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Fox in the Henhouse

Earlier this month, media mogul and climate change skeptic Rupert Murdoch's *21st Century Fox* purchased a controlling interest in the esteemed *National Geographic*, formerly run by a non-profit society, founded in 1888. *National Geographic* not only set the high bar for photography, cartography, infographics and ethnographic journalism. Its quality, giant subscription base and blue-chip governance structure has enabled it to shift marginal debates into the mainstream, much as it did a few years back in its coverage of the Alberta oil sands. This gives the magazine a kind-of moral weight, an authority that few if any other publications can claim. As a child, *National Geographic* turned me on to geography, which alas became my undergrad degree, and in turn led me down a path of community development and – ultimately – an interest in the dynamics of community investment and social innovation (a topic on which there is much ecumenical interest in Calgary). Growing up Catholic, each issue of the magazine was, for me, a secular Homily, each atlas a Papal Encyclical (although Pope Francis's latest on climate change might garner a similar fan base).

What, then, to think of the magazine's new owner? Fox Corporation was the subject of an expose a decade ago that illuminated how it sheltered its profits in off-shore tax-havens, a practice now so commonplace among the "1%" as to barely elicit notice. The use of off-shore shelters undermines the social innovation gains of the Twentieth Century – governments' ability to finance pension plans and universal health care, for example - but it also signals a lack of obligation to the common weal; a misanthropic impulse.

In this light, it is strange to hear of innovation gurus like Harvard's Michael Porter or Babson's Bradley Googins speaking not of wealth-hoarding, but of a maturing of corporate citizenship into something far more sophisticated and embedded than mere feel-good "philanthropy". Yet, they are on to something: there is

ample evidence to suggest that profound changes are afoot in how companies are investing in community. The Institute for Community Prosperity, at Mount Royal University (MRU), is publishing later this month a series of mini-case studies on "community investment" undertaken by Canadian companies of all sizes and forms: Publicly-traded giants like Bell and RBC, are changing the dial on our attitudes toward mental health and water conservation respectively. Credit unions like Vancity and Assiniboine have underwritten action on issues like Indigenous-settler reconciliation and predatory pay-day lending. ATB Financial has been a vanguard champion of LGBTQ rights in Alberta. Small and medium sized businesses like Village Brewery, Ten Tree Apparel and Manitobah Mukluks are living embodiment's of Porter's notion of "shared value", where economic and social value are virtually indistinguishable.

These examples, and many others, are used as discussion tools in a new Certificate program at MRU designed for professionals working to develop and enact a company's community investment strategy. These mavens of shared value must be nimble in their expertise and approach, understanding the complex and shifting dynamics of the social economy. They must work to ensure that investments are more than transactional, regulatory-compliant or simply charitable. They must reach across the company's business units – from supply chain to human resources to marketing – and up the chain to engage the company's executive leadership. In short, to embed a "soul" in their corner of the next economy.

And there may even be hope for Fox: Rupert's son James, now CEO, has parted ways with his Jurassic dad: "All of the climate-prediction models suggest we're on the worst-case trajectory, and in some cases, worse than the worst case." A dark cloud, yes. But also a splinter of light.

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