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Measuring Social Support
Comparing community and national-level results

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•**Measuring Social Capital: Comparing Community and National-level Results**

•20 minutes, 10 min Q&A, 15 minutes plenary

•Adequate social capital measurement requires the collection of detailed information at local levels. This includes information about social networks and relationships as well informal and formal organizations. The operational demands of such collection makes it difficult to generalize beyond a few case studies without introducing elaborate assumptions about the relationships among individual characteristics and social networks. The availability of the General Social Survey on Social Networks (GSS22) provides a unique opportunity to address these difficulties since it replicates a module of questions from the New Rural Economy (NRE) Project of the *Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation*. In this paper, data from the GSS22 will be compared to the analysis of social capital derived from 22 rural sites of the NRE project. Using the common modules on social support from the two instruments results will be compared in order to identify the relative sensitivity of the GSS22 to the various elements of social capital as developed in the NRE project. This research will provide a useful basis for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of measuring social capital at a national level.

•Introduction

•Social capital

•Measures

•Results

•Implications

  •Researchers

  •Policy-makers (where the rubber hits the road)

    •Carcross/Tagish

    •Barriere

    •SSHRC/Rural Secretariat

•When a forest fire threatened the towns of the Crows Nest Pass in 2003, the Mayor and council called in the regional firefighters of Alberta's Department of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD). At the same time, they deputized the members of the local Quad Squad to head off in the woods to warn the vacationers, settlers, and more recluse members of the community that they may have to evacuate at any time. Families organized their things for evacuation or fire-fighting and the local radio station turned its facilities over to updates and advice on a regular basis.

•When the Carcross/Tagish Nation achieved self governance the first thing they did was collect stories, legends, and myths of their past – interviewing the elders and compiling a public list of the key themes represented in those stories. They then hired a political science student to help them translate those themes into a language that the BC, Yukon, and Federal government would accept as appropriate for policy.

•When we conducted a survey of volunteer groups in rural Canada we found that those with Boards of Directors were more likely to receive funding from the government.

•These stories illustrate the ways in which things get done – the ways in which people and communities organize themselves to manage their affairs and deal with the challenges they face.
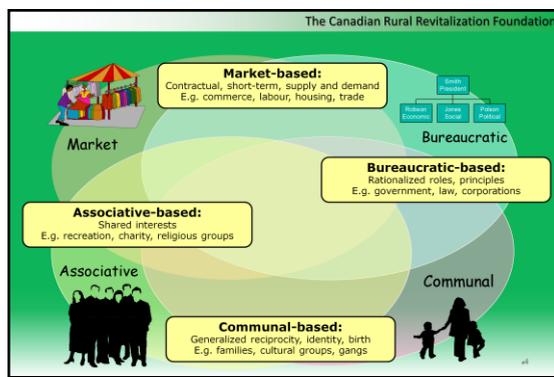
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Collaboration

- How does collaboration take place?
- What are the conditions that favour collaboration?
- What are the challenges to collaboration?
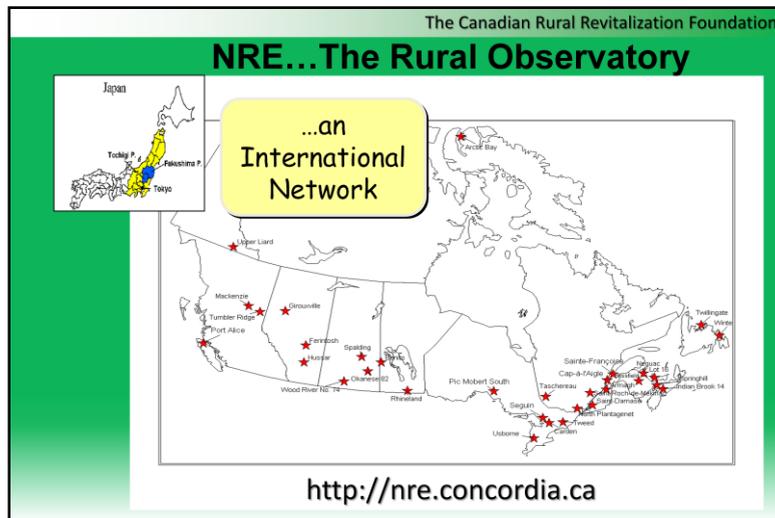- How might these challenges be overcome?

•Our research has examined these examples and many other like them to learn about the common and special characteristics of such co-ordinated action.

•What are the ways in which such collaboration takes place?

•What are the conditions that favour collaboration?

•What are the challenges to such collaboration?

•How might the challenges be overcome?

•Through this work we have found the importance of social networks for successful collaboration: not only through the structure they provide, but also the norms under which these structures operate

•The formal and informal rules, guidelines, assumed ways of behaving that guide the action of people in those networks: the norms by which people interact and co-ordinate their interaction.

•It is not only important who you know – but what you assume and can assume about their behaviour, dependability, and expectations of you – the basic ingredients in trust.

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Market-based:
Contractual, short-term, supply and demand
E.g. commerce, labour, housing, trade

Market

Bureaucratic

Bureaucratic-based:
Rationalized roles, principles
E.g. government, law, corporations

Associative-based:
Shared interests
E.g. recreation, charity, religious groups

Associative

Communal

Communal-based:
Generalized reciprocity, identity, birth
E.g. families, cultural groups, gangs

•In this research we have identified four very general types of such normative structures.

•They can operate together, but one or the other tends to predominate in a specific example of co-ordinated action.

•(S) Market-based norms

  •Based on contractual relations – usually short term, exchange oriented, guided by supply and demand

    •Predominate in commercial interactions, housing markets, job markets, and all levels of trade relations

    •Distribution of resources and services is made on the basis of ones ability to trade and exchange

•(S) Bureaucratic-based norms

  •Classic rational-legal relations as articulated by Weber

  •Guided by general principles and interlocking roles as reflected in by-laws and organigrams.

    •Predominate in corporations, public institutions, many NGOs

  •Distribution of resources and services is made according to one's assigned role and status (within and external to the organization)

    •If you meet the criteria (e.g. age class), you gain access to the resources – so long as you know the criteria and how to access them

•(S) Associative-based norms

  •People come together and organize their activities around a common interest

  •Participate so long as this interest is being served – or is likely to be achieved

    •Predominate in voluntary organizations, social action groups, emergency responses

  •Distribution of resources and services under these normative systems is according to one's commitment to and support for the common interest

•(S) Communal-based norms

  •People organize their behaviour with respect to family, ethnic, or other complex loyalties

  •Inclusion and exclusion usually guided by ascribed characteristics or strong identities

  •Don't have the single-focus outcomes as found in associative-based relations

    •Predominate in families, gangs, cults, etc.

  •Distribution of resources and services according to identity (often ascribed) and loyalty

•All forms are necessary in a complex, changing environment - The more agile a group, household, or community is in being able to use all systems, the greater will be their capacity - especially under conditions of change. Each of them forms a basis for people working together.

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NRE…The Rural Observatory
…an International Network
http://nre.concordia.ca

•Using this framework, we explored the way in which it helped us understand co-ordinated behaviour in Canadian rural communities.

•We conducted a face-to-face survey in 22 of the 32 rural communities in the NRE Rural Observatory.

  •It resulted in just over 2000 households being surveyed.

•As part of that work we asked respondents to identify the most significant change that occurred in their household over the last 12 months, then followed this up with a series of questions about how they dealt with those changes.

•These responses provided the material we used to identify the types of normative systems in which they operated to deal with those changes.

•Our Japanese colleagues were very impressed with this approach and asked us if we would collaborate with them to do the same thing in Japan

 •(S) With our help they selected 2 sites in Japan and ran a parallel and comparative project with ours.

Normative Systems

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- Types of support vary by the type of change
- Supports available are not always used
- Types of supports most often used in combination
- Not all types used are successful
- Types of supports used depend on household characteristics
- Community context matters

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•As a result of that research we have discovered the following types of things about the normative systems used.

•Types of supports used vary by the type of change

  •Finances: Market-based supports

  •Health: Bureaucratic-based supports

  •Living and Family: Communal-based supports

•Types of supports available are not always used

  •Many types of supports are available.

•Types of support are most often used in combination

  •Bureaucratic and Communal

    •In order to get to a doctor or hospital, for example, it is often necessary to find someone to help with child care or (in rural areas) get a ride.

  •Market, Bureaucratic, and Communal

•Not all types of support used are helpful

  •Market is least helpful for dealing with the changes

  •Communal is most helpful

•Types of support used are related to other household characteristics - like incomes

  •Market and Associative positive; Bureaucratic and Communal negative

  •Not always a simple relationship

    •Associative-based relations more often used by low income groups

•Community context matters

  •Use of Associative-based social capital will increase incomes in a community – but only if the community is globally connected.
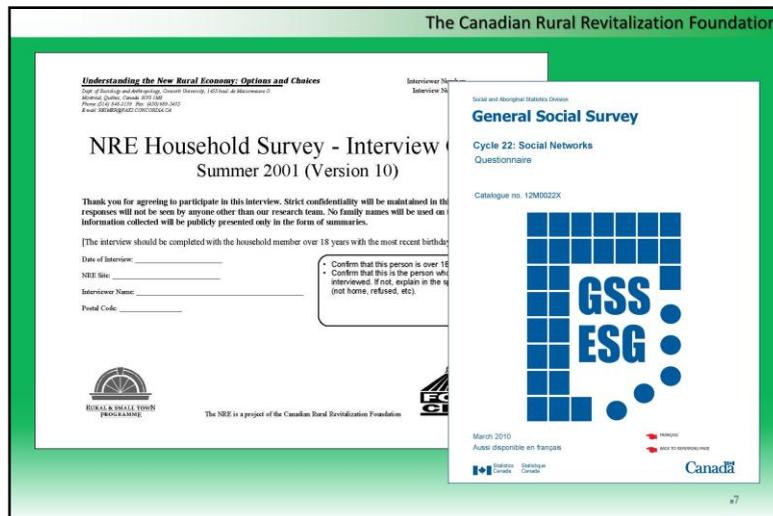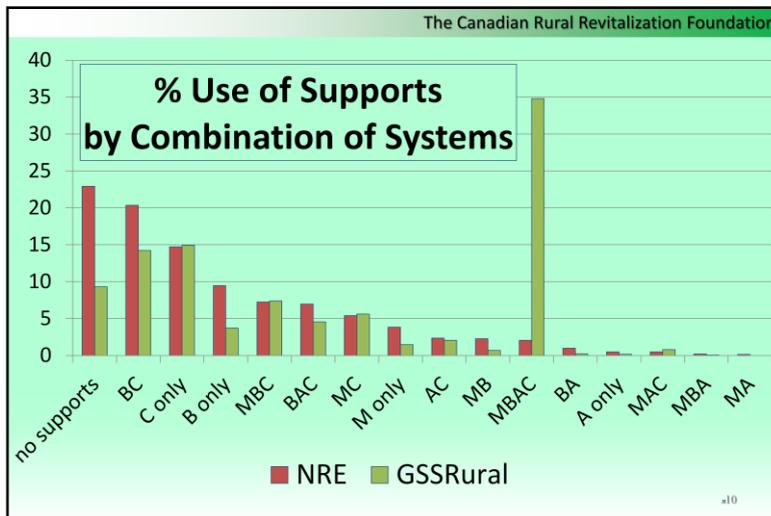
- This line of investigation continues to be useful so we were encouraged when Statistics Canada personnel picked up the module on social support in their 2008 GSS survey on Social Networks.
- They picked up the complete module, adjusted it for telephone delivery, and added a few elaborations – especially with respect to the types of changes and outcomes.
- This now allows us to examine the use of social capital and social support for a national sample, not just the rural communities of the NRE
  - Provides an opportunity to compare rural and urban places, for example
- Differences
  - Telephone as opposed to face-to-face
  - Slightly different strategy for posing questions
    - NRE: "Describe briefly how your household is managing or trying to resolve this change." Then probed for 8 types of sources – with many subcategories in each.
    - GSS: "Now we want to know about any resources that may have helped you during the change...Did you get help from..." then asked about 6 types of resources.
  - NRE focused on changes affecting the household; GSS focused on changes affecting the respondent.
- Our analysis involved first of all mapping the two surveys on the basis of the responses.
  - Not too difficult when we used the most generic categories.
    - 9 types of changes

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Major Changes by NRE and GSS Surveys
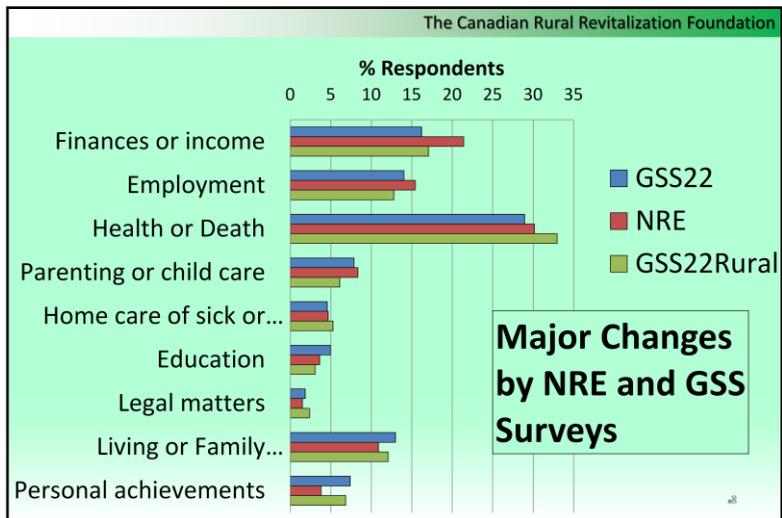
- This table provides the distribution of use among the 9 generic types of changes common to both the NRE and GSS surveys.

- The blue bars represent the % of GSS respondents who identified the various changes listed on the left hand side of the graph.

- (S) Reasonably good match between the 2 surveys.

  - The NRE survey results are slightly higher on Finances or income changes.

  - It is also lower than the GSS results on both the Living or family and Personal achievements.

- (S) Not too much difference when we excluded respondents from CMA and CA locations.

  - We see slight increases in health or death changes from the full GSS responses.

- Promising comparisons overall. Some indications that the two surveys are sensitive to similar things.
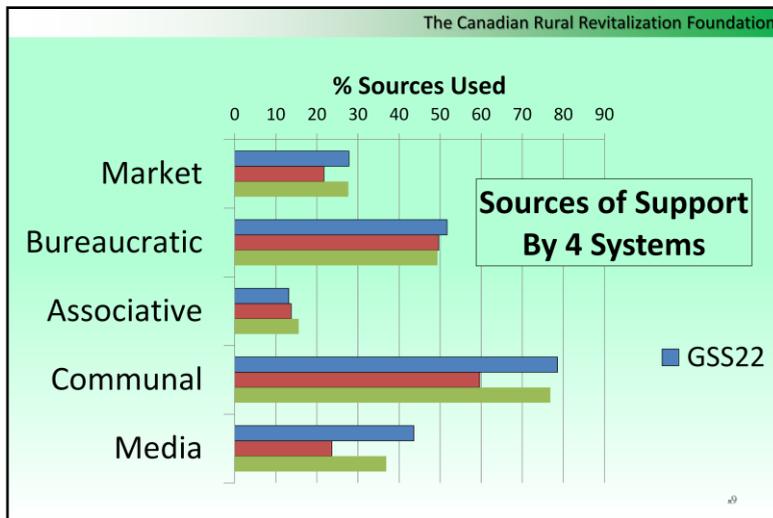
•When we examined the various types of support used, we find the two surveys are also reasonably compatible.

•(S) GSS survey is high on Market, Communal, and Media types of support.

•(S) Slightly improved match when we look at non-CMA/CA respondents only.

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% Use of Supports by Combination of Systems

NRE   GSSRural

•Here we have a distribution reflecting the way in which multiple types of support systems are used by the respondents in the NRE survey.

•Note that bureaucratic and communal types of support are frequently used together, then communal only, bureaucratic only, and market, bureaucratic, and communal together.

•(S) When we look at the GSS survey for non-CMAs and Cas there are 2 noticeable differences that emerge.

•The % of "no supports" is lower and the % of multiple uses of all 4 types of supports is very much higher.

•It is difficult to interpret these differences but our current speculation is that this is partly the result of the different modes of engagement with the respondents.

•The GSS took people through each of the 16 sources of support in turn, whereas the NRE survey left the issue more open – probing in terms of 8 categories only after the respondent had provided a general description of the response they made to the change.

•The former may have encouraged respondents to identify multiple sources of support whereas the latter may have let things rest at the most salient types of supports.

Summary: NRE and GSS Surveys

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- Types of changes: similar
- Types of supports: similar
- Types of supports are used in combination
- Opportunities for answering questions
  - Which systems are most effective?
  - How are the systems compatible?
  - How can we improve the opportunities for collaboration?

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•Summary

•Types of changes – very similar between surveys (GSS may slightly under-represent financial or income changes

•Types of supports used – very similar between surveys (GSS may slightly over-represent communal-based supports)

•National survey confirms the ways in which sources of support are used in combination

•GSS may over-represent the extent to which this occurs – especially with respect to the multiple use of all 4 types

•This initial investigation of the GSS also reinforces the value of future research using the GSS.

•It appears to be sensitive to the variations in normative systems I have outlined.

•It provides the opportunity to explore in more detail such questions as:

•Which of these normative systems are most effective – for which types of challenges?

•In what ways are the normative systems compatible – and where do they create problems for collaboration?

•How can we improve the opportunities for such collaboration?
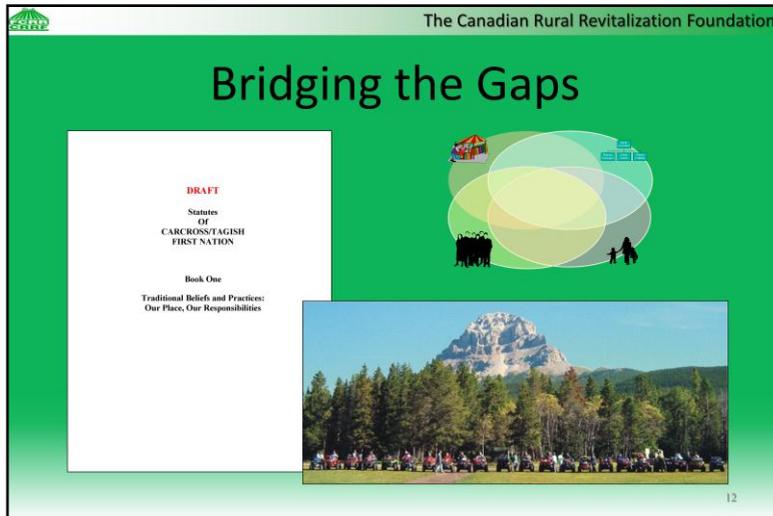
•In conclusion I would like to return to the examples with which I began.

   •With a more polemical message.

•Both of them illustrate how co-ordinating our behaviour with other (collaborating to get things done) requires the development of personal and group skills within a number of different normative systems.

•They don't always go well together.

   •The initial reluctance of the provincial fire authorities to work with the local citizens increased the danger for local residents and firefighters alike. It was only when they worked out a way in which the more hierarchal bureaucratic norms could accommodate the more flat structure of associative and communal ones (and integrate the Quad Squad, the municipal Learning Centre, and local families) that these dangers were reduced.

   •The Carcross/Tagish nation recognized the challenge of different norms from the beginning – so they took initiatives that allowed them to construct their self-understanding on the basis of their traditional norms – then make the effort to translate this understanding into a form that was understood by those operating on the basis of bureaucratic norms.

•I suggest it should be the other way around – since the personal, infrastructure, and financial resources are mostly under control of those operating within bureaucratic norms.

   •It is people working in these systems that are better equipped to make the effort to recognize the strengths of other ways of collaborating – and work with those systems rather than insist they become more bureaucratic-like.

•We have found that those volunteer and service groups that have a Board of Directors are most likely to be funded from government.

   •It shouldn't always be this way.