

## Social capital, services certainty, asset mobilization and community revitalization: Insights from a coal mine closure in Tumbler Ridge

In the spring of 2000, Teck Corporation announced that it would be closing the Quintette Mine in Tumbler Ridge two years earlier than expected. The closure of the town's main employer, and the associated loss of jobs and property tax revenue, precipitated a crisis and raised questions about the town's viability. Despite years of warning about the possibility of mine closures, and despite the inherent vulnerability of a single industry economy, diversification efforts had not been initiated. Within six days of the closure announcement, local leaders had a plan for revitalization which they have been working to implement over the past three years. Over that period, the town lost approximately one half of its population and then replaced that population. It has seen stability brought to municipal finances, and growth in the number and range of local economic activities.

Three elements appear to have been important in Tumbler Ridge's revitalization. The first involves the highly developed levels of social capital and social cohesion in the community. Individuals and groups were able to respond quickly and to draw upon a wide range of experiences and skills. They also knew "who could be trusted" to deliver on key revitalization tasks. Even in cases where particular groups may have had different visions for the future of the community, they were willing to work cooperatively

due to this sense of trust between groups and leaders. This social capital and cohesion had been built up over many years of community development activity. Everything from the "Emperor's Challenge" cross-country run, to the annual Grizzly Valley Days festival, to the cooperative work by the snowmobile and cross-country ski groups in mutual trail development, to support for local youth and women's groups, Tumbler Ridge had been a very active community with groups and individuals routinely coming together to offer successful events which built community pride and social capital.

In marketing the community to new home-buyers and new economic activities, it was critical that key local services (education, health care, and social services) were functioning. During the sale of mine-owned houses, the second question most potential home buyers would ask was "where is the hospital" (in the case of seniors looking for a retirement home) or "where is the elementary school" (in the case of young families looking to set up new businesses). In both cases, the town was able to point to high quality services. Support agreements with the provincial government guaranteed these

services for a period of five years after the Quintette Mine closure, yet the success of the revitalization has meant that this special funding has not been used.

Third, the community has been able to mobilize previously underdeveloped assets around forest resources, tourism, and retirement amenities. Most noticeable has been the very positive growth associated with dinosaur fossil, trackway, and skin impressions. A museum is under development and has the potential to contribute significantly to the local economy.



Bottom up revitalization enjoyed some success in Tumbler Ridge due to the ability of residents to work collectively, to draw upon the availability of high quality service infrastructure, and to deploy innovative visions with respect to local assets.

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