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Robin Rigby Trust Midterm Report

I began my thesis field work while attending the Island Institute's sustainable island conference in October 14-16 in Rockland Maine. At that time I was able to establish contacts on some of the islands of the Penobscot Bay. In November 2012 I returned and spend a month doing field work. Internet was key in identifying some organizations prior to my departure; as well, the Island Institute was an extremely valuable support organization that assisted me by introducing my research to people and lending legitimacy within the communities for my research.

I started my field work in November on Mohegan Island and VinalHaven Island. During that time I had three principal modes of making contact with local businesses. The first was through the Island Institute and their publications: The Working Waterfront newspaper, and the Institute's webpage. This gave me a few locations where I could start my field work and grow my sample from there. Second, I met with community leaders on these islands who introduced me to various entities. Thanks to the small size of these islands I was able to identify other economic entities as well. Finally, I met with the VinalHaven Chamber of Commerce who introduced me to some local businesses. I was able to introduce myself and my research to these people, and to send them permission letters and an invitation to be interviewed. I believe that this approach facilitated an ease of mobility within the communities. The generous support of both the Island Institute and the VinalHaven Chamber Of Commerce furthered the ease of access to my research sites.

As I started doing person to person interviews with the islanders I found they were able to provide information about their own enterprises and to identify other social enterprises on the Island. This helped me to form a line of research and identify some enterprises that many considered to be social enterprises. During this phase I interviewed independent people who work, local traditional businesses, NGOs, informal businesses and social enterprises. I was guided by students in the fellowship program of the Island Institute, and VinalHaven Town offered me a space to work in their office.

During this time I was able to collect a great deal of interview data as well as first person observations. I have been able to talk with community members and to make my own observations on each island, and this data is ready to be processed and analyzed. The months of December and January I spent working on my transcripts and preparing for my trip to Chiloe. After receiving the green light from the Robin Rigby Trust I began the next phase. On February 23 I traveled to Chile to begin my field work on the following islands of the Chiloe archipelago (Lemuy, Quinchao). I am working hard to accomplish my field research within the allotted time of three months in Chiloe. Following this I will return to the Maine Islands of Isle of Haut, VinalHaven and the Island Institute for a period of one month. I consider it of crucial importance that I conclude all field work in the month of June.

In Chiloe it has been necessary to interview local authorities to identify and establish contact with the various business organizations on the islands. I have established contact with each one or more of the local authorities in the following municipalities: Lemuy (which is a separate island), Achao (which includes a number of smaller islands), Curaco

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de Velez and Castro (on Chiloe Island). Some businesses were identified on the smaller islands of Achao Municipality and I decided to include them to ensure that my sample size was reached. Most of my time has been spent on Quinchao Island, and I have also been visiting the small surrounding islands.

The first two weeks in Chiloe were spent identifying possible social enterprises. It is essential for me to mention that the situation in Chiloe has been more complex than the experience I had in Maine. The location and the isolation of some small islands have been a challenge. The Chiloe archipelago is formed by a big island and about 35 small islands, all of which are inhabited. The Archipelago is divided administratively into 10 'comunas' or municipalities. One island that I chose for my study is Lemuy, also known as Puqueldon Island which is a comuna by itself. Quinchao Island is part of the comuna of Achao and Curaco de Velez.

The legal classifications of businesses are more complex in Chile than those formed in the state of Maine, United States. In Chiloe there are enterprises with limited responsibility, known as 'traditional' enterprises. There are also the independent people who run small businesses or services, and various groups of people who work together in an informal cooperative structure to obtain benefits. The municipalities identify many types of enterprises including Cooperatives, Commetes, Sindicatos (labour unions) as well as organizations such as artisan groups, tourism groups and indigenous groups. The majorities of these groups form to meet some social need and may or may not have a commercial goal. Finally, there are some informal organizations that are formed to meet commercial aims. One thing that was interesting to notice was that according to some definitions of social enterprises, only cooperatives are clearly identified as part of the Social Economy. However I have been venturing to interview some of the other groups that have social as well as commercial goals, to know how they are formed, and who constitutes a member or constituent, so as to judge whether or not they conform to the definition of a 'Social Enterprise'.

While In Maine I did 8 online interviews, and 15 face to face interviews, and in Chile to date I have done 18 interviews. The interviewees include local authorities, workers in cooperatives, labour union workers, workers who are part of Comeetes, and functional organizations. The interviews include people from the islands selected for the study as well as some from Castro and other communities, especially those recommended to me by past interview participants.

With regard to the questions asked by the RT guide, until today the time stipulated to do my field work has been sufficient for my research. I did my first part in Maine in October-November and I was able to talk with people from my research sites. While in Chile I have had good responses because I arrived at the end of February. January-February is the busiest time in the archipelago since it is summer time in South America. It was good to spend the first weeks getting information about the islands and identifying the various organizations.

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I am trying to stay with families from rural areas to be able to support their local economy while traveling to remote islands. Some of the expenses I have incurred are different from those initially envisaged.

The research work has been well accepted and the people have shown their support by collaborating and helping me gather information and sometimes have assisted with transportation, especially to the more remote islands. The research presents them with an opportunity to know what a Social Enterprise is. This is novel for them because it has been a new term for them. Another area of inquiry is the contrast between those SEs on the islands of Maine and the islands of the Archipelago of Chiloe.