

State of Rural Canada: 2015



Canadian Rural Revitalization
Foundation/Fondation canadienne
pour la revitalisation rurale Canadian

Partners!

- Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation
- Rural Policy Learning Commons
- Rural Development Institute



RPLC
RURAL POLICY LEARNING COMMONS

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DES POLITIQUES RURALES



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Thank You!

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Report Structure, Intent


- Opinion, reflection vs. statistical report
- Thematic coherent:
 - Demographic, Economic, Infrastructure and Services, Aboriginal
 - Key provincial, territorial issues
 - Analysis, synthesis



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Rural Context

- Economic restructuring
- Out-migration
- Focus on natural resources
- Retreat from rural and the dismantling of rural institutions



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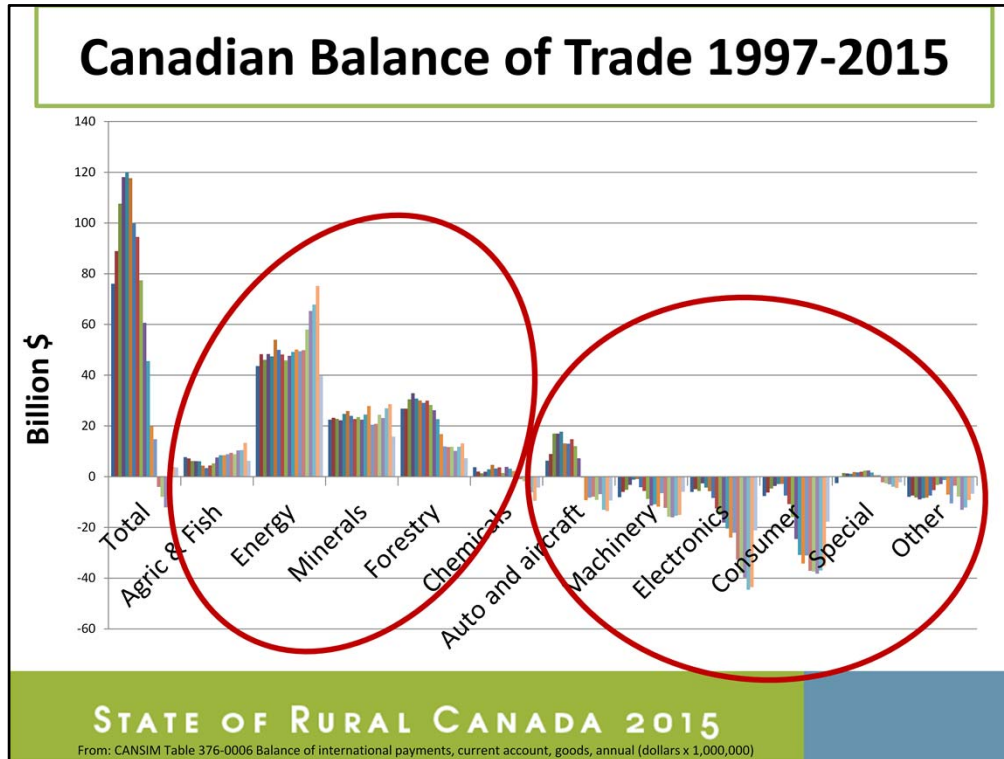
As was noted in the beginning, rural Canada is encountering a new reality. This new reality did not come over night, nor did it arrive within the last year. This new reality has been shaped by a number of factors, each taking place for a number of years. Today I want to highlight four of these factors contributing to the new reality or the critical turning point for rural communities.

Economic restructuring: Since the time of European settlement, rural Canada has always been about trade. From fish, fur, butter, and wood to grain, minerals, energy, and petroleum, our economic health has relied on commodity exports – most often in a boom and bust context. Our national and provincial policies have largely supported this strategy with only minor variations – often driven by international events and policies.

The most recent expression of this legacy occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Rural communities were required to restructure their economic bases in response to practices and policies favouring globalization. During this period, Canadian rural communities witnessed the consolidation and decline of natural resource industries along with their increased mechanization. Business competition was no longer with a neighbouring community, but with communities from across the world. Rural communities have responded to this economic restructuring in a variety of manners, ranging from quite well (such as Winkler, Manitoba), to quite poorly (such as Tumbler Ridge, BC).

Out migration: Rural communities have also experienced an out-migration of people over the past two decades, particularly youth and skilled workers – as Canada has been transformed from a rural to urban society. This has in turn increased the proportion of seniors within rural communities, reduced municipal funds, and redirected the long-term (inter-generational) transfer of wealth.

Focus on getting resources out of rural: In spite of occasional efforts to diversity rural economies, our policies, infrastructure, and basic dependencies have continued to reinforce our fall-back position of commodity production.



As illustrated in this graph, we have consistently relied on our rural-based industries like agriculture, energy, mining and forestry to support our thirst for consumer goods, electronics, and machinery. Domestically, our food, water, energy, housing, and medicines rely on rural products. In spite of this reality, investments into rural communities have historically been viewed as subsidies, whether they be provided to communities or businesses. Where the investment approach has been adopted, it has focused primarily on infrastructure, as most recently illustrated by the Economic Action Plan in response to the 2008 economic recession. These programs often do not address the key priorities or the day-to-day challenges for rural communities.

Rural Context

- Economic restructuring
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Dismantling of rural institutions: In the past ten years, Canada has witnessed the dismantling of a number of key rural institutions. In our enthusiasm for the neo-liberal emphasis on individualism and consumer approaches to service provision (over collective and citizen-based approaches), “per capita” arguments for service delivery have been used to justify the reallocation of resources. Within such a framework the long distance and low density of rural and northern areas will mean they become net losers.

Over the same period, urbanization has meant that perceptions and power have shifted to urban people and issues. The essential interdependence of rural and urban places and people has been lost as these connections become more complex and urban challenges increase. As a result, rural-focused institutions such as the federal Rural and Cooperatives Secretariat, the Rural Analysis Unit at Statistics Canada, and the legacy of regional and rural based programs have been shut down, significantly reduced, or face under-funding.

All of these factors contribute to a new reality and a critical turning point for rural communities.

Guiding Questions

- How is rural Canada changing?
- How does rural contribute / benefit broader society as a whole?
- What programs and policies are most likely to enhance rural vitality?



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These changes have created a context in which new questions emerge for rural and northern communities, researchers, and practitioners such as those at this conference. These were the types of questions we identified when preparing the State of Rural Canada report. They were considered from the perspective of each province and territory.

How is rural Canada changing? Remains one of the most basic questions to be addressed by all of us. Systematic, reliable, sensitive, and imaginative research and analysis regarding the changes taking place must be supported in all its forms. That is why the loss of the universal long form census was such a disaster for small places and regions – and why its re-establishment is such a cause for celebration. It is also the reason why national organizations like the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, the Rural Policy Learning Commons, and regional ones like the Rural Development Institute are so important to support.

How do rural people and places benefit Canadian society as a whole – and urban places in particular? This question becomes particularly important as we seek ways to connect with urban people, demonstrate the ways in which a strong rural Canada means a strong urban one, and show how our fates are intertwined. We need to address this question to get the details of this interdependence right and to develop the strategic alliances between rural and urban people that are most important.

What programs and policies are most likely to enhance rural vitality? If we wish to take action on our insights we need to look closely at the policies and programs that enhance or inhibit positive outcomes. Our focus is on rural and northern policies, but as we have demonstrated these are not independent from those directed to urban issues. Is our commodity approach the best one for producing healthy, safe, and sustainable food? How can rural communities reorganize themselves to become better stewards of their resources? How should the benefits of those resources be distributed? What have we learned from the many community development programs that can be used by rural communities as they face the challenges we have identified?

Resilience

- Resources and ecological services
- Employment opportunities
- Rural – Urban interdependence
- Social ties and commitment to place
- Aboriginal youth



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As a result of the provincial and territorial scan we have identified three themes that emerged – for the purposes of this presentation. The first we have identified as **Resilience**.

Given the boom-bust nature of the rural economy, many communities have developed a capacity for resilience. This includes mechanisms such as migratory working and remittances (NL), local self-reliance and a well developed informal economy (Atlantic region), cultural enhancement (Indigenous communities), strategic planning (Inuvik), and regional collaboration (QC) – all often rooted in strong place attachment.

All of items listed here can be seen as potential assets for rural and northern communities to build their resilience- and foci of attention for local leaders, community development practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers.

- Initiatives like the Green Communities network focus on environmentally friendly actions to build resilience.
- The Rural Futures organization has a long record of employment and community economic development initiatives – one of the few consistent successes in Canadian community development – with its emphasis on community engagement, not just business development.
- The Alberta Hub organization integrates the city of Edmonton and its many surrounding communities in recognition of their mutual interdependence.
- The Québec Rural Policies started with the existing networks and organizations within each region and built upon them rather than trying to create an additional structure.
- Many organizations and communities are responding to the neglect of Aboriginal youth by focusing on a wide variety of skills: from employment and business to language and culture. The research shows, however, that the most important ingredient is the community itself – the celebration of its heritage and the support it provides for the future. We are now seeing the early signs of this approach – in the form of Aboriginal leaders – in spite of the continuing neglect from our major institutions.

Neglect

- Lack of an investment mentality
- Market-oriented policies miss opportunity of collaborative, integrated approach
- Running-down core infrastructure



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Neglect is a second theme that we see in these provincial and territorial scans.

Rural communities are often working within an economic, social, and political climate that does not support such resilience – or relies too heavily on it.

- Investment is focused on corporations and sectors (and sometimes individuals), not places. As a result, communities have little control over local resources and assets. The financial support provided is therefore seen as subsidies in spite of the fact that they are often created using local resources and talent.
 - The most offensive and entrenched example is the federal government's use and control of the natural resources within First Nations territories. It receives the benefits of these assets then allocates a (often relatively small) portion of them to First Nations communities to manage – but always under Federal Government veto. The dominant perception of these allocations is as subsidies – neither investments nor misappropriation of power.
 - Outside Aboriginal communities we see examples of this through a preference for corporate rather than community-based management of forestry and other resources.
- Market-oriented policies miss collaboration and integrated approaches. At the local and regional levels, economic, social, environmental, and cultural conditions are inter-connected. The town councillor is often the local business-person, coach, and firefighter. A school policy affects health, employment, and environmental conditions directly. We need venues and authority to deal with these inter-sectoral implications, but they are few and far between as entrenched sectoral players compete for scarce resources.
 - Québec's use of the regional health clinics as a basis for welfare and employment reorganization provides an excellent example of how policies can fight this tendency. If a nurse discovered the patient was lacking reading skills, it was a simple matter to refer them down the hall to the literacy program conducted by the employment office. Similarly, if the employment counsellor suspected a health problem was making it difficult for the client to hold a job, it was easy to take them to the health clinic.
- Running down core infrastructure: Urban-biased service delivery – designed for high density and relatively short distances can often disadvantage rural places.
 - Health policy encouraging the training of specialists over generalists is one example.
 - The closure of railroad spur lines and local grain elevators on the prairies is another. This often meant the loss of funds for maintaining roads in some places and the creation of elevated costs for others as truck traffic patterns shifted.

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*BC Ferries example: save \$xxx million and lose \$2.2 billion; same goes for decisions to close hospitals and schools without a fully integrated, cross-sector analysis
Boil water advisories, crumbling roads, and toxic hockey rinks*

30 years of neglect – and misguided policy



A third theme in the SORC report is the strong foundation for rural and northern futures that we find throughout the provinces and territories. Each of the regional reports pointed to the opportunities these assets provided for strengthening rural and northern places. This is not new news, of course, since we have always relied on our rural places for the resources, human capital, and innovation that has sustained Canada. The authors are pointing in this report to their potential for the future – and a renewed approach to ensure they are not overlooked or squandered.

In **demographic** terms, population aging and the recruitment of a “next generation” workforce together require investments that build robust new development foundations. The increased numbers of Aboriginal youth are an especially important opportunity in this regard.

- Yukon college stands out as an encouraging model of how this can be done through adult education and training.

Economically speaking, rural and northern places remain important and strong. If we continue to treat their resources as exportable commodities we will continue to feel the boom and busts of demands and markets beyond our control, but if we take advantage of these assets as sources for value-added industries and seek to develop our comparative advantages we are more likely to mitigate the negative effects of changing markets on our communities.

- The local entrepreneur in Matawa, ON who used rejected cores from the local plywood mill to manufacture bowling pins; the community of St. Clement, QC that established itself as a supportive community for handicapped children; and the town of Warner, AB that turned its aging buildings into an international school for girls hockey are just a few of the examples illustrating this approach.

From a **social** point of view, rural and northern places retain important assets in their strong sense of community, supportive networks, and capacity for self-organization.

- In Nova Scotia, we see how this can be developed with a vibrant social economy
- In Manitoba, we see how it was used to create a rate of in-migration that rivals Toronto
- In BC, we see how a focus on Aboriginal culture, language, and heritage was instrumental in drastically reducing suicide rates among youth

Rural people are also deeply concerned about the **environment** – and are ready to act on those concerns.

- Northern communities in British Columbia have established a specialty timber business that exports internationally.
- Community-based forestry has taken on many different forms across the country – in spite of policies that create significant barriers to its expansion.
- Our research in the NRE project cautions us to note that rural people’s environmental concerns are not always manifested in the same way as those in urban places. When asked whether they participated in composting programs, relatively few rural people answered “yes” – they composted in their backyards.

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We also have some examples of successful policy: Québec Rural Policy: 2001-2007; 2007-2014; 2014-2024

- Focus on regional collaboration and existing legacy of collaboration (MRCs)
- Significant funding for regional collaboration
- Capacity-building in weak communities made beneficial for the strong.
- Adequate resources for rural agents as supporters and brokers
- Long term horizons (10 years) gives regions confidence to make compromises and collaborate

Recent cut in the Rural Policy Funding is an example of the changes above (neo-liberalism/austerity, urban co-optation of the agenda and resources)

Hopefully, the first 13 years of the policy will have built the rural capacity to the point where it can survive the lean years.

Jean, Bruno and Bill Reimer (2015) "[Québec's Approach to Regional Development: An historical analysis](#)" RPLC Webinar, Feb 23. [\[Link to recording\]](#)

<http://billreimer.ca/research/files/JeanReimerRPLCWebinarReQuebecPolicy20150223V06.pdf>

<http://momentum.adobeconnect.com/p6pfr4fl4bn/>

Communities in Nunavut, and elsewhere show us how rural residents embrace a resource economy (and are the people in the country who are closest to the impacts associated with different sectors), but not where the environmental impacts threaten a way of life, opportunities for economic diversification, or functioning ecosystems over the long-term.

Recommendation #1

- **Provincial and Federal governments must develop new and robust visions and policy frameworks for rural Canada.**



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In the absence of such visions, inappropriate, short-term, and narrowly perceived policies and investment decisions will continue to waste taxpayer dollars and further burden rural places with failed development decisions.

Québec's internationally recognized national rural policy is the exception within the country, and we can see from the Québec chapter how it is working to shape and influence rural development in the province in a myriad of positive ways. (so not only should we learn about being able to purchase beer and wine at the depanneur – we can learn much from Quebecs rural policy.

Implications for CD:

- *Help communities to challenge inappropriate visions.*
 - *Broker their access to tools, groups, and institutions that can do this.*
 - *Provide communities with the information and data to challenge inappropriate visions*

Recommendation #2

- **Rural communities must be active participants in understanding, planning and investing in their own futures.**
- From Case-making to Place-making!



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If communities don't have a plan, how do they expect to engage constructively with senior governments when opportunities for engagement do arise? If communities don't cooperate with each other at the regional level, or worse, act in a negative competitive fashion with each other, how do they expect to re-build their critical infrastructure? If rural communities are unwilling to invest in their own future, how can they expect senior governments and corporations to play their part?

The chapters in this report make it clear that local action matters. There are wonderful, inspiring stories of community and regional development from coast to coast to coast. We need to get better at telling these stories, sharing (learning from and celebrating) our failures, and working to adapt and scale-up successful models to other areas. And, the investment mentality is not just for policy makers, but rural citizens and communities themselves

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Implications for CD.

- *Help communities take initiative to develop, exchange, and communicate more appropriate visions and frameworks*
- *Facilitate inter-community collaboration to identify and articulate common interests*
- *Facilitate alliances between rural and urban people, groups, and organizations (esp around food, water, environment, energy, recreation)*

Recommendation #3

- All Canadians must participate in the window of opportunity that follows the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to acknowledge and seek serious corrective steps to heal the “historical trauma” suffered by Aboriginal peoples in this country.



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Every author in this report has acknowledged the challenges that face Aboriginal peoples, but also the historic opportunities that are being realized because of the efforts and changes going on within Aboriginal communities themselves, the promise held within their young and growing populations, and emerging patterns of self-governance.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI) toolkit (profiled in the Manitoba chapter) provides examples of communities working hard toward reconciliation and mutual, respectful development.

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Worthwhile to point out?:

- *Indigenous people provide us with examples of what can be done to change things.*
 - *They have informed themselves of the legal and political apparatus available to them*
 - *Learned how to use them*
 - *Have created opportunities for local, regional, and national development*
- *The West provides us with many opportunities to learn how to better organize our communities*
 - *Many groups have been successful in getting control over their governance and resources*
 - *Are radically rethinking the ways in which people can organize themselves*
 - *Providing us with numerous experiments in self-governance and resource use.*
 - *E.g. Carcross-Tagish*

Implications for CD

- *Facilitate communication among Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities so that they can learn from each other and develop collective action.*
- *Use the lessons learned from the history of Indigenous peoples to create welcoming communities for migrants.*

Rural Engagement



- Crossroads...
- Authentic engagement
- Rural institutions
- Place-based policy
- Real revenue sharing and investment

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As we approach a re-imagined rural Canada we need to listen to rural peoples, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, about their ideas and aspirations for the future. We cannot re-imagine places and economies without the vision and experience of those who live and work every day in these places. All chapters speak of the necessity of an authentic engagement with rural peoples.

PEI Chapter: we are at a crossroads: for me, this means that we both understand the nature of the challenges facing rural Canada – and we also know enough about the potential solutions – well tested and known solutions that are operating in pockets across the country and internationally – we simply have to choose to act and invest.

1994 – Toward a Whole Rural Policy for Rural Canada – those that have come before us and written similar reports fought for academics, companies, policy makers and politicians to listen to rural people – and not just tell them what's good for them. It is somewhat ironic that we have to fight for this basic known truth all over again.

Apedaile, Leonard P. and Bill Reimer (1996) "A Whole Rural Policy." Invited presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Natural Resources. May. [<http://billreimer.ca/research/files/WholeRuralPolicyMay281996.pdf>]

Questions for Discussion



- How is CED relevant to rural development in Canada?
- How to mobilize policy attention?
- How to facilitate rural-urban interdependencies?

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RPLC

- *Partnership grant: This means we are not doing the work ourselves but we are facilitating others who are already doing the work by:*
 - *Supporting meetings, workshops, conferences, exchanges, internships*
 - *Facilitating webinars, institutes, publications, media initiatives – including social media*
- *Are eager to work with anyone or any group that shares our concern with critical, useful, effective, sustainable rural and northern policy*
- *Contact me or via our website (<http://rplc-capr.ca>)*



Add other links?

CRRF

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RDI

Our e-mails?