contradictions and diversity of experiences between and within gender. Focusing on the multiple knowledges of gendered labour practices, the assymetric valuations of gendered knowledge, and on discerning empowerment beyond the recognition and rhetoric of gender, the ways in which labour and knowledge processes and dynamics (gained from outside the cooperative) reinforce gender inequalities within the cooperative become clearer.

### **6.3.1 Analysis of Local Knowledge-Grassroots Rhetoric**

What is defined as knowledge among the cooperative members? An indication may be drawn from Table 4 on the next page, which represents a general overview of what knowledge each MICRC member might contribute to the cooperative. Specifically, from the questions: "What personal and professional experiences do you bring to the cooperative?", and "Do you have any specific knowledge or skills that you are willing to contribute to the cooperative?", the following representation may be made.

In the context of the cooperative, I found that knowledge is mostly thought to be scientific knowledge, or 'expert' knowledge. In many cases, and in particular amongst the female interviewees, they, and it was felt that they did not have 'knowledge'. Knowledge was primarily based on previous and/or current labour in resource production, outside the MICRC.

Paradoxically, members wanted access to, and control of, the Island's resources because they perceived that they had local knowledge and therefore they better understood Malcolm Island's contemporary economic, social, and environmental conditions, resource history, and community 'needs'. They felt they were more knowledgeable than 'outside' 'experts'. Yet, many

**Table 4: Interviewees' Response to their Types of Knowledge**

Number of Interviewees Responses to Types of Knowledge	Women	Men
No knowledge	1	0
Knowledge Through Community Involvement	4	2
Local and / or Local Ecological Knowledge	10	10
Forestry / Industry Knowledge	0	6
Note: 'No knowledge' refers to having no forestry knowledge. 'Knowledge through community involvement' refers to past experience with organizational and administrative necessities within a community organization. 'Local and or local ecological knowledge' refers to knowledge of community members about the community history and of the surrounding environment. 'Forestry and industry knowledge' refers to management plans, experience in forestry related occupations, machinery occupations, industry knowledge, and dealings with the Ministry of Forests.		
Source: Pullen (1998).		

contradicted themselves by saying that they lacked knowledge. Thus it became clear that 'expertise' in resource processes and production was usually the basis of members perceptions of 'knowledge' despite their objections to it.

Interestingly, three women were emphatic about their knowledge as they stated, respectively: "I don't have any knowledge whatsoever. Well my step-father of mine was a

logger..." (SANDRA); JANET said: "I have no knowledge, but am willing to learn"; and DOROTHY said: "I have no professional forestry attributes at this time," but at the time she was taking courses in forestry engineering. Despite the fact that two of these women had lived on Malcolm Island for approximately twenty-five years, and were heavily involved in community organizations, they perceived knowledge in terms of scientific, forestry-based knowledge.

I propose that a focus on gender power relations has much to offer with regards to explaining this paradox and its connected contradictions. These contradictions implicate directly superficial and inherent perceptions of authority that posit knowledge as being neutral in the MICRC. AMANDA, an 'environmentalist' speaks directly of this when she states that: "I believe that people on a grassroots level have more knowledge and compassion than people on top of a hierarchy." Interestingly, as with 'green' literature, 'local knowledge' is here held up as being superior to 'outside' knowledge. The non perception, or for those who did not evoke a possible hierarchy, of differing knowledges held up consciously or not by people in Malcolm Island does not mean that the possibility of a hierarchy or the reality of differing knowledges is unimportant. Indeed, the occlusion of this reality implies that gender, knowledge and authority merit more attention and are not necessarily described within the confines of peoples' perceptions or publicly held views.

With particular attention to women's and men's gendered knowledges, ecofeminist arguments have focused on local knowledge as the realm of women's knowledge, based upon their situated activities in household and the community. Yet, facets of peoples' lives cannot be dichotomized clearly between men and women. Certainly, for example, many men have taken on volunteer and community roles which influenced their participation and expression of knowledge in the MICRC. With these reservations in mind, my findings indicate that female interviewees did mention local knowledge through their activities based on recreation and hobbies (i.e. making

jams or canning), and to a limited degree their paid employment (if applicable). Yet, a dichotomy did not exist with regards to whether local knowledge was within the women's or men's domain. Both men and women felt they had sufficient local knowledge of resources, of where resources are located, etc. Differences in interpreting local knowledge were most apparent in discussions that raised issues of resource production, resource industry knowledge, skills and experience. Distinctions may be related to labouring within the community based on what organizational theorists call "skill bundles" (Theis and Ketilson 1994: 5). These bundles are collected from other volunteer and community roles, from paid work, and from family life etc.

While there is much to be learned from focusing on local knowledge from a theoretical perspective, the politicization of local knowledge as grassroots rhetoric tends to be problematic. The application of local knowledge through institutions such as the cooperative enterprise is believed to be empowering (both for researchers and cooperative members) as even interviewees made reference to local knowledge and applied the language of grassroots rhetoric. But here again, from a feminist perspective, just as we demonstrate with a critique of 'green thought', there is problem with this discourse as local knowledge is mostly perceived to be gender neutral by participants in the MICRC.

The issue of how women and men identified different knowledges, and how they defined and distinguished them is part and parcel of how they valued and or discounted their and others knowledges. What emerged from the research was more the importance of the power relations between knowledges than considerations of hierarchization of knowledges. While local knowledge was held up as expert knowledge, people wanted to assert their authority by disclaiming outside knowledges, yet relied on these to make their decisions. In other words, people wanted influence upon decisions, instead of having non-residents and non-local

knowledge affecting their lives through decisions based on non-local knowledge. This analysis points to the multiple nature of knowledge, the subject of the next section's analysis.

### **6.3.2 Multiple Knowledges Emerge: Analysis of Gendered Labour Practices**

The spatial and gender divisions of labour on Malcolm Island were briefly discussed with regards to the cooperative enterprise in chapter five. Delving into women and men's gendered knowledges and contrasting their situations proves insightful with regards to issues of authority. What follows is a discussion of gender positions. On Malcolm Island, gender divisions of labour seem to settle along the lines of gender interests. These interest are presented here according to women and men's activities.

All ten women interviewed discussed their own local ecological knowledge. Examples included the following: where to pick seaweed, fish, pick berries, collect firewood, the medicinal properties of plants and plant species knowledge. This knowledge was gained through women's interaction with the environment for recreation, for medicinal remedies, for jams and jellies, etc. While three of the ten women had worked in, and were knowledgeable of, the fishing industry, none cited forestry knowledge, although one women was taking forest engineering courses. Past experiences women brought to the cooperative were fairly diverse, but were mainly focused on organizational activities such as training, research and technical skills, policy and procedure development, and accounting.

All ten men cited local and local ecological knowledge of the Island's forests and surrounding waters, gained either through recreational use or through their employment. Six men identified forest ecosystem knowledge, tree species knowledge and market value, equipment knowledge having worked in the logging industry all of their lives. Other responses included: trail-building knowledge, training modules, and organizational skills such as writing proposals.

Past experiences men brought to the cooperative were predominantly resource-related, either through schooling (in a forestry program) but mainly in 'the bush'. Logging experiences and know-how such as forest management, forest products, contracting, marketing, milling, machinery, and silviculture were referred to. One male member, however, speaking of environmental sustainability, stated "I don't think there is a lot of technical knowledge, or knowledge, to drive sustainability in the cooperative." (ARVO)

Male members whose motivations and interests were similar to women's seemed to conduct the majority of the tasks in the cooperative. For the most part, labour within the cooperative enterprise was unpaid. With the exception of a short term paid community liaison position held by a woman during the Community Forest Feasibility Study period, all active participants, as discussed in chapter five, were unpaid volunteers.

The respective knowledges inherent in the members' perceptions related to divisions between active (unpaid) versus less active participants. STAN commented that:

Even in a place like this, the people that will get involved in trying to promote something or put their ideas, are not the largest percentage of people. Most people sit back and let somebody else do it, and say 'I don't know why they tried that for that would have never worked to start with, I could have told them months ago that was crazy'. Just because it is a cooperative you aren't immune to that type of thinking.

Interestingly, members' prior perceptions had a direct impact on the cooperative enterprise. These perceptions were dependent on the institutionalized history of their labour. For example, members involved in forestry were less active in the cooperative enterprise, and were primarily interested in potential employment opportunities: in essence, their behaviour emulated the behaviour they would have had in larger more hierarchical institutions usually associated with forestry. Active participants perceived the community forest initiative as experimental and alternative, while the members already involved in the forestry industry were more detached.



They were maintaining their participation at the level of waiting for new opportunities, rather being directly involved in creating new opportunities.

The issue of unpaid labour is important because it points to the gendered realities of participation in the cooperative enterprise. Despite the active participation of some men, the institutionalization of the organization mostly followed *ad hoc* efforts and was mostly directed by women's interests, while men waited on the sidelines and reacted based on their interests.

Bringing theory and experience together gives weight to the contention proposed in chapter five, namely that knowledge is not gender neutral since labour is itself gendered. Gendered labour implicates knowledge since the cooperative enterprise tends to reinforce gender inequalities and gender power relations. The gender divisions of labour implicated in cooperative tasks tend to demonstrate that women were not empowered through cooperative labour participation, as this labour was mostly unpaid labour tinted with female specific labour stereotypes. These realities and resulting biases have been dealt with incompletely in the cooperative literature on gender and labour relations. Within the MICRC and the social context of Malcolm Island there seems to be an implicit asymmetry where women's gendered knowledge is devalued and men's gendered knowledge is held up and perceived as legitimate knowledge, with the resulting consequences in terms of positions of authority, as we shall explore further in the next section.

### **6.3.3 Implications of Malcolm Islanders Asymmetric Valuation of Gendered Knowledge: Towards Understanding Gendered Authority in the MICRC**

Related to the last point, the idea that women's labour, knowledge and authority tend to be usurped, ignored or devalued ('invisible') at large (that is, under male orientations), one must also take into account that women also tend to devalue their knowledge. Although the MICRC is

perceived to be democratic, one must ask how does democracy work in the cooperative? Who and how does it benefit? Mosse (1994) calls the fundamentals of gender power relations 'systematic hierarchization'. This interpretation is relevant for this thesis as it may be used to show the multiple relations between labour, knowledge and authority, as well as contribute a framework to analyze the institutional hierarchies realized in the MICRC.

Though Jardine (1997) makes the point that one of the common values and aims of cooperative enterprises is that "...stereotyped work, sex, or social roles are avoided whenever possible", as was discussed in the last section, such objectives are rarely met. What follows is a presentation of the implications of asymmetric knowledges as they relate to the issue of gendered authority both inside and outside the MICRC, through a discussion of the gendering of tasks involved in the everyday functioning of the MICRC.

The following paragraphs present information on voting, standing for election, assuming a leadership role in the MICRC, opportunities for participation in the MICRC, and barriers to participation in the MICRC along gender differences lines.

With regards to voting, all twenty respondents stated that they had exercised their voting rights. With regards to standing for election, the Board of Directors were nominated and chosen by acclamation. Two women were nominated and accepted and 2 were nominated and declined. Three men were nominated and accepted; one man was nominated but declined. One woman commented that:

I was nominated but declined because I felt there was a definite conflict of interest occurring. There were different philosophies of people, occurring, with some joining to keep logging what was left and others were there to save what was left. There was a real diversity in people's agendas. (HILARY)

One women not nominated said she would consider standing for election at some point. But it should be noted she is a leader in an another community organization. Another women noted

that at least four other organizations had surfaced in the past few years. She likened this community response to Baudrillard's concept of 'simulcra', as it is like a simulation -- with all directors but no membership. Another woman, JANET, similarly commented that "It seems that there are all these meetings, all these groups, groups up the ying yang ... But what do they actually accomplish other than having meetings and forming boards?"

With regards to assuming a leadership role in the MICRC, four of the 10 women had taken on a leadership position. Two women acted as educators, facilitators, and researchers. Two women were Directors. Four of 10 men had taken on a leadership position. One man wrote papers and conducted some research, but was an Alternate Director. Three other men were Directors, and one became over time the secretary of the cooperative yet did not do any of the minutes, etc. the usual tasks of a secretary).

With regards to opportunities to participate in decisions, all the participants stated that they were given the opportunity to participate in decisions. For example, the community forest land proposal, the wood lot application, how and when to incorporate the cooperative, and the name change (from community forest cooperative to community resource cooperative), were all perceived as events where and when democracy was at work. This opportunity to participate however was not always with the best interests of the cooperative in mind. As one male respondent seemed to laugh off, "[a]s a matter of fact, we lined up enough people to come and vote down anything that was going to happen. Funny how democracy works - you get on the phone, call a few people and you can do just about anything."

Concerning barriers to participation in decision-making, women did feel that there were barriers to their participation in decisions. One mentioned "there are several people I am particularly uncomfortable with". A few women mentioned instances in which they were not able to attend and were thus excluded from the decision-making process: "if you weren't there you

weren't part of the decisions". Interestingly, one women noted "family complications" in that a relative of hers was hoping for the cooperative to be something she was totally against. When asked about barriers, men all simply stated that "there aren't any", a contradiction which requires further clarifications.

At the level of general interest driven tasks, although a male director in the MICRC stated that he was the secretary for the MICRC, he said he never took down the 'Minutes'. Instead, several female members listed 'minutes' as one of their tasks within the cooperative. Most of the women who had specific tasks were active women in the community. For example, one was a newspaper editor and another an organization leader. Three of the 10 women conducted research, one of whom was the community liaison person with the feasibility study. One produced a package of materials outlining Community Forestry Tenure options, plans and mission statement possibilities. And one collected input into protected areas designation on the Island). While two of the women were Directors, and one was the Chair, one women was informally responsible for updating and informing members.

Regarding positions of authority as they relate to situated knowledge, the men were split with five having specific tasks and five not being directly involved. Two of the 10 men helped with research, looked into Community Forestry Tenure plan and phoned and spoke with different people regarding the community cooperative. One of these men was an alternate Director, 1 man interacted with the Ministry of Forestry on behalf of the cooperative. Three men were Directors, one was the secretary, another geared the sub-committee that looked into the Coast Select Option of buying land, and the third helped with collecting information on the Community Forestry Tenure proposal. Note that the loggers were KARL; OTTO; HARALD; MICHAEL; DANIEL, and a logger's wife PETRA.

Loggers tended to see their experiences and knowledge as more legitimate. This confidence was also the case with those in community/sustainability group. Ten men said they would consider working for the MICRC. Four of them specified working on a contract work basis, in accordance to their lifestyle preference as they already were conducting their labour on a part time basis in activities such as road building, timber harvesting, timber marketing forest products, etc. One mentioned being interested in an executive level position or in a job related to the fishing aspect of the MICRC (he was at the time unemployed). Other men spoke of their availability in terms of being on-call for whatever was needed. Two of these respondent men were unemployed, and their views coincide with their motivations as 5 of the 8 men had stated economic opportunities as a motive.

What these divisions and participation experiences point to is a division of labour between women and men where the former focused on aspects of cooperative organization, and the latter concentrated on relations between resource-related government ministries and the business aspects of the cooperative. This is further apparent in tasks conducted during meetings. Women seemed to be more active during the meetings. Two women occasionally took down the Minutes. One collected the membership fee and 1 was an educator and facilitator. The Chair (a woman) called the meetings and facilitated them. Men on the other hand were rather inactive during meetings. Two of the men said that they helped facilitate the meetings, but both were held to that participation in light of the fact that both were Directors of the MICRC. While 5 women had no specific tasks, 8 of the 10 men stated that they had undertaken no tasks during meetings.

For women and men who predicated their involvement on the premise of personal employment opportunities, 6 of the 10 women said they would consider working part-time (one stated full-time) for the MICRC. Types of jobs that they would apply for ranged from office manager/publications to salvaging / pruning / thinning / gardening (organic greenhouse). What

this analysis of the gendered labour aspects of participation in the MICRC points to is that it would seem that inequality in roles and responsibilities within the MICRC 'trace' power relations outside the organization, in Malcolm Island at large. In line with a critique of gender neutrality claims of the cooperative enterprise, and in agreement with other studies, such as Wacjman (1983)'s work on the Fakenham shoe cooperative, this thesis concurs with a perspective which critiques the view that a high proportion of female labour is in what is traditionally seen as 'women's jobs', a view that maintains stereotypical male and female-defined work roles.

#### **6.4 Discerning Empowerment: Analysis of Rhetoric**

In order to understand the realities of gender power relations on members' empowerment in the cooperative, a series of questions was deemed pertinent and instructive: what is defined as knowledge? What are women's and men's gendered knowledges? How 'accessible' are women's knowledge, competence and experience to mixed-gender cooperatives? Whose/which knowledge is 'legitimate' or validated in terms of authority. What knowledge is deemed appropriate for women and men? What are the differences in access to knowledge?

So far, we have been able to illustrate and discuss the contradictions, complexities, and multiplicities of empowerment through a theoretical, institutional and personal foci on the MICRC. I contend in this section that empowerment needs to be acknowledged as more than just 'formal authority' or positions of leadership. Certainly, several women were empowered by their participation in the MICRC in the sense that they achieved or assumed authority and leadership positions within the cooperative. But their legitimacy was undermined or challenged by others' accepted authority and knowledge, which, in the case of the MICRC, are mostly based on resource production experiences and their implicit gender power relations. Indeed, studying gender power relations at the family-farm scale, Feldman and Welsh (1995) found that

differential power relations are embodied in the division of labour and thus confer on women less active participation in decisions regarding production choices. This reflects ideas of power, authority, and whose knowledge is perceived to be 'legitimate'.

Interestingly, people I interviewed never explicitly referred to the issue of empowerment. But some men did mention that in their view empowerment does not always lead to economic or material benefit. In particular, the male interviewees held the view that working for the cooperative would lower their wages, as these were not union jobs. For those already involved in forestry, there was a reluctance to wrap their heads around employment in a different sector (e.g. non-timber products), or to deal with different business structure than those in well established industries. Indeed, a *Forestry Sector Training Needs for Older Workers* (1996: 12) report conducted in the Port McNeill Forest District found a similar reluctance for forestry workers to accept a reduction in their level of income:

[b]ecause the industry has traditionally required high levels of particular skills, has been a relatively dangerous occupation, and has been harvesting a resource for which there is a constant demand, the level of financial compensation for the workers has been at a high level. It is unlikely that other occupations will have the earning capacity as those in the forestry sector for which salaries would be comparable.

As discussed earlier, the cooperative enterprise literature that touches on gender typically studies paid labour solely within the context of the cooperative enterprise, in distinction to what I have done above in terms of not only the cooperative enterprise, but also the community at large. Moreover, while this literature does provide an example of gender differences, analyzing the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in which 16 percent of labour participants are women, and 70 percent of their labour is clerical occupations (Theis and Ketilson 1994: 27), this literature does not go beyond to discuss gender, not only in terms of differences, but also in light of asymmetries.

Indeed, even in the case of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, a far greater share of tasks fall to women while these tasks are also regarded as less being less skill intensive or specific. Using the perspective of this section, such evidence defines inequality in a double sense. As Hacker and Elcorobairutia (1987) and Hacker (1988) further note, a pervasive problem in large industrial cooperatives is that technical and scientific knowledge/skills are concentrated among a few positions, primarily held by men. Using another example, in their study of the earlier mentioned Mondragon, Hacker and Elcorobairutia (1987) find women workers in the cooperative complex cluster at the bottom of the pay and occupational hierarchies. Thus my thesis confirms that cooperative enterprises tend to 'trace' the inequalities in roles and responsibilities and power relations in other businesses.

In contrast to past studies which have concentrated primarily upon gender and labour relations operating solely within the cooperative, an investigation of paid and unpaid labour and its resultant 'situated' knowledges demonstrates how power relations outside the organization influence the activities and processes within the MICRC. Because the majority of work within the MICRC was unpaid labour, I contextualized this study around both unpaid and paid labour outside the cooperative enterprise. From this perspective, I can only conclude that women were disempowered in light of their participation in the MICRC. I am reminded again of SANDRA's position as while she is the Chair of the MICRC, a long-time resident, the Regional Director for Malcolm Island, extremely active in the community, yet she claims she has no knowledge. And I must stress HILARY's comment that she had 'power' because she put together the Community Forestry Options information for the cooperative, but that she felt undermined as her endeavour was channeled or appropriated by those who strictly wanted her to focus her attention on employment in traditional forestry activities.



Men's paid labour is seen as the norm in which 'others' in the community may be integrated. Interestingly, this view is reflected across genders as KARL a former logger, exuding the idioms of the language of the 1980s, also unknowingly yet characteristically regrouping youth and women issues against men's', says that the MICRC "gives women and younger people initiative to try, and the older people the initiative to help others." KARL's comments are certainly based on men's experiences and knowledge. But his view occludes the fact that women have been active participants and 'initiators' within the MICRC at the outset. For him and many others, including some women, the MICRC 'should' primarily be a men's 'space'.

In many ways, the MICRC further consolidates men's traditional and gendered practices. This tendency is echoed in Delancey (1987)'s research findings on palm-oil cooperatives in the southwest province of Cameroon, where women lack skills and experience in resource-based cooperatives, which impacts, in that case, the viability of such women-only cooperatives. He compares the problems of the women-run cooperative with that of a successful male-run palm-oil cooperative. His study implicitly demonstrates the male gender norms upon which knowledge is based in the state (societal hindrances) as well as within the cooperative. With regards to empowerment, while control of Malcolm Island's resources was a central concern for many of the interviewees, the basis of knowledge on the island was viewed as inadequate for the purposes of the cooperative. One contradiction was of some members wanting to apply local knowledge to MICRC operations, and some others viewed this knowledge as not necessarily the most qualified. JANET stated that:

... the real problem I see with the cooperative is how do you get people to agree and how do you ensure that the best qualified people are doing the jobs that they are best qualified for. How does a Board of Directors that doesn't really have expertise in an area make decisions. It seems to work with credit unions. Credit unions have a very established system, that they can somehow bypass that. In other words, there's a credit union system that exists apart from the Board of

Directors that assists them and gives them models to follow and there are very strict rules on what they can do.

Identifying barriers to her participation in the cooperative, JANET says that:

"I had a feeling that a certain crowd were becoming particularly involved and were going to make decisions accordingly, which didn't, I feel, take into consideration the long term effects on the community."

Referring to the 'loggers' group and her opinion with regards to their involvement, JANET further explained:

One of the biggest hindrances of the co-op is its structure, in the sense that no matter how many - this is the big difference between a co-op and a corporation or private enterprise - is that no matter how many shares you have, in other words, no matter how much you have invested in the co-op, you only have one vote. Of course, it is going to discourage the 'big shot' guy from investing because he can't really, doesn't get much power for the investment he made. He'll get a higher dividend, but people often want a say in how things are going to be done so they can get that higher dividend. So, I guess, in a sense, it has led to the situation [the MICRC] is in now.

OTTO, a long-time logger, comments on the provision of forestry expertise:

[The MICRC] has to start working to produce something, not working to get grants. There is no one on the Island to do it, you have to go off the Island anyway, for expertise and experience. For example, there are no RPFs on the Island.<sup>1</sup>

In an historical context of colonial authority systems in tropical forests, Bromley (1992: 454) observes that "... it was necessary for alien sources of power and authority to undermine and destroy local systems of power and authority; otherwise, the legitimacy and authority of the alien power would be compromised and challenged."

JOHAN, also employed in forestry-related activities, states that:

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<sup>1</sup> An 'RPF' refers to a registered professional forester. In 1997, several women in the community approached the Sointula campus of North Island College to set up a course on carpentry geared to women. Such a course was seen as an opportunity for women to gain skills which would direct them towards paid employment on Malcolm Island. This endeavour never came to fruition because the college, using the criteria of enrolment as the determinant for going through with offering the course, found limited demand.

Cooperative or not it is still a business, and the thing is to have a good business you need good management and usually where good management comes in is big dollars. And when you have a co-op nobody wants to give big dollars to a manager so you're, unless somebody special comes along, that has tons of time and tons of money and wants to do it, which is very lucky to find somebody like that. It's pretty hard to run a business with no experience. Only one was a logger ... on the executive ... and he's more interested in his own business. He's probably more there to look after his own interests.

HILARY, the female 'Community Forest Options' researcher, had the opportunity to participate in decisions, and saw that,

... at the time of deciding some of these principles that would set up the cooperative, of course I had the advantage of having done this research. So when people were kind of deciding what kind of cooperative it would be, who would get to be a member, what kind of shares there would be ... all those things. In fact, I was presenting the range of options, although I didn't direct choice. They were decisions all made by voting. But as you know, certainly within a consensus model, that in voting as well, the person with information has a certain power.

Yet, this 'power' (through labour and knowledge) was usurped. In an earlier conversation I had with her, she mentioned her concerns with the cooperative and community forest, particularly the fact that in her proposal she clearly identified land and community clauses to the mission statement; however, when the official statement was announced the 'land based' clause was missing. She saw it turn into, pretty much solely a job creation strategy, which she didn't want. It also drew largely on the value-added rhetoric running rampant in the community.

DOROTHY mentioned that "[i]t depends on the aspects of the forest industry developed, but for traditional forestry and harvesting, men have the logging experience, so it is natural to look to them on this Island." KARL, also based the employment situation on gender differences in forestry labour and knowledge, but said that "[t]he people who wanted it, that's okay, but they're going to be all the ... they won't be out doing the forestry. They'll be sitting in offices and stuff. The people that want to run it ... it's just not going to work." WAYNE stated "[t]here were some hidden agendas you know that were around in there and that's probably a lot of what

has led to where we are today. There were people within, there still are people within the cooperative, that in reality wanted to control [Malcolm] Island to the *exclusion* of forestry uses (interviewee's emphasis.)

On the other hand, DANIEL, commented from the 'other' perspective, though he himself is seeking forestry-related employment, the problems with the MICRC:

I don't do it anymore. The reason being there are a number of people in the group that are more interested in philosophizing than doing. It's been a pretty hard time agreeing with stuff. After two and a half years of farting around with this co-op, in my eyes, we did not get a whole heck of lot done. Well 'so and so' thinks this, and someone else thinks that and somebody else agrees with something 'so and so' said, but totally disagrees with someone else. And we would talk back and forth. It was a hard time doing anything because we would just discuss until ... it was a hard time getting things resolved.

PETRA, who in the past has been employed in both the fishing and forestry industries (i.e. boat deckhand, logging camp cook, and local sawmill worker) stated: "Naturally, in the logging part, women are not fallers. But women are accepted in resource industries in the community." But stereotypes tend to devalue women's authority. One woman, ELMA, perceived that local knowledge of Malcolm Island and community members "has its problems. The emotional ties, connections that interfere." She devalues her knowledge because of feminine characteristics such as emotionality.

Between men involved in forestry, however, there seem to be other variables, which come into play, particularly age. As one young male with labour experience and knowledge in forestry: "Since there is no work. I have just been doing grunt work now. Even after my schooling, I still don't have much to do with forestry." (DANIEL). Authority based on number of years in forestry not necessarily formal education.

All in all, with regards to gender power relations, at a general level, from the perspective of the community, men's knowledge was deemed to be implicitly given while women's was

intrinsically less valued for economic reasons, and more in terms of historical ideals of women's gender roles. This interpretation although not always clear or adhered to nevertheless guided the community's activities. For men, knowledge was explicitly tied to their involvement in paid labour and resource extraction. For women it was generally linked to non-capital intensive practices. For the community, knowledge was not recognized as an issue: the men's ideal of knowledge as being predicated on skills has associated to it an asymmetry that disfavors women's participatory practices and involvement in leadership positions.

From the perspective of the MICRC, implicitly, men's authority is not seen as an issue, as the guiding principle behind leadership is deemed to be associated with labour experience and not with gender roles or community involvement. In this context, women's authority is rooted in participation in decision-making rather than the implementation and management of the use of resources. Despite the fact that Malcolm Island was set up as a community and not as a company town, women's ascribed gender roles are still guiding their historical leadership positions in the community.

### **6.5 Towards Alternative Conceptualizations of the Cooperative Enterprise**

So far this chapter has followed the proposition that scholars need to elaborate on the organization of the cooperative enterprise beyond a simplistic check-list approach that looks for positions of authority as a measure of empowerment. I contend that this type of methodology does not tell us much about the significance of 'situated knowledges' with regards to gendered labour, knowledge and authority. Cooperative members perceptions, motivations, and practices are variegated in light of different experiences, different labour histories, and different knowledges.

Theobald (1997)'s *Reworking Success: New Communities at the Millenium*, argues that a redefinition of 'success' criteria is needed for the twenty-first century, a redefinition which might include ecological integrity, effective decision-making, and social cohesion. More poignantly, he insists that a change in the success criteria needs to occur at the personal, group, and community levels, rather than through top-down policy shifts.

Researchers must delve into this complexity not only to discern the forces at play, but also to help guide the difficult consensus that must often be reached in such endeavours as the MICRC. Hence gender power relations and men and women's gendered labour, knowledge, and authority must be taken in account if we are to understand the undermining of women in the cooperative enterprise. Indeed, 'situating' social sustainability debates directly lead us to considering alternative conceptualizations of the cooperative enterprise. I have mentioned throughout the thesis that the analytical and exploratory process of writing followed from rethinking the role of gender in the cooperative enterprise, or what I have called here an alternative conceptualization of the cooperative enterprise for green thought. Essentially it has become clear that greens need to provide better theories of organizational control beyond simple conceptions of decentralization and democracy.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Whose Alternative Visions of 'Harmony'?

#### 7.1 Revealing the Complexities and Contradictions of Participation in Cooperatives

In the introduction of this thesis it was argued that 'green' theorists narrowly conceive participation in the cooperative enterprise through a lens of 'access' that ignores potential power relations within the cooperative. Indeed, contemporary 'green' thinkers like Bookchin (1982) and Mies (1996, 1997) unquestionably assume that equitable participation will be achieved within decentralized, participatory democratic and cooperative arrangements. By recognizing that participation is complex, contradictory, and gendered, this thesis's analysis of equity and empowerment informs 'green' theories of social sustainability of the cooperative enterprise.

Although some feminist scholars have already engaged with gender issues in the cooperative enterprise, I have found that they have done so incompletely. As mainly descriptive accounts of gender differences in participation rates, their works rarely identify the factors influencing women's asymmetric participation in cooperatives (but see Mayoux 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Oerton 1994, 1996). I have therefore attempted in this thesis to explore the complexities and contradictions of access to, and impact of, participation (i.e. equity and empowerment) as they apply to a mixed-gender community resource cooperative on Malcolm Island, British Columbia (BC). Employing a labour-knowledge-authority feminist framework, this study has attempted to document the nuances of gender and participation in the cooperative enterprise.

Findings from my case study indicate that while the Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative (MICRC) appears to be socially 'sustainable' based on quantitative measures of participation (i.e. membership and leadership participation rates in the cooperative), these measures ignore gender power relations *within* the cooperative. In part, this reveals the

contradictions of participation. In fact, gender inequities suffused MICRC members' participation, particularly in meeting discussions and 'cooperative' decisions. Often, the interests of a predominantly male 'loggers' group intercepted and controlled the direction of MICRC activities, at both the expense of the cooperative's mandate and the aims of the mixed-gender 'community sustainability' group. Thus, echoing the findings of Mayoux (1995b: 245)'s research on 'participatory development' institutions, this study concurs with her conclusion that,

participation is rarely a result of 'spontaneous grassroots initiative' where there is consensus between all participants or potential participants. On the contrary it is generally a complex political process in which inequalities in resources and power between participants and potential participants strongly influence the aims of participation and the forms which this takes.

In this thesis I have argued that participation in the cooperative is based on gendered labour, gendered knowledge(s), and gendered authority. In the context of my research, these relate to the gender power relations of resource-based labour markets, local labour practices, and community social norms, with their resulting 'situated' knowledges. In turn, these factors affect women and men's gender identities, their motivations for cooperative involvement, and the 'impact' of their participation in community resource cooperatives. In doing so, this study challenges the 'green' assumption that decentralized and democratic participation inevitably leads to equity and empowerment.

I suggest that definitions of member participation in the cooperative need to be elaborated in 'green', as well as in feminist literatures. Instead, they should be focused on the *types* of participation (e.g. in discussions, labour, and leadership) members are able to assume in mixed-gender cooperatives, keeping in the mind the potential contradictions of participation. For example, a cooperative member may be empowered in the sense that s/he has access to cooperative decision-making processes, but may simultaneously be disempowered by gender or other power dynamics within the cooperative, which ultimately limits the 'impact' of their participation. By focusing on these different shades of equity and empowerment, we can



therefore begin to gain a better understanding of cooperative dynamics, particularly in resource-dependent communities.

## **7.2 A Re-conceptualization of Cooperatives and Social Sustainability**

In this study, I have characterized 'green' theory as producing an understanding that represents cooperatives as socially 'sustainable'. As discussed in chapter two, this coupling is problematic. While certainly the potential exists for cooperatives to provide greater equity and empowerment than traditional business arrangements; I am reminded of Jardine (1979: 30)'s comment on the ideals of the cooperative movement, that is "[o]ne must carefully avoid using stereotypes or easy generalizations in dealing with ... cooperatives. They are highly diverse, varying greatly in function, mode of operation, and philosophical viewpoints on co-operation." Notably, 'green' theorists tend to over-determine the cooperative enterprise, instead of addressing the very real possibility that inequalities of power suffuse even seemingly non-hierarchical institutions.

As the MICRC experience demonstrates, in spite of the perception of common interests or aims in collective action - for example, gaining access to, or control of, local natural resources - individuals may not necessarily participate equitably or be empowered by their participation in the cooperative enterprise. For instance, MICRC members' gendered labour activities (in particular, forestry resource-related labour versus community management labour) tended to structure gender relations and participation in the cooperative. Indeed, the male 'loggers' group perceived their labour and knowledge as more "legitimate" than those within the mixed-gender 'community sustainability' group and thus felt that conferred upon them greater authority in decision making. Ultimately, this limited the 'impact' of the 'community sustainability' group's contributions (e.g. labour, ideas, and research) to the cooperative.

Thus, if we conceptualize the cooperative as offering "variously significant" (Liepins 1998: 1192) equity and empowerment to its membership, we diffuse the risk of essentializing

the cooperative as socially 'sustainable'. In other words, cooperatives can still present opportunities for members of communities to participate in decisions that affect their lives and natural environment; however, we must remain cognizant of, and try to address, potential power relations in cooperative dynamics.

### **7.3 Thesis Contributions and Limitations**

One of the basic objectives of this research has been to compare the experiences of male and female cooperative members' participation within a mixed-gender community resource cooperative enterprise. In doing so, this thesis has examined the situatedness of member's gender roles and experiences, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of participation and its implications for equity and empowerment. By solely focusing on 'gender', however, this study has ignored other relevant forms of difference between cooperative members (e.g. age, ethnicity, class, ability, etc.). Thus while gender is a critical divide in cooperative power relations, it is not the only one.

Of similar consequence, I have structured this study of gender power relations through a predetermined analytical framework of labour, knowledge and authority. Yet as McDowell (1997: 12) remarks,

[p]ower relations are of course variable (if not quite as fluid as some of us may wish) and the analytical categories that we base our analyses of these power relations upon are variable, as well as being analytical abstractions from a more complex reality.

I therefore duly note that my analysis may obscure other gender differences in the cooperative enterprise. Overall though, my intention has not been to undertake an exhaustive search of gender power relations in the cooperative enterprise, but to conduct a study which is "about challenging and changing the oppressive status quo and about creating the space to envision alternatives" (Nash 1995: 76).

Reflecting on the context of my research draws attention to the methodological problem inherent in many community studies; that is, the distortion, idealizing and romanticizing of community life and social relationships, both in the past and in the present (Crow and Allan 1994: 12). While initially my interest in Malcolm Island was sparked by the community's fascinating utopian history, its experiments with communitarian lifestyles have been anything but utopian. And even today, as was evident in my analysis of the MICRC, deep divisions in the community continue to exist. Local issues such as the preservation of Malcolm Island's natural environment and the search for economic development opportunities are constantly contested between resident 'environmentalists' and 'business-as-usual entrepreneurs'. Again, this awareness of diversity, difference, and social conflict in the community and the cooperative, makes a critique of 'green' theory that much more pertinent (Kenny 1996; Marvin and Guy 1997, Rowson 1997).

Of further note, in reference to the practical context of this research, the reader may have already noticed that I have defined my case study site as a resource-based community, and have thus tended to avoid the 'term' rural. This act was deliberate. I wanted to solely focus on resource-based issues (e.g. access to natural resources), which may, or may not, be identified in rural studies. I have, however, often referred my arguments to the literature based in these studies (e.g. Whatmore et al. 1994; the 'Rural Planning' special issue of *Plan Canada* 1989).

Lastly, in the conclusion of chapter four, I identified that at the time of my research the MICRC was waiting for news regarding the potential for a community forest pilot project in partnership with the Mount Waddington Regional District. However, this project never materialized. By 1999, the MICRC membership decided to suspend all activities in developing a cooperatively run community forest. Though other initiatives, such as a food and fish processing plant, were being advanced by some of the MICRC members, the community forest initiative had essentially hit a crossroads. And today, according to one of the directors, the

status of the MICRC is "dormant." It can be argued, therefore, that the presentation of this thesis presents the problem: what can you say about a cooperative that has gone dormant?

Although these circumstances were not intentional, I have found that by studying the initial activities of the MICRC, this research sheds light on the basic, initial, and often problematic, presumptions of what cooperatives can achieve. In particular, it has focused my critique of 'green' theories, in that even in the initial stages of cooperative formation, the MICRC exhibited internal tensions and power relations. My research findings can therefore be instructive to emerging cooperatives, in identifying aspects (e.g. the context and policies) with which they will have to consider when setting up a mixed-gender community resource cooperative.

#### **7.4 Is the Cooperative Enterprise an Alternative to Conventional Corporate Capitalism?**

My understanding has much in common with Boucher (1993: 44). She writes that her view differs from:

both 'proindustry' and some environmental voices in both my unwillingness to support community-based decision-making processes that continue to bring together elite, male-dominated 'stakeholder' groups for the purpose of resolving land-use issues as defined by 'man's' story - processes that continue to silence the voices and knowledge of those who do not support 'his' truth. And where I differ from any environmentalist voices is in my unwillingness to wholeheartedly embrace prescriptions for 'sustainable' economic alternatives that fail to challenge the patriarchal biases inherent within the industry, within the technologies developed, and within the definition of work itself, and my unwillingness to support community processes and organizations that continue to silence the experiences, concerns, strategies, and visions of women.

Boucher 's interpretation is also similar to Davis and Bailey (1996)'s, who together seem pessimistic when defining the potential for alternative approaches of natural resource management to address social sustainability concerns. I nonetheless believe that the cooperative is a meaningful alternative. My intent in conducting this research was to raise awareness on the limitations of cooperatives, and along the lines of Gibson-Graham (1996a: 263)'s argument, to

revisit the literature with the intent that socially 'sustainable' cooperatives may potentially become a "'realistic' activity rather than a ludicrous or utopian future goal"<sup>1</sup>

In this light, what follows are several recommendations for further research. Foremost, 'green' theory needs to adopt more "sophisticated" theories of organizational control (Carter 1996), which better conceptualize member participation in cooperative enterprises. As argued above, this is particularly pertinent to issues of gender equity and empowerment.

This failure of 'green' theories' to address questions of how participation can be socially sustainable, however, largely stems from the fact that 'green' theorists rarely analyze, or draw from the experiences of actual existing cooperatives. This means that the value of 'green' arguments is mostly in providing a justifiable model of change rather than in providing an empirically valid model.

Hence, my second recommendation is that 'greens' must examine the actual experiences of community-based resource cooperatives. This requires a shift from a focus solely on place to an emphasis on social relations in place (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Kobayashi and Ray 2000; Reed 2000). 'Green' theorists need to displace normative conceptions of the cooperative enterprise as purely democratic, and develop alternative conceptualizations of social relationships that allow for relations of inequality and difference. This is also relates to my third point. 'Greens' need to acknowledge the situatedness of cooperative members and sites.

As MacLeod (1997: 15) argues in *From Mondragon to America*, the 'situated' context, in most cases, determines either the cooperative's chances of success or, on the other hand, its ultimate failure.<sup>2</sup> He argues that "the key to ... community-based economic developments are the values rooted in a particular society, not neutral ideas and techniques claimed to be independent of social context" (MacLeod 1997: 15).

<sup>1</sup> Gibson-Graham is speaking of the attempt to generate alternatives to the dominant discourses of capitalism.

<sup>2</sup> See also, Bradley and Gelb (1983).

Cooperatives and their members are therefore located within particular historical, geographical, and social specificities, which ultimately imbue their experiences. Thus, as Eckersley (1992) and Trainer (1996) have poignantly pointed out, community-based alternatives are only as socially or ecologically 'sustainable' as the consciousness of their members. Furthermore, we can expect different consciousness to be built up differently in different places.

Nevertheless, based on my research, I suggest that a gender equitable cooperative enterprise would:

- have explicit policies for women's involvement in leadership positions and committees,
- support women's income generating activities,
- adopt non-discriminatory employment policies and work practices,
- unpaid tasks would revolve back and forth between female and male workers,
- encourage women to participate in the organization, affairs, and monitoring of cooperative activities,
- be easily accessible; that is, it would schedule meetings to be convenient for women with regard to their other responsibilities, and
- develop a Women's Advisory Board.

The notion of situatedness is also relevant to the debates within cooperative enterprise theory and associated literatures. That is, the common dilemmas of establishing cooperatives as viable economic entities and achieving member consensus around issues. In many cases, the expectations of the cooperative enterprise (e.g. environmentally 'sustainable' or socially cohesive) and the reality of the situation within a particular cooperative have led to the downfall of these structures (Wacjman 1983; Wilkinson and Quarter 1991; Craig 1993). Jardine (1979: 31), for example, defines this as "hyperidealism" - the impossible expectations and their consequent disappointments.

Furthermore, given the likelihood that members have varied, or 'situated', backgrounds and philosophies, it is difficult to develop common objectives and goals (Craig 1993, Mayoux 1995b). After spending all this time researching and writing about the people and events of Malcolm Island, I can only agree with Michaels (1996: 222)'s comment that what matters is

[t]he importance not of what's extant, but of what's disappeared . . . The quest to discover another's psyche, to absorb another's motives as deeply as your own, is a lover's quest. But the search for facts, for places, names, influential events, important conversations and correspondences, political circumstances - *all this amounts to nothing if you can't find the assumption your subject lives by* (my emphasis).

Perhaps, if these theorists adopted situatedness into their works, then prescriptive, methodological frameworks could be developed in order to address inherent tensions within cooperatives. In conclusion, with particular attention to social sustainability, ". . . [b]ecause islands force their inhabitant to recognize the environmental consequences of activities that seem harmless elsewhere, island communities foreshadow the future for all communities" (Conkling quoted in Young and Bernard 1997: 44). In this way, Malcolm Island's drive to gain access to, and control of, local natural resources is instructive for other resource-dependent communities in British Columbia searching for 'economic' alternatives.

**APPENDIX I**

**Letter of Introduction and Consent Form  
Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative Members**



Thank you for your consideration of my request and I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Yours truly,

Mary M. Pullen  
M.A. Candidate  
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University of British Columbia  
Phone: (604) 822-2663  
Fax: (604) 822-6150

## CONSENT FORM

RE: ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF 'HARMONY': SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND THE MALCOLM ISLAND COMMUNITY RESOURCE CO-OPERATIVE

I have received a letter that provides details about the nature and scope of this project with a request for my participation. The conditions of participation have been clearly explained to me by this letter which I may keep for my own records.

I understand that if I participate, my confidentiality will be respected and that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. I may choose to answer some, if not all of the questions posed.

I consent to participate in this study.

---

Participant's Signature

Date

---

Signature of a Witness

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Letter of Introduction and Consent Form Local Community and Regional Organizations**

## CONSENT FORM

RE: ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF 'HARMONY': SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND THE MALCOLM ISLAND COMMUNITY RESOURCE CO-OPERATIVE

I have received a letter that provides details about the nature and scope of this project with a request for my participation. The conditions of participation have been clearly explained to me by this letter which I may keep for my own records.

I understand that if I participate, my confidentiality will be respected and that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. I may choose to answer some, if not all of the questions posed.

I consent to participate in this study.

---

Participant's Signature

Date

---

Signature of a Witness

### **APPENDIX III**

#### **Sample of Semi-Structured Interview**

## Sample Interview Questions<sup>1</sup>

### Participant Information

Name  
Address  
Phone Number  
Age  
Gender  
Cultural Background

### Residential and Family Life

How long have you lived on Malcolm Island? Why did you decide to move to Malcolm Island, or, if you have lived on the Island all your life, why do you stay? Do you plan to continue living on Malcolm Island?

Are you currently living with a spouse/partner? Do you have any children / what are their ages? Do other members of your family live on Malcolm Island (ie. parents, siblings, etc.)?

### Formal Education and Work Life of Participant: Paid, Unpaid, and Volunteer

What is the highest level of formal education that you have obtained?

Please describe your employment history. What is/are your current occupation(s)? How would you describe your employment status (ie. self-employed, full-time, part-time, seasonal, etc.)? Do you work on Malcolm Island?

What kinds of unpaid work do you currently undertake (ie. household responsibilities, childcare, etc.)? How many hours per week are you involved in this unpaid work?

Are you currently an active member or volunteer in any community organization(s)? How much time do you dedicate to volunteer activities per month?

### Formal Education and Work Life of Participant's Spouse/Partner: Paid, Unpaid, and Volunteer

What is the highest level of formal education that he/she has obtained?

What is/are his/her current occupation(s)? How would you describe his/her employment status? Does he/she work on Malcolm Island?

What kinds of unpaid work does he/she currently undertake? How many hours per week are he/she involved in this unpaid work?

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews were semi-structured in order to provide enough flexibility to explore not only pre-determined questions and themes, but also topics which originated with the research participants themselves.

Is he/she currently an active member or volunteer in any community organization(s)? How much time does he/she dedicate to volunteer activities per month?

### **Community Identity and Issues**

Can you describe the qualities of Malcolm Island that contribute to its sense of identity and uniqueness in the region? In your opinion, what are the most important issues and/or concerns on Malcolm Island? How have you personally responded to these issues and/or concerns?

### **Cooperative Ventures on Malcolm Island: Recent Past and Present**

Are you currently a member of the Sointula Credit Union / Are there specific reasons why or why not? Are you currently a member of the Sointula General Coop Store / Are there specific reasons why or why not? Do you use these services on a regular basis? Have you ever been a member or employee of any other cooperative venture(s) on Malcolm Island? Can you briefly describe your experience(s) in the cooperative(s)?

### **Malcolm Island Community Resource Cooperative Membership: Experiences and Perceptions**

How did you initially hear about the Cooperative? What motivated you to become involved with the Cooperative? What characteristics or principles of the cooperative structure do you most value? What are your specific goals or interests in the Cooperative? Do you think that these goals or interests are more likely to be fulfilled in a cooperative structure? What do you perceive as the Cooperative's potential role in the community? What personal and professional experiences or values do you bring to the Cooperative? Do you have any specific knowledge or skills that you are willing to contribute to the Cooperative? In what capacity do you participate in the Cooperative (ie. member, director, and committees)? Do you have any specific responsibilities in the Cooperative? Did you attend the annual general meeting this year? When the Cooperative has a meeting, do you undertake any specific tasks? Do you regularly join in discussion or voice your opinion at Cooperative meetings? Outside of the meetings, do you undertake any specific tasks for the Cooperative? Do you exercise your voting rights during elections in the Cooperative? Have you ever stood for election within the Cooperative / Would you like to in the future? Have you ever assumed a leadership role or responsibility in the Cooperative? Do you have the opportunity to participate in decisions regarding the Cooperative? Can you identify any barriers to your participation in the decision-making processes of the Cooperative? What do you perceive as the benefits of your participation in the Cooperative? Are there any associated costs/cons? Are there any specific constraints to your participation in the Cooperative? What kinds of strategies have you used to address these constraints? Do you think that the opportunities and/or constraints for participation in the Cooperative differ between men and women? Would you consider possible employment opportunities in the Cooperative? If yes, what type(s) of employment are you willing to undertake? Would you prefer full-time, part-time, seasonal, etc.? What do you perceive as the potential opportunities and/or constraints to working in the Cooperative? Do you suppose that the opportunities and/or constraints to working in the Cooperative differ between men and women? Has your membership in the Cooperative in any way changed your attitudes or perceptions?

**MICRC Mandate and Structure (Board of Directors only)**

What are the stated objectives of the Cooperative? What types of products or services would the Cooperative potentially provide? What markets would the Cooperative serve? Has the Cooperative, at any time, encountered specific barriers to its achievement of these objectives? As a result, what actions have been taken to cope with these barriers? Can you briefly explain the current status of the Cooperative? Who can become a member of the Cooperative? Are there specific membership criteria? Have any efforts been made to increase the membership? Has there been consistent volunteer support for the Cooperative? To what degree has there been cooperation with the other cooperatives on Malcolm Island? What has been the role of other agencies, institutions, and the regional or provincial governments in the development of the MICRC?



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