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Reimer, Bill. 2011. "The trajectories of rural communities in Canada: A review of the literature (full citation version)." Chapter 5 in Parkins, John R. & Maureen G. Reed, Eds. *Social Transformation in Rural Canada: New insights into community, cultures and collective action*. Vancouver: UBC Press

## **The Trajectories of Rural Communities in Canada – a Review of the Literature**

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Sept 12, 2011

### **Introduction**

Rural Canada is undergoing major changes. Over the last 50 years it has lost its population advantage to urban areas, felt the challenges of wider global competition, lost many of its social services, and suffered the brunt of threatened resource industries. At the same time, it has shown considerable resilience as it moves from a primary to a service economy, reorganizes many of its governance institutions, and identifies new products and services to produce (Reimer and Bollman 2010).

The processes driving these changes are complex and often subtle, making their investigation challenging and open to controversy. This merely reinforces the value of such investigation, since the clarification of the key elements of change will therefore be critical to knowledge advancement, good policy, and effective practice. Without a relatively clear understanding of the processes of change we will be in danger of dealing with the symptoms alone in a short-term effort to minimize their negative impacts.

The first objective, therefore, is to examine the existing literature on long-term community changes, the processes associated with them, and the evidence for various claims. This part of the work will be primarily descriptive: involving a search for common themes, the types of issues addressed, the explanations offered, and the methodologies utilized. This analysis will focus on the general frameworks of change that are implied by the various studies. It will

contribute to the second objective for this chapter: the identification of promising frameworks for the analysis of long-term community change. Finally, several suggestions for future research will be identified from the results of this analysis.

Our review is guided by a number of strategic choices. Initially the literature regarding social transformations in rural Canada will be examined by focusing on explanations of change related to municipalities and other regional social organizations. The focus on social groups is meant to complement the research conducted at the level of individuals that is so prevalent in the literature. This level of analysis is not the only relevant one for understanding rural change, but it is chosen for two main reasons. First, it remains a level of analysis that is underexplored as a research focus – most likely because of the prevalence of individual-level information in the census and survey materials of our public institutions. Second, the collective nature of municipalities, their enterprises, and social organizations lend themselves to coordinated action through the institutions of our local, regional, and national governments. By adding an examination of the formal and informal social networks and groups to the pool of knowledge regarding individual behaviour, we will be in a better position to both understand and act on the knowledge we gain.

We will also focus our literature search on those studies conducive to longitudinal analysis. If we are to have any hope that the complexity of rural change can be addressed and verified it is likely to be through the analysis of changes over a relatively long period of time. Only in this way can we determine when short-term crises are manifestations of long-term changes or simply perturbations in relatively stable processes – an objective that has challenged analysts of environmental change for many years now. For this reason, we will be looking for studies that identify processes of change and related factors over multiple years – or at least hold

promise for such long term analysis. In many cases this means inferring the dynamic qualities of the processes involved since they may not be specifically elaborated within the studies selected.

Finally, we will give special attention to those studies that include an empirical component – through field work, surveys, use of existing data, or documentary analysis – over those that are primarily speculative in nature. The speculations are important to consider for insights and potential directions for research, but the empirical studies will enable us to test the suggestions and identify the relative importance of various processes. This is especially the case for those studies that are comparative in nature or enable comparison across studies.

## **A Review of the literature**

The review was conducted in three stages. The first was to scan available academic databases and materials for studies addressing changes in rural places. The second was to consider alternative frameworks for classifying the material: frameworks addressing social transformations among rural communities and groups. Finally, we reconsidered the literature with respect to the most promising frameworks for those transformations.

### **Step 1: Initial scan**

The initial scan of the literature was based on the four criteria outlined above: a Canadian focus, longitudinal analysis, community-level studies, and the priority of empirical material. We began with material published in the last 10 years although we did not exclude earlier material that was particularly relevant. Since we were interested in long-term changes, we included studies that discussed transformations since the period of the Second World War (1939-1945). This included a time period that is fundamental to the state of rural Canada today.

Operationally, we focused on transformations that entailed long-term structural changes in the economic, social, political, or cultural organization of Canadian society. We remained open to research on short-term issues (such as the energy crisis of the 1970s or the Québec referenda of 1980 and 1995) in recognition that they may be interpreted as elements of more long-term transformations. In such cases, our focus remained on the long term implications of these events.

Five bibliographical databases were searched (EBSCO, EconLit, GeoBase, Sociological Abstracts, and AnthroSource), using selection keywords such as community, rural change, economic development, regional development, longitudinal, and small town in various combinations. The lists of references within selected articles were also scanned along with an annotated bibliography on rural change that was prepared by Andrea Rawluk (2009). We considered books when they were identified by authors in research articles or where they included in edited collections related to our topic. In all, hundreds of entries were considered, with 97 of them followed up for more detailed analysis. These core references were classified into groups according to the primary type of changes investigated: economic, policy-related, demographic, social, environmental, historical, or health. We then elaborated each of these topics, looking more carefully at the specific factors contributing to change as identified or implied by the authors.

We also kept track of the type of research methods used by the researchers. This information was valuable for assessing the implicit factors of change as considered by the authors since the specific indicators or data sources of the studies often provided clues about the change or outcome factors in those cases where the study does not identify them. The information on methods was also used to assess the nature and extent of evidence for the claims

made – an important contribution to our assessment of those claims. Our findings regarding these methods and the related data will be outlined first.

Most of the studies used available data (50 out of 97) – either in the form of census information or surveys conducted by national or regional agencies. These also tended to be issue-based, although some of them were explicitly conducted to compare the relative contribution of various factors on specific outcomes (e.g. population change in small areas, poverty, or health). The factors identified tended to be those of particular relevance to the outcomes under study such as market linkages in the case of population change, economic sector adjustments in the case of employment, or wage rates in the case of poverty. Most of these studies were also descriptive in nature – assuming the operation of general processes that drive the specific variables in their analysis. As a result, there were few attempts to test competing explanations.

There were twenty-five that were primarily case studies – often single cases but in some instances multiple sites that were selected in a strategic, convenient, or systematic fashion. Most of these case studies addressed particular issues such as health status, social groups, livelihood strategies, or development initiatives. Factors of change were usually identified as external to the local sites (most often economic, political, or demographic) but local initiatives or characteristics were frequently discussed as mitigating factors that modified the negative effects of these more general processes, alleviating poverty, improving education, health, or livelihoods. Several outlined the social and political processes internal to the communities that facilitated or inhibited these processes.

Twenty-six of the studies were primarily theoretical in orientation, referring to the author's history of research in general or other research to support the cases made. Fourteen of them were largely reviews of the literature. This type of study tended to identify macro-level

trends or characteristics such as ‘post-productivism’ or ‘globalization’ as driving forces for specific outcomes in which they were interested. These studies were often the most explicit about long term trends so they will serve as useful points of reference for identifying future directions of research.

Twenty of the studies employed their own systematic surveys for the collection of primary data. These also tended to focus on specific issues such as migration, social capital, gender roles, or poverty. Surveys were often included in the case studies mentioned above – as a supplement to participation, informal interviews, or observations – especially in countries without a strong research infrastructure. Interviews with strategically selected community members were reported in sixteen of the studies – most often those targeting a particular organization (e.g. health service) or type of individual (e.g. indigenous people).

Even a cursory review of the material makes clear that the identification of ‘drivers’ of community trajectories is a misnomer for the processes involved. It is highly unlikely that there will be one, two, or even a few ‘drivers’ of this nature since the dynamics of change are much more complex than those implied by this metaphor. As a result it is necessary to consider more elaborate frameworks for change as a basis for comparing the literature.

## Step 2: Frameworks for analysis

In preparation for a more detailed analysis of the trajectories and the principal factors involved we made use of several frameworks for the organization of the material examined. The first was the model used by Alasia, et al. (2008) in their study of community vulnerability in Canada.

This framework identifies three elements to consider when identifying the type of changes in which we are interested: stressors (both positive and negative), assets (sometimes taking on the characteristics of liabilities), and outcomes of these two as they impact local communities. Stressors are considered to have impacts largely outside the control of local or regional actors. Assets, on the other hand are resources, social structures, or conditions over which regional actors have greater potential for control or influence. The difference between the two is a question of degree, not qualitative in nature – although various authors may treat them as more or less distinct.

The advantage of this framework is its simplicity. Although useful, its simplicity is also a disadvantage since it overlooks two ingredients that are of particular interest in the literature on longitudinal changes: the role of local, regional, or national initiatives and the dynamic quality of the relationships among the key elements.

Stressors and assets are important elements in the trajectories of communities, but it is also important to recognize the way in which these elements are identified and organized by local and regional actors. The governance (both formal and informal) of stressors, assets, and liabilities can make a considerable difference on the outcomes – as is clearly reflected in the research literature by the diversity of outcomes from one location to the next.

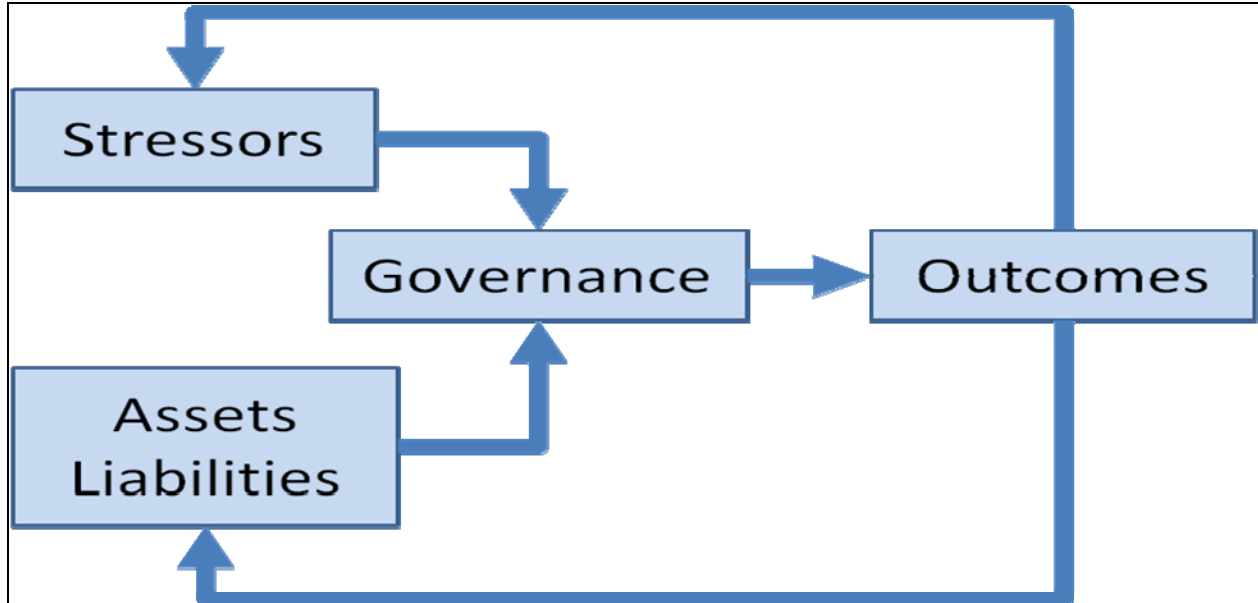
The linear nature of this framework also overlooks the many ways in which outcomes at one point in time can become stressors or assets at another. Improving the health or education levels of a community can add new assets to the repertoire for future action, just as successes in collective action can increase community social capital assets. A more complete framework will acknowledge and explicitly reflect these important elements.

The community capacity framework as developed by the New Rural Economy (NRE) project is consistent with that of Alasia et al. yet introduces the two elements identified above (Lyons and Reimer 2009). This national study of community capacity-building ended in 2008 after 11 years of collaborative work with 32 rural sites in all regions of Canada (<http://nre.concordia.ca>). Their capacity model explicitly introduced the elements of governance that intervene in the organization of stressors and assets and the recognition of feedback from outcomes to assets. It includes some of the key processes conditioning that governance – processes that have proved useful in the analysis of community dynamics (Reimer et al. 2008; Reimer 2006)

By integrating these two models we are able to produce a more flexible framework for the classification and analysis of the materials found in the literature. This integration starts with the Alasia model, but recognizes the role of governance in the mediation of stressors and assets for outcomes and it integrates feedback processes in which outcomes can influence stressors and assets (see Figure 1). In the process, the contextual elements of the NRE model become integrated into the stressors element of the framework.



Figure 1: Modified Framework for Community Trajectories Analysis



We used this framework for the classification and analysis of the factors and variables discussed within the literature. It allowed us to organize the key concepts or variables in a manner that reflected the proposed relationships among them. It also allowed the role of the same concept or variable in one study to be different in another. Changes in employment, for example, are used by some authors as a stressor or asset whereas by others these changes are treated as outcomes. This may even occur within the same study. Our framework represented this as a reflection of the dynamic nature of the processes involved: outcomes at one point in time or for one point of reference can become stressors, assets, or liabilities at another.

### Step 3: Processes of transformation

Table 1 provides a summary of the number of articles or books mentioning a particular factor of change as they are sorted into the four key elements of our framework. The data

illustrate the way in which economic factors were most often cited in three of the four categories.

Policy and social factors played an important part in governance processes.

The relatively low number of publications referring to historical and health issues is most likely a reflection of our focus on social science and rural-focused longitudinal studies for this scan. Both of these topics were well represented in the literature, but they were less often found within social science discussions of rural change – an issue to which we will return when discussing the implications of our review.

Table 1: Number of references\* by types of factors for change and framework elements

	Stressors (156)[81]	Assets (92)[53]	Governance (41)[29]	Outcomes (131)[78]
Economic	69	31	10	59
Policy	24	12	14	11
Demographic	23	14	0	11
Social	17	23	15	31
Environmental	11	9	2	8
Historical	9	3	0	3
Health	3	0	0	8

\* Since multiple references can be found in one article, the total references (in parentheses) can be more than the total number of articles with at least 1 factor mentioned [in brackets]. The total number of articles examined is 97.

## Stressors

According to the literature surveyed, economic-based processes are the major stressors for change: processes that are largely exogenous to communities and regions. In most cases these are characterized by macro-level phenomenon such as sectoral shifts (usually reflected in employment), changing global demand for goods and services, or the rural economy in general (69/97) (Reimer and Bollman 2010; Woods 2006; Lobao and Meyer 2001).<sup>2</sup>

Many of the chapters in this volume also identify economic change as a major impetus for social transformation (e.g. Young, Barney, Davis and Reed). In some cases the stressors are more specific, such as shifts in the scale of enterprises (usually increasing), the mechanization of production, or the increase in demand for land. A few studies refer to long-term transformations such as ‘commoditization’, ‘economic dependency’, or the shift to ‘post-production economies’ as the fundamental drivers of change for rural communities.

Most of the economic-focused studies concentrate on agriculture in their analysis (53/97). Very few of the other rural-related sectors such as forestry, fishing, mining, or energy are represented in this longitudinal-focused literature. Discussions of tourism are the most frequently addressed sectoral topic besides agriculture – usually as part of a focus on diversification in rural areas. Transformations among sectors are frequently discussed (23/97) along with their manifestation in multifunctional occupational activities (17/97).

Policy and demographic stressors rank second and third in the frequency of references. The policy issues are much broader than the demographic ones, including very general factors such as the changes in government structures (most often at the national level), the dominance of neoliberalism (characterized in part by calls for diminished state involvement in economic activities, deregulation, and privatization), and policy shifts favouring trade liberalization or

environmental sustainability. The most frequent demographic stressor is urbanization and its related population reduction in more remote communities. Population growth is often included as part of this discussion.

Shifting values and institutional changes are most frequently identified as social stressors. The values include those related to sexuality (including gender roles and HIV/AIDS) (Poon and Saewyc 2009), the environment (Woods 2006; Holmes 2008), food (Halfacree 2007), and even the meaning of 'truth' and legitimate knowledge (Tovey 2008).

#### Assets/Liabilities

The most frequent assets identified are also economic in nature. Assets are (by our framework definition) under greater potential local control but they often have similar characteristics to stressors. The difference lies in the way they are discussed by the various authors. If they are represented by the authors as locally managed or potentially managed by local or regional actors we have considered them to be assets rather than stressors. This is not always clearly stated by the authors but inferred from the context of their discussion.

Economic conditions such as agricultural resources, sectoral shifts, pluriactivity, market linkages, and economic diversity are sometimes treated as potential opportunities for economic growth (Getz 2008; Burton and Wilson 2006; Broadway 2007; Robinson 2006; Friedland 2002; Fujita and Krugman 2004; Stauber 2001; Woods 2006), even as they are treated as stressors by others (Bessant 2007; Holmes 2008; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Knickel and Renting 2000; Lerman and Sedik 2009; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Morris and Evans 2004; Murdoch 2000; Eikeland and Lie 1999; Wing and Wolf 2000). The former studies tend to be those focusing on

case studies or specific policies – the latter on general representations of the context in which the changes occur.

Social characteristics are the second most frequently identified assets in the literature (they are seldom represented as liabilities) (Bowen 2009; Farmer et al. 2003; Getz 2008; Kirwan 2004; Matthews, Pendakur, and Young 2009; Murdoch 2000; Sharp and Smith 2003; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004; Besser 2008; Ur-rehman 2008; Wang et al. 2009). “Social capital” is the term used most often to represent these types of assets. The examples discussed are most often social capital relationships of the associative type (voluntary groups and informal networks) (Bowen 2009) (Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004; Besser 2008; Ur-rehman 2008) rather than those which are market-based or communal (Reimer et al. 2008). In a few cases the availability or use of bureaucratic-based social capital such as municipal structures (Friedland 2002; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Sharp and Smith 2003; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004; Besser 2008) or marketing organizations (Halfacree 2007; Kirwan 2004; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Murdoch 2000; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004) are included within this type of discussion.

A highly educated population (Bernier 1998; Burton, Kuczera, and Schwarz 2008; Chokie and Partridge 2008; Estudillo, Sawada, and Otsuka 2008; Sumner 2008; Tanaka 2009), in-migration (Broadway 2007; Chokie and Partridge 2008; Duranton 2007; Morris and Evans 2004; Beyers and Nelson 2000), proximity to large centres (Millward 2005), and relatively young populations (Estudillo, Sawada, and Otsuka 2008; Glendinning et al. 2003) are all identified as potential demographic assets for communities —although in the latter case, the chapter by Ryser et al. points to challenges of harnessing the potential that youth can bring to communities. Policy-focused assets are most often identified in terms of government

organizations or their services at the local, regional, or national levels (Bowen 2009; Broadway 2007; Chokie and Partridge 2008; Halfacree 2007; Markey and Manson 2007; Millward 2005; Sharp and Smith 2003; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004; Eikeland and Lie 1999). Two studies identified the existence of policy legislation supporting identity (Beyers and Nelson 2000) and gender (Eikeland and Lie 1999) as important assets for local enhancement and action. The availability of natural resources and amenities for tourism and lifestyle advantages are the most frequently cited environmental assets mentioned (Kash 2008; Glendinning et al. 2003; Knickel and Renting 2000; Markey, Halseth, and Manson 2009; Mitchell 2008; Partridge et al. 2008; Beyers and Nelson 2000).

What is remarkable about the assets identified in the literature is their diversity. Authors identify economic, social, policy-related, demographic, and environmental factors as potential opportunities for local communities and regional initiatives. The case studies provide even more specific examples taken from the local conditions investigated.

## Governance

As one might expect, the most frequently addressed issues of governance are policy and social ones. There are a few studies examining the ways in which entrepreneurs and economic institutions might provide importance governance roles – reflecting a bias among researchers to treat governance in a limited fashion. Relatively little attention is given to demographic, environmental, historical, or health contributions to the ways in which communities organize themselves with respect to their stressors and assets.

Studies of policy-related governance most often focus on government structures, at the local, regional, or national levels (Holmes 2008; Keating and Stevenson 2008; Nelson, Adger,

and Brown 2007; Richards 2007; Robinson 2006; Vandermeulen et al. 2006). In several cases the policy issue is discussed as a reflection of neoliberalism (Goodman 2004; Richards 2007; Woods 2006) but it is also considered with respect to more specific issues such as environmental sustainability (Machum 2005; Morris and Evans 2004; Sumner 2005), food policy (Keating and Stevenson 2008; Kirwan 2004; Morris and Evans 2004), human rights (Tanaka 2009), health (Scott, Christie, and Midmore 2004), education and identity (Tanaka 2009), and service provision (Markey, Halseth, and Manson 2009).

Most social-focused studies of governance discuss the role of formal organizations in communities and the ways in which they structure information, attention, and action (Fujita and Krugman 2004; Ilbery et al. 2004; Knickel and Renting 2000; Keating and Stevenson 2008; Lewis 2008). Studies of social capital supplement this in several ways by emphasizing the more informal mechanisms by which this coordination of action takes place (Hinrichs 2000; Ilbery et al. 2004; Knickel and Renting 2000; Richards 2007). In some of the research, specific issues such as gender relations (Glendinning et al. 2003; Tanaka 2009), stratification (Nelson, Adger, and Brown 2007), social cohesion (Jaffe and Quark 2006), values (Friedland 2002; Sumner 2005), and frustration with existing conditions (Friedland 2002) are treated as contributing factors to the co-ordination of action. Challenges to this co-ordination are specifically addressed in a few studies by their focus on inter-organizational relations (Tanaka 2009), power (Friedland 2002), and conflict over environmental issues (Sumner 2005).

Only two of the studies discussed governance issues with respect to the substantive categories we identified – and both of these refer to the co-ordination of environmental concerns: natural resources (Friedland 2002) and access to natural amenities (Lewis 2008). Governance topics were not identified with respect to demographic, historical, and health issues.

The remarkable finding from a governance perspective is the relative absence of research on this topic. Our framework highlights the central role of governance for the conceptualization, co-ordination, and mobilization of action with respect to stressors and assets, yet there seems to be little work done on the way in which these processes are organized and work – especially at the more informal level. This is clearly an important focus for future research.

## Outcomes

The most frequent focus for community outcomes is on economic factors. Within this category the most frequent concerns are with poverty (Bessant 2007; Bowen 2009; Chokie and Partridge 2008; Estudillo, Sawada, and Otsuka 2008; Gerry, Nivorozhkin, and Rigg 2008; Getz 2008; Ilbery et al. 2004; Jaffe and Quark 2006; Labrianidis and Sykas 2009; Lanjouw and Murgai 2009; Lerman and Sedik 2009; Mulenga and Van Campenhout 2008; Riva et al. 2009; Stauber 2001; Surender and Van Niekerk 2008; Tanaka 2009; Ur-rehman 2008; Zhou, Hua, and Harrell 2008) and various forms of exclusion. This is reflected in concerns regarding incomes (Bernier 1998; Broadway 2007; Fiorelli 2007; Kash 2008; Chokie and Partridge 2008; Duranton 2007; Estudillo, Sawada, and Otsuka 2008; Gerry, Nivorozhkin, and Rigg 2008; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Knickel and Renting 2000; Leichenko and O'Brien 2002; Lerman and Sedik 2009; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Machum 2005; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Millward 2005; Mulenga and Van Campenhout 2008; Patriquin, Parkins, and Stedman 2007; Sharpley and Vass 2006; Stauber 2001; Surender and Van Niekerk 2008; Besser 2008; Beyers and Nelson 2000; Zhou, Hua, and Harrell 2008) and employment (Bessant 2007; Bowler 1999; Broadway 2007; Chokie and Partridge 2008; Duranton 2007; Elands 2008; Estudillo, Sawada, and Otsuka 2008; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Knickel and Renting 2000; Lanjouw and Murgai 2009;



Lewis 2008; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Matthews, Pendakur, and Young 2009; Patriquin, Parkins, and Stedman 2007; Richards 2007; Stauber 2001), most often treated as indicators of more general economic conditions in the regions under study. In many cases these more general concerns are focused on agricultural sustainability as an outcome – not only in terms of its survival, but the forms it will take as a result of changing stressors, assets, and governance structures (Bowler 1999; Elands 2008; Estudillo, Sawada, and Otsuka 2008; Hinrichs 2000; Ilbery et al. 2004; Jaffe and Quark 2006; Labrianidis and Sykas 2009; Lanjouw and Murgai 2009; Leichenko and O'Brien 2002; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Marsden and Sonnino 2008; Millward 2005; Prandl-Zika 2008; Sharpley and Vass 2006; Riley and Harvey 2007; Scott, Christie, and Midmore 2004; Vandermeulen et al. 2006; Walford 2002; Winter 2005).

Economic-related outcomes are also reflected in studies examining the levels of pluriactivity (Bernier 1998; Getz 2008; Keating and Stevenson 2008; Labrianidis and Sykas 2009; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004), tourism (Elands 2008; Lewis 2008; Scott, Christie, and Midmore 2004), housing (Broadway 2007; Duranton 2007; Keating and Stevenson 2008), land prices (Elands 2008; Friedland 2002), and transportation costs (Partridge et al. 2008). Most of these can be identified as stressors or assets as well, so we have tried to classify them as outcomes only when the authors appear to treat them in this manner.

Social outcomes are the second largest group in the literature examined. The impacts of changing conditions on livelihoods and livelihood strategies are the most frequent expressions of this type (Burton, Kuczera, and Schwarz 2008; Getz 2008; Lerman and Sedik 2009; Lewis 2008; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Riley and Harvey 2007; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004; Sumner 2005; Ur-rehman 2008; Wing and Wolf 2000). The level of civic engagement is the second most frequent (Bessant 2007; Kash 2008; Friedland 2002; Keating and Stevenson 2008;

Woods 2006) and a wide variety of social issues follow: social capital and social cohesion (Lobao and Stofferahn 2008; Surender and Van Niekerk 2008), the capacities of informal organizations (Besser 2008; Markey and Manson 2007; Surender and Van Niekerk 2008), gender and aboriginal relations (Morris and Evans 2004; Robertson, Perkins, and Taylor 2008; Surender and Van Niekerk 2008), quality of life (Richards 2007; Scott, Christie, and Midmore 2004; Sharp and Smith 2003), social exclusion (Bessant 2007; Getz 2008), the strength of the social infrastructure (Markey and Manson 2007; Surender and Van Niekerk 2008), the nature of values (Broadway 2007; Ilbery et al. 2004), the extent of social stratification (Labrianidis and Sykas 2009; Stauber 2001), and power relations (Surender and Van Niekerk 2008).

Demographic outcomes primarily focus on community population levels and the factors contributing to growth or decline (Black 1999; Dahms and McComb 1999; Duranton 2007; Gerry, Nivorozhkin, and Rigg 2008; Lewis 2008; Millward 2005; Mitchell 2008; Partridge et al. 2008; Woods 2006). Aging of the population and immigration are the other two topics discussed as outcomes (Millward 2005). Environmental sustainability is the most frequently addressed policy outcome in the literature (Kash 2008; Elands 2008; Friedland 2002; Lewis 2008; Robinson 2006; Scott, Christie, and Midmore 2004; Sumner 2008; Winter 2005) – most often discussed as a response to stresses from production and social action. Other policy outcomes mentioned include identity challenges (Burton and Wilson 2006; Jaffe and Quark 2006), national security (Kash 2008), and food policy (Buttel 2001).

Health outcomes are given attention in a number of the studies – most often with respect to population health (Broadway 2007; Farmer et al. 2003; Friedland 2002; Madhavan et al. 2007; Riva et al. 2009; Wang et al. 2009; Wing and Wolf 2000). Challenges of disease (especially in third world countries) (Madhavan et al. 2007; Wing and Wolf 2000), STDs (Madhavan et al.

2007; Poon and Saewyc 2009), and the availability of health services (Madhavan et al. 2007) are included within this more general category. Environmental outcomes are usually discussed with respect to threats to natural resources (Morris and Evans 2004; Robinson 2006; Ur-rehman 2008), and access to water (Kash 2008) or recreational amenities (Scott, Christie, and Midmore 2004).

It is apparent from this list of outcomes that many of them can also be considered stressors or assets under different circumstances or frameworks. This is not often reflected in the literature examined, however, since they are typically treated as outcomes of a linear process. Our framework encourages more dynamical thinking about these elements - and particularly the relationships among them.

#### Interrelations of framework elements

The current literature can be analyzed from a more dynamical perspective if we consider the various ways in which the stressors, assets, governance, and outcome elements are proposed to interact. In many cases this means inferring the dynamics from more linear studies rather than documenting the explicit analysis by the authors. The process will provide us with some research-based suggestions, however, for proposing a more coherent approach to community revitalization.

Out of the 97 references examined, only nine mention all four elements of our framework. Almost all of these nine examine changes over time, most often with respect to agriculture. Since they represent these changes in terms of the interaction among many elements (e.g. economic restructuring, policy, environmental issues, and livelihoods) they make claims regarding all four elements. Most of these claims are based on case studies with interview or

statistical information (Friedland 2002; Knickel and Renting 2000; Machum 2005; Markey and Manson 2007; Richards 2007; Robinson 2006) although several are theoretical or policy focused (Kash 2008; Morris and Evans 2004; Woods 2006). There is little effort to elaborate the types of relationships among the factors in a systematic fashion.

Forty of the studies discuss at least three of the four elements in our framework. Although many of them describe changes over time, this is often done as part of a background discussion of specific crises or programs (e.g. the Common Agricultural Policy in Europe: (Walford 2002); farmers' markets: (Hinrichs 2000; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000); rapid urban growth: (Black 1999; Duranton 2007; Partridge et al. 2008); foot and mouth disease: (Scott, Christie, and Midmore 2004)) rather than as the central focus as one might desire with longitudinal analysis. Only a few have a specific longitudinal focus (Black 1999; Broadway 2007; Mitchell 2008; Partridge et al. 2008; Richards 2007; Sharpley and Vass 2006; Stauber 2001; Zhou, Hua, and Harrell 2008) although there are several others that discuss long term changes as part of theoretical or policy developments (Bessant 2007; Kash 2008; Friedland 2002; Keating and Stevenson 2008; Woods 2006).

It is difficult to generalize regarding the substantive findings from these studies since the topics they discuss, the role assigned to the various factors, and the styles of research are all very diverse. However, one can identify two general claims that may provide an indication of emerging consistency.

The first is that local and regional dependence on primary industries creates major stresses on local populations and employment. This is most thoroughly represented in the Alasia et al. analysis (2008) since it stands as one of the few longitudinal studies in which most aspects of our framework are included. When controlling for many other factors, Alasia et al. found that

increased dependence on primary sector employment increased the location's vulnerability to population and employment decline. This result is echoed in many of the other studies although not in such a systematic form (Argent 2002; Bernier 1998; Bessant 2007; Bessant ; Beyers and Nelson 2000; Burton and Wilson 2006; Chokie and Partridge 2008; Dahms and McComb 1999; Elands 2008; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Knickel and Renting 2000; Labrianidis and Sykas 2009; Lerman and Sedik 2009; Lewis 2008; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Markey and Manson 2007; Marsden 1999; Millward 2005; Morris and Evans 2004; Prandl-Zika 2008; Sharpley and Vass 2006; Woods 2006; Zhou, Hua, and Harrell 2008). It also supports the claim by Bollman and Reimer (Bollman and Reimer 2009) that seeking investment in primary commodity production as a technique of community development is unlikely to increase population in the long run.

The second general claim is that a focus on local places, local assets, and local social capital provides a good basis for revitalization. This claim is supported by 19 of the studies in our list (Besser 2008; Bowen 2009; Dahms and McComb 1999; Farmer et al. 2003; Flora, Flora, and Fey 2004; Friedland 2002; Getz 2008; Glendinning et al. 2003; Gold 2007; Halfacree 2007; Hinrichs 2000; Ilbery et al. 2004; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Jaffe and Quark 2006; Kirwan 2004; Knickel and Renting 2000; Madhavan et al. 2007; Markey and Manson 2007; Markey, Halseth, and Manson 2009; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Marsden and Sonnino 2008; Matthews, Pendakur, and Young 2009; Morris and Evans 2004; Prandl-Zika 2008; Pritchard, Burch, and Lawrence 2007; Sharp and Smith 2003; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004; Sumner 2005; Tovey 2008; Ur-rehman 2008; Vandermeulen et al. 2006; Walford 2002; Wang et al. 2009). It is unfortunate that many of these community level variables are not included in the more systematic or large scale survey studies – most likely because of the lack of

information at this level, so we are unable to examine the relative impacts of the first claim with the second. Synchronic analysis suggests that they might be taking place at the same time, however (Reimer 2006).

## **Discussion**

The most remarkable feature of the literature we examined is its diversity – in the particular variables examined, the methodologies utilized, and the conclusions identified. Economic conditions and issues dominate the research but their status varies considerably – as stressors, outcomes, and in some cases, assets for community changes. Among the longitudinal studies, for example, economic-based factors may include relatively specific items like income or employment, but they also refer to much more general processes such as exposure to the global economy, sectoral shifts, or the rural economy in general.

It is disappointing to find how often these general factors of change were identified without elaboration or evidence – leaving the reader to speculate on the specific aspects of the ‘sectoral shifts’, ‘market linkages’, or ‘changing global demand’ that are responsible for change. In those cases where more detail is provided we find that the authors most often identify ‘resource restructuring’ (Argent 2002; Bernier 1998; Bock 2004; Bryden and Bollman 2000; Dahms and McComb 1999; Elands 2008; Holmes 2008; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Joseph, Udgard, and Bedford 2001; Knickel and Renting 2000; Leichenko and O'Brien 2002; Lewis 2008; Lobao and Stofferahn 2008; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Marsden 1999; Marsden and Sonnino 2008; Millward 2005; Pritchard, Burch, and Lawrence 2007; Stauber 2001; Sumner 2005), ‘consumption patterns’ (Bowler 1999; Bryden and Bollman 2000; Elands 2008; Evans 2002; Flora, Flora, and Fey 2004; Holmes 2008; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Kirwan

2004; Leichenko and O'Brien 2002; Lerman and Sedik 2009; Lobao and Stofferahn 2008; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Marsden 1999; Prandl-Zika 2008; Pritchard, Burch, and Lawrence 2007; Sharpley and Vass 2006; Sumner 2005), 'mechanization' (Argent 2002; Black 1999; Bock 2004; Bowler 1999; Bryden and Bollman 2000; Elands 2008; Evans 2002; Fujita and Krugman 2004; Holmes 2008; Joseph, Udgard, and Bedford 2001; Labrianidis and Sykas 2009; Lobao and Stofferahn 2008; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Marsden 1999; Sumner 2005), and the 'scale of enterprises' (Bessant 2007; Besser 2008; Black 1999; Broadway 2007; Bryden and Bollman 2000; Evans 2002; Hinrichs 2000; Holmes 2008; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Joseph, Udgard, and Bedford 2001; Lewis 2008; Lobao and Meyer 2001; Machum 2005; Marsden and Sonnino 2008; Pritchard, Burch, and Lawrence 2007; Zhou, Hua, and Harrell 2008) as the key economic-focused influences.

We find similar diversity among the other key factors: demographic, social, and policy-related. Not only are the specific measures and foci of research diverse, but their implied theoretical role in community development processes also vary from one project to the next. This makes critical evaluation of their relative importance very difficult.

The challenge of evaluation is exacerbated by the fact that very few of the studies integrate more than two or three elements at the same time. There is a tendency to focus on one outcome such as population growth, poverty, rural investment, or inequality, then look for one or two factors that seem to affect them. Very few studies are designed to do this in a style where competing hypotheses are identified and compared.

In spite of these limitations, there are frequent references to the operation of more complex relationships than explicitly identified in the literature. These complexities are often included as conditions that modify or limit the central relationships. Several studies, for example,

point to the way in which local assets can modify the general impacts of urbanization, commercialization, or population change. The level of local civic engagement (Friedland 2002; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Sharp and Smith 2003; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004), social capital (Besser 2008; Bowen 2009; Farmer et al. 2003; Getz 2008; Kirwan 2004; Matthews, Pendakur, and Young 2009; Murdoch 2000; Sharp and Smith 2003; Smithers, Johnson, and Joseph 2004; Ur-rehman 2008; Wang et al. 2009), natural resources (Beyers and Nelson 2000; Kash 2008; Knickel and Renting 2000; Markey, Halseth, and Manson 2009), or value structures (Glendinning et al. 2003; Morris and Evans 2004), for example, can lead to improvements in health (Wang et al. 2009), business incomes (Besser 2008), or agricultural sustainability (Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Sharp and Smith 2003). Although the processes are not often examined in detail, the consistency with which local and regional factors condition the impacts of general stressors provides a strong indication that this will be a fruitful direction for research (Reimer 2006).

One should also remain sensitive to the level of analysis at which most of these studies are conducted. By focusing attention at the local level alone, researchers may miss some of the most significant ways in which the wealth of rural areas is extracted: through corporate and financial ownership, activities, and control. Most of the studies have focused on population, income, employment, and health as key outcomes to consider in the analysis. These characteristics are typically measured at the individual level. However, they are primarily sensitive to the wealth remaining in rural locations, not the wealth that is exported elsewhere. Measuring this transfer requires much more difficult analysis since the data rests primarily in corporate accounts, trade statistics, and property records.



If we are to understand the processes of rural revitalization and decline, however, the analysis of wealth transfers is critical. Not only do we need to know the relative share of wealth that remains in rural communities, but we need to know how it is transferred, the processes that condition the relative share, and the mechanisms available to redistribute that share. Most of this information and discussion is lacking in the current research. Expanding our focus from the local or regional level would be a good initial step to rectify this limitation.

## Conclusions

It is difficult to identify one or two clear paths for research from this review. Instead, we find that the literature provides a rich source for questions that need to be answered along with some suggestions for possible answers. Some of them are outlined below.

*How much of the wealth in rural areas remains in those areas and how much is exported? What are the paths by which this occurs? What are the mechanisms by which the distribution might be changed?*

These three questions directly address one of the major limitations we found in the literature examined. Answers to these questions may exist in the more synchronistic literature but ultimately it will require longitudinal analysis in order to elaborate the processes involved. A good first step will be to compile the data necessary to answer these questions – data that are not easily accessible in the public record.

*What are the relative contributions of local, regional, national, and international factors to the extent and direction of community development?*

It is no surprise that most studies of this question are theoretical and speculative in nature since the methodological challenges of answering it are significant. It implies the analysis of data at multiple levels, in sufficient quantities, and with rather sophisticated tools. On the other hand, the growth of multiple-level studies and the methods to deal with them has been impressive.

What is required is some coordination of these studies and methods to allow the necessary comparisons. Projects such as the New Rural Economy Project in Canada, the DORA Project in Europe, and the RIMISIP Project in Central and South America provide models for such research and analysis that should be developed.

*What are the local dynamics involved in rural revitalization and how are they mobilized?*

The identification of assets and governance processes in our framework highlight the gap in the literature regarding the details of local relationships in the mobilization of action. How are the skills, interests, values, and identities of local people organized, where do they conflict, and how do such conflicts enhance or inhibit local development? These questions are often the focus of attention for community development practitioners, but they are frequently neglected among researchers. Answering them would have both explanatory and applied benefits that provide strong justification for the work.

*What are the relationships among the various economic sectors in rural areas?*

This is a question that is well represented in the literature – particularly with a focus on agriculture and its transformations in a service economy. Those addressing multifunctionality, pluriactivity, and more holistic approaches to rural analysis have provided useful suggestions regarding the directions for answering this question. The challenge remains in the methodology implied – both with respect to the availability of appropriate data (especially at the level of communities and regions) and the development of analytical approaches that are appropriate for the complexity of the relationships implicated.

*What are the likely impacts of environmental, climate, and food security concerns on rural places and opportunities?*

In spite of the considerable advances in the natural sciences regarding our understanding and analysis of environmental changes and challenges, there are few studies that integrate this

knowledge within the social sciences. As the literature shows, the importance of these factors is clearly identified, yet the conceptual and methodological tools to analyze them are underdeveloped. This requires learning more about the tools used by the natural scientists, greater collaboration with them, and exploration of the ways in which social science approaches, insights, and tools may be integrated to their analysis.

*Is social capital a necessary or sufficient condition for rural and community revitalization?*

Both the theoretical and empirical studies of social capital, social engagement, and local networks identify the importance of social capital for the modification of general stressors affecting rural communities. In most cases, this is demonstrated by case studies, examples, or literature reviews. Very seldom does the research take place in a context where the impacts of social capital are measured independently from economic, political, or other factors. The only exception to this (Alasia et al. 2008) provides some indication that social capital and economic conditions interact in important ways, but the details of that interaction are not elaborated.

*Which frameworks are most appropriate for the analysis of the complex and dynamic processes involved in rural revitalization?*

Many of the studies examined acknowledge the complex nature of the relationships they are investigating. However, they are frequently limited by the availability of appropriate information and restricted models and tools of analysis (e.g. linear or non-systematic). We have been encouraged by the value of the framework in Figure 1 and the related NRE capacity framework – both with respect to the elements highlighted and the dynamic nature of their relationships. It stands only as a very general model, however, and will require considerable elaboration to make it useful for identifying appropriate data, developing the details of the processes involved, and imagining the implications of the framework for rural change, policy development, and promising action.

The literature review also reflects insights on the major themes of this volume. From an historical and territorial point of view, the existing literature is weak with respect to the diachronic analysis of social transformation yet strong with respect to the analysis of territory and place. Examinations of social structure and change most frequently focus on economic and agricultural transformations with much less emphasis on social processes – a problem that is clearly addressed in this volume. The identification and analysis of identity is underdeveloped in the literature, and where it does occur it is often inadequately conceptualized – usually focusing on ‘rural’ identity in a way that leaves it unconnected to other social issues. Once again, the following chapters help to overcome this limitation by highlighting the complex relationships among identities and their implications for social networks and structures. Studies of culture show similar problems as those on identity, with the additional tendency to concentrate on crises or isolated case studies. Integrating cultural analysis into longitudinal studies will require more work of a comparative nature to help us understand how culture contributes to the economic and social transformations that are so prevalent in the literature. The literature on collective action tends to focus on formal organizations and government-based initiatives (often with an agricultural bias) while contributions and processes related to more informal groups are under-represented. The following chapters are welcome contributions to overcoming these biases.

In general, we need to integrate time in our analysis if we are to develop a better understanding of social transformation. This means asking “How long does it take?” and “Why does it take that long?” in all our research initiatives. This literature review has also taught us that the nature of rural research and the attention given to rural conditions is undergoing a significant change. By virtue of its geographical character, such research is inherently multi-disciplinary. By focusing on places rather than the classical divisions within our disciplines we

find that all those disciplines have something to contribute to understanding rural dynamics. This means that searching for research on ‘rural’ will inevitably be limited since much of the rural-relevant research is identified under other categories – like natural resources, water, food, community development, or economic growth. What makes rural special is the conjuncture of these many elements in a particular place. Our analysis and tools must reflect this condition – even though it makes our work that much more complex.

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<sup>1</sup> Vicki Beaupré-Odorico made major contributions to the early stages of this work. I would also like to thank Jennifer Couture, Tara Dourian, and Mao Sato for the assistance they provided when searching and organizing the biographical materials. We would also like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council that provided funds for this project.

<sup>2</sup> In the interest of brevity, only illustrative references will be included. The full list of works considered and their relevant classification can be found via <http://billreimer.ca/trajectoriesch5.pdf>.