


NRE² BUILDING RURAL CAPACITY IN THE NEW ECONOMY





The Rural-Urban Interface

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Rural Matters! Conference
Edmonton, AB (AAMDC)

- [about 100 people turned up]
- Acknowledgements:
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
- Concordia University
- The Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada
- Statistics Canada
- CRRF
- NRE Research Team
- Rural Citizens in our field sites

•GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY STREAM:

- *Session (Hall D) – Chaired by Deb Grey*
- *The Rural/Urban Interface (A Panel Discussion)*
- *(Dr. Mark Partridge, Dr. Roger Gibbins, Dr. Bill Reimer)*
- A panel of renowned individuals from the U.S. and Canada in the area of rural/urban relations will offer three different perspectives on the interface between rural and urban regions, their conflicts and their interdependencies.
- 15 minutes each
- Toronto Greenbelt – established in 2005

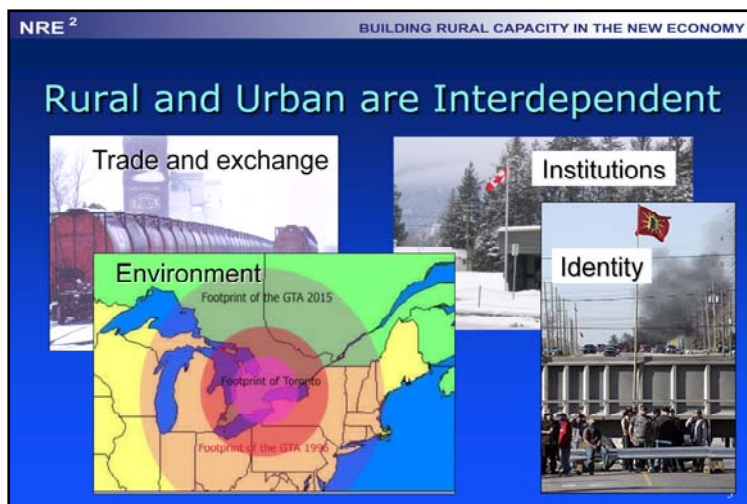
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Rural and urban Canada are interdependent

- In what ways are they interdependent?
- Implications of this interdependence?
- How should we reorganize ourselves?

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- Rural and Urban Canada are interdependent
 - Take this for granted
- We need to recognize and understand the nature of this interdependence to take advantage of the opportunities it creates
- We need to answer questions like:
 - In what ways are rural and urban Canada interdependent?
 - What are the implications of this interdependence?
 - How can we best reorganize ourselves to take advantage of these opportunities?
- I will be making some suggestions along these lines during my 15 minutes



- I find it useful to think of Rural-Urban interdependence with respect to 4 broad features of social organization
- These are 4 ways in which changes in rural or urban settings will have impacts on the other (the meaning of interdependence)
- (S) The first is via trade and exchange
 - Of goods, services, finances, and people
 - Sometimes it is direct as with farmers markets and commuting (labour markets) but often it is indirect via other nations or complex downstream transformations
 - This is to be expected in our commodity dependent economy where 83%+ of our positive balance of trade (goods and services) is due to the export of rural products (agriculture, forestry, energy). (Cansim, 2006)
- (S) The second broad way in which we are interdependent is through the institutions we share
 - This includes national, provincial, regional, and some municipal institutions (formal and informal) that organize activities for both urban and rural people
 - Health, Education, Welfare to Scouts, Religions, Families – where policies developed in and for one context are applied to another context
- (S) The third area is the environment
 - Over the past 50 years we have learned a great deal about the interdependence of all regions with respect to the environment – including the total earth
 - It can also be seen dramatically on a regional scale
 - The environmental footprint for Toronto is 280 times its formal size (about 1/3 the size of Ontario)
 - The footprint is largely on rural areas (food, water, pollution processing, waste management)
- (S) The final area is with respect to identity
 - This refers to both personal and collective forms of identity
 - The social sciences have highlighted the importance of identity and its intimate connection to the social groups in which we operate
 - From the family and community to ethnic and cultural groups
 - In our preoccupation with individual freedom and personal choice we often disregard these attachments as quaint traditions or obstacles to development
 - But they keep coming back to haunt us – in the form of
 - Social strife and suicide when we attempt to remove or undermine the bases for identity – as we did with Aboriginal Peoples or community relocation in Canada
 - Or in the form of civil unrest and war in its most extreme forms
 - The same conditions and dynamics lie at the basis of attachment to place, commitment to community or region, and social cohesion that frustrate the more extreme advocates of free market economies, but in fact, serve as a critical basis for economic development
 - The advertising industry is aware of the power of identity and uses it to generate an \$8 billion industry (Industry Canada, 2004)
 - We need to recognize and work with this power in our exploration of new forms of rural-urban collaboration



- It important to consider all 4 aspects of interdependence when we explore ways to maximize our opportunities for economic, social, and environmental viability
- We tend to focus on trade and exchange over the others
- If we consider trade and exchanges alone we would bring our institutions in line with the flow of goods and services, commuting patterns, and our urban settlement regions – recognizing the value of agglomeration economies and reducing transaction costs through infrastructure
- This implies that we should also reorganize our education, health, and social service institutions – as they respond to the urbanization of our population and the search for critical mass
- However, such an approach runs the risk of
 - (S) Poor watershed management as smaller places are stressed (e.g. Walkerton)
 - Walkerton is a good example since it demonstrates how the removal of support services by urban-centric governance, jeopardizes the ability of smaller communities to provide safe water and how stresses on our agriculture producers increases the risk to settlements at a great distance from those producers.
 - Limiting our understanding of interdependence to exchange and trade also undermines the heritage of smaller places and the local and regional identities they have sustained
 - (S) New York faced this problem and established a formal agreement with communities in the Catskill Mountains (from where they received their water)
 - The agreement provides community development funds and services in exchange for water protection via sewage and stewardship management
 - (S) Edmonton and the Northern Hub Alliance is a local initiative that recognizes the value of rural communities and particularly their cultural heritage to the health of the city – and reorganizes the governance to take advantage of the opportunities
 - The Japanese government recognizes this interdependence by a tax on water that goes to rural development and the French government supports similar development via a tax on food
 - (S) In Québec the full range of interdependence is recognized via their 'rural pact' – a key element of rural policy
 - This reaffirms the value of local initiatives and provides several venues for managing the inevitable challenges that they create
 - 17 administrative regions, 88 county-level councils, and 21 regional roundtables of elected officials
 - Context for raising issues and finding common interests
 - Long term view – to learn how to collaborate
 - Support and adequate resources over that period – not impatient – tolerating numerous failures in the process of learning
- There is an important lesson here for planning policies and programs that recognize the multiple ways in which rural and urban people and groups are interdependent

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Lessons

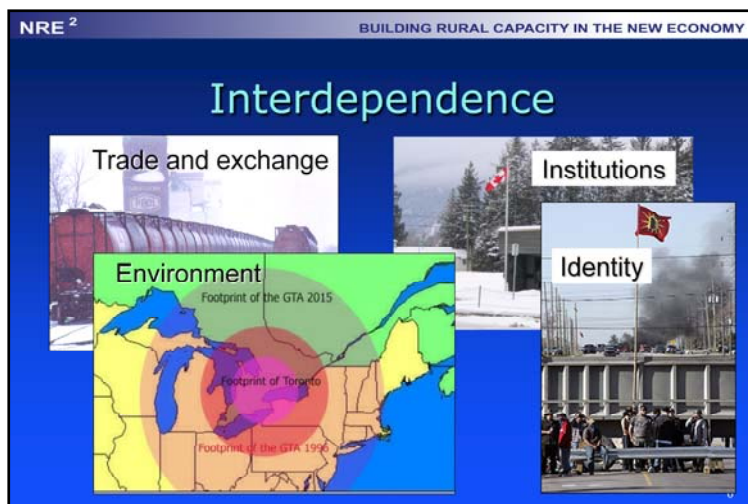
- Interdependence is complex
- Strong identity an asset
- Environment connects
- Collaboration requires
 - A venue
 - Time
 - Learning





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- Lessons learned
- (S) Rural-urban interdependence operates in multiple ways – often conflicting and complex
 - The movement of urban people and institutions into rural areas bring with them interests and values that diverge from those of the traditional rural populations
 - Rural municipalities often strain under the demands of new residents that demand urban-style services and rural-style taxation
 - Seguin faced this challenge by including seasonal residents on their municipal council and committees
 - They discovered that these people not only brought very useful organizational skills and networks to meet the challenges they face, but that by encouraging the newcomers to share in managing those challenges, they received much less resistance to tax increases where it was felt necessary
- (S) Strong local identity can contribute to revitalization and innovation that contributes to both rural and urban conditions
 - The Carcross/Tagish First Nation decided to develop their family policy based on their own identity and heritage rather than adopting non-Aboriginal style policy
 - They started with their stories and legends, identifying the central themes from them – then used these themes as the basis for constructing policy principles which were appropriate for the language of Yukon and Federal policy-makers
 - The key to making it work was the recognition of the deep roots of their traditional understanding of the world and their willingness to move from this basis to the language of others
- (S) Environmental interdependence can act as a powerful motivation for rural-urban collaboration
 - In response to the decline of the salmon-fishing industry in the Miramichi, groups of salmon fishers, the forest industries, farmers, environmentalists, municipal leaders, and cities along the river formed a watershed committee to address the many issues affecting the health of the watershed
 - This watershed cut across many of the traditional boundaries established by trade, institutions, government, and local identities – forcing the creation of a new institution to address those challenges
- (S) Common to all of these lessons is the importance of a venue where these different interests can be articulated, discussed, debated, and decisions can be made
 - There is a critical role for governments in this process
 - They need to create the venues, provide the skills and resources that sustain people meeting in spite of conflicts, failures, and complexity, and legitimize new forms of accountability and fairness that are sensitive to local conditions.
 - (S) Québec has shown considerable leadership in this regard – establishing regional councils where municipal leaders have learned how to articulate and debate their interests, and by providing the long-term structures that mean people can make compromises in order to come to decisions. Given their 15-year experience in this regard, they are now showing impressive results in the form of rural-urban collaboration, wholistic approaches to economic development and education, health, and service delivery, and significant examples of locally-generated innovations.



- Rural and urban areas are indeed interdependent
- We need to learn about this interdependence in all its complexity
 - Through trade and exchange
 - Institutions
 - Environment, and
 - Identity
- And we need to experiment with new ways of reorganizing our governance to reflect what we have learned
- This will require considerable risk and tolerance on all our parts (researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and citizens)
 - But the prize is worth the struggle.
- It will help us create:
 - New forms of governance that are up to the challenge of rapid change, differing interests, and divergent skills and experiences
 - Forms of governance that will serve to build build strong economies, vital communities, engaged citizens, and sustainable environments.

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