

INTRODUCTION

Changing the narrative: Rural as resilient and sustainable

Ryan Gibson and Laurie Brinklow

... rural school closures are “ripping the heart out of the community”...

— CBC 2017

... far-flung rural communities dragging down the Newfoundland economy...

— CBC 2016

... rural revitalization programs a waste...

— CBC 2001

Pick up a newspaper or listen to a broadcast anywhere and rural stories will likely be of economic demises, school closures, depopulation, or decreased service provisions. These narratives paint rural as unsustainable, precarious, and seeking a saviour. This narrative is pervasive and detrimental. This narrative is not representative of all rural areas and ignores the narratives of resilience, accomplishments, and adversity of rural communities. A change in narrative around rural development is long overdue.

Throughout Canada and internationally, rural leaders are designing, implementing, and benefiting from resilient and sustainable initiatives. These initiatives are emerging from local leadership, local assets, and creative thinking. This is not to ignore that rural communities are in a period of transition and turbulence. The new rural reality is fueled by factors of globalization, technological advancements, and urban-focused initiatives (Dickens 2010; Reimer and Markey 2014).

Connection to high-speed Internet is fundamental to participating in the global economy. Likewise, competition in today's economy is no longer with your neighbouring communities. Rather, rural communities are competing with communities around the world for economic development opportunities. Rural communities are also addressing issues of outmigration of young people and skilled labour (Corbett 2005; MacDonald et al. 2013), economic restructuring (Halseth et al. 2010; Halseth and Ryser 2006), and maintaining service delivery (Gibson et al. 2017). As rural communities adjust to this new reality it is not all doom and gloom. Rural areas are making economic contributions to their provinces and the country. The rural contributions to Canada's gross domestic product are approximately equal to the proportion of Canadians living in rural areas (Bollman 2013). Rural communities are home to a strong sense of place and identity (Daniels et al., 2015; Turcotte 2005) and rural communities have turned to entrepreneurial, innovative, and creative solutions to address these new realities (CRRF 2015).

From Black Horses to White Steeds: Building Community Resilience highlights narratives of rural communities exhibiting their resilience as they encounter these new realities. As Maura Walsh eloquently challenged: why must rural settle for jam and cheese jobs? Why can't rural communities compete for high-tech businesses and compete on the international scale? Settling for "easy" solutions does not facilitate rural resilience. The chapters of this book offer a different narrative from that of the newspapers: a narrative focused on the strength of local initiatives, the impacts of collective power, and re-envisioning local assets. The resilience exhibited in these rural communities emerges from innovative strategies of governance, partnerships, resources, and assets. This book explores how various "dark horses" in the broad North Atlantic and Canadian context—including minorities, small towns, peripheries, Aboriginal communities, those with little money, status, voice, or political leverage—can rise to the occasion and chart livable futures.

THIS VOLUME AND CONTEXT

This volume emerged from the "Building Community Resilience: Innovation, Culture and Governance in Place" conference held in

Summerside, Prince Edward Island, in 2015 (www.pei2015.crrf.ca). The conference was co-hosted by the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, a charitable institution devoted to bettering the lives of rural Canadians, and the North Atlantic Forum, a network that focuses on sustainability and resilience of coastal communities around the North Atlantic. Over 150 community and indigenous leaders, non-profit organizations, policy-makers, students, and researchers gathered from across Canada and around the world. The conference served as a platform for the critical and interdisciplinary discussion of experiences where those living in rural, however defined, show unexpected ingenuity and mettle; and respond cleverly to dire economic straits or public policy negligence. This volume represents an opportunity to enhance the reach of information shared at the conference.

From Black Horses to White Steeds: Building Community Resilience builds on two previous contributions: *Remote Control: Governance Lessons for and from Small, Insular, and Remote Regions* (Baldacchino, Greenwood, and Felt 2009) and *Place Peripheral: Place-Based Development in Rural, Island, and Remote Regions* (Vodden, Gibson, and Baldacchino 2015). These volumes each highlighted the need to shift power and governance to the local level, build local capacities, and engage all levels of community and governments. This book presents 14 narratives of rural communities creating avenues to foster livelihoods and communities, making innovative engagements and governance strategies, and building futures through collective stewardship.

The book is organized in three sections, each providing illustrations of rural communities striving for or achieving local sustainable development. Each of the chapters provides implications for rural development, public policy, and research. Each section is introduced with a chapter that embodied the conference message: one telling the story of turning around a small community in Ireland; one detailing the evolution of a former Canadian Forces Base into a driver for the aerospace sector; and one showing a vision for future rural as depopulated peripheral areas of Germany become vibrant once more.

Before exploring the avenues, steps, and futures of building community resilience David Douglas provides a foundational retrospective on rural resilience in the Canadian context. His chapter provides discussion of what is meant by resilience and how it manifests itself in

rural communities. Douglas critically examines resilience from the perspectives of local practice, public policy, and research. In describing the past experiences in rural resilience Douglas provides a “call to arms”: resilience needs to be developed to fit place—a theme that echoes through each of the *From Black Horses to White Steeds* chapters.

PART 1: Avenues to fostering livelihoods and communities sets the tone for the two thematic sections that follow, by bringing together four perspectives that represent the “global to local” scale of the issues involved in community development. Maura Walsh in Chapter 1 shares a story of rural resilience from the Irish context, providing inspiration for rural development in all jurisdictions. Throughout the many ebbs and flows in development policy in Ireland, rural communities have found platforms to advance local prosperity. Using the LEADER methodology for the past two decades, community groups like IRD Duhallow have achieved tremendous economic and social successes for their residents. In spite of these achievements, rural development organizations in Ireland are increasingly being subjected to new government policies that hinder their ability to continue to achieve success. The IRD Duhallow story demonstrates the commitment of rural leadership to champion area-based, collaborative, and inclusive rural development.

In Chapter 2, Andrew Jennings moves our attention from south-western Ireland to the Scottish Islands. Jennings examines the unexpected consequences for three island communities of the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum. While the rest of Scotland was debating whether to remain in the United Kingdom, the three island councils of Shetland, Orkney, and Outer Hebrides took the opportunity to develop a campaign seeking greater power and recognition from the United Kingdom. The chapter examines how the three island councils developed the campaign, documents their demands, and reports on the outcomes. Jennings shares whether this opportunistic strategy created an avenue for enhanced livelihood for these three Scottish islands.

Brian Beaton, Franz Seibel, and Lyle Thomas explore how information and communication technology adoption can create resilience among rural and remote First Nations. Chapter 3 explores how Canada’s First Nation leaders have adopted digital approaches to enhance livelihoods. These initiatives have included online platforms to

facilitate health, learning, business, and networking. Owning, controlling, and managing this digital infrastructure is described by Beaton, Seibel, and Thomas as a critical component to community resilience. The chapter shares evidence of how local broadband infrastructure is supporting community resilience through social and economic developments.

Chapter 4 investigates the role of recreation and sport as agents to foster livelihoods and communities. Kyle Rich, Laura Misener, and the Trout Creek Community Centre Board share the case of Trout Creek, a rural community in Ontario experiencing changes as a result of municipal amalgamation, highway diversions, and loss of its local school. Rich et al. describe how a community recreation centre can create a sense of community and facilitate collective action with local residents. The discussions of the chapter explore how the lessons of Trout Creek could be adopted by other rural communities.

Income is a critical component of health and well-being. In Chapter 5, Virginia McGowan and Hannah Bell demonstrate how empowering and mentoring women entrepreneurs lead to enhanced rural resilience. Through an examination of women entrepreneurs in Prince Edward Island, McGowan and Bell advance our understanding of the needs of women wishing to start and expand existing businesses. A key component emerging from their study is the need for mentoring women entrepreneurs. The chapter explores a particular mentoring model that meets the needs of PEI women entrepreneurs, which in turn enhances resilience.

PART 2: Steps in innovative engagement and governance highlights processes and methods that are proving useful to resolve challenges faced by small communities in Canada which are working towards achieving a higher quality of life for residents within a global economic context. In Chapter 6, Shawn McCarvill describes how Summerside created an innovative strategy for dealing with the closure of Canadian Forces Base Summerside. In 1989, the Government of Canada announced the closure of the military base. In the face of losing a major employer, the community came together to develop an innovative strategy. Slemon Park Corporation, established to manage the former military base, developed an aerospace and aerospace training cluster of businesses at the base and converted former residential

infrastructure into affordable housing. The Slemon Park story shows how local innovation can be used to successfully develop and implement development strategies.

The ability of coastal communities to adapt to changing climate is a fundamental reality. In Chapter 7, Carolyn Peach Brown, Randy Angus, Derek Armitage, Shandel Brown, Anthony Charles, Luna Khirfan, and Joshua MacFadyen explore how three coastal communities in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia have adapted to climate change. The research emphasizes sense of place, the connection of people to place, and the place-specific governance approaches in addressing climate change.

In Chapter 8, Kimberley Kennedy describes an Alberta community college's recent approach towards youth engagement in local capacity building. The chapter examines a recent study of community-engaged, project-based learning among college students. Students indicated a preference for project-based learning opportunities. The research demonstrates the importance of innovative strategies for engaging college learners, community organizations, and instructors to enhance capacity building.

Peter Clancy and Mario Levesque explore environmental governance in one of Canada's major river systems in Chapter 9. The Gulf of St. Lawrence is a rich ecosystem with multiple governing authorities. Governance of the Gulf of St. Lawrence has historically been driven by physical sciences, with Clancy and Levesque arguing a social science perspective is long overdue. The chapter provides a framework for how to manage political priorities, environmental conservation, and resource appropriation in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

PART 3: Futures through stewardship and ownership, as the final thematic section, profiles big changes in small places that serve to remind one that sustained effort is often the constant involved in delivering long-term community benefits, regardless of scale and geography. In Chapter 10, Peter Dehne describes a back-to-the-land movement in rural Germany that is building new futures. Through this movement, rural communities that had traditionally been demographically and economically stagnant are witnessing new arrivals. The movement strives for small-scale stabilization.

Emily Thomas explores innovative fishery responses by six

communities in Maine and Newfoundland. Although with different fishery dynamics in both jurisdictions, communities have enacted innovations to facilitate small-scale fisheries and allow communities to remain in place. Chapter 11 discusses these innovation strategies, which in turn are building resilient communities. Thomas states that without a strong fishery in each community, the long-term future of each would be in jeopardy.

In Chapter 12, Angela Pollak explores how rural communities could overcome seasonality of traditional tourism by creating new futures using “idea” tourism. The chapter outlines how communities could build tourism products and experiences based on the human and social capital contained within a community. Pollak provides illustrations of current idea tourism to reinforce the opportunity. These human and social capitals could be used to expand the traditional tourism season, providing increased opportunities for rural communities.

Paul Kraehling examines how Green Infrastructure can serve as a foundation for building resilient rural communities. Green Infrastructure planning integrates natural elements, built elements, and human settlements. Chapter 13 provides illustrations of how rural communities have used Green Infrastructure to achieve long-term sustainability goals.

In the final chapter, Brendan O’Keeffe explores the vibrancy of rural communities in Ireland. The chapter outlines how community and voluntary organizations in South Kerry are contributing to the health, well-being, and vibrancy of the region. At the same time, these organizations are confronted with a series of challenges that threaten their ability to continue their work on a long-term basis. From this research emerge a series of recommendations on maintaining and enhancing rural vibrancy.

CONCLUSION

The authors of this book provide an alternative narrative of rural communities building local and regional resilience. These stories hold significant implications for community development practice and public policy. At the local level, *From Black Horses to White Steeds* contains a message that local actors need to be bold and think outside the box—achieving resilience is not accomplished overnight. Persistence and

patience are required to build resilient initiatives. This may require re-envisioning local assets as the case of a former military base or empowering community members through entrepreneurship. For policy-makers, this book offers recommendations of how governments can support and facilitate resilience. There is a need to ensure future government policies and program implementations reflect the new realities of rural communities. This often requires new forms of governance in working with communities as partners. *From Black Horses to White Steeds* also offers the recommendation that place matters and place-based strategies are required to build resilient rural regions. Place-based strategies need to ensure plans and processes are grounded in local capacity and local actors (Baldacchino et al. 2009; Vodden et al. 2015).

The chapters herein offer an alternative narrative on the future of rural regions across Canada and internationally. This is a narrative of optimism, sustainability, and a bright future. This narrative is rooted in long-term relationships, capacity-building, new forms of governance, innovative thinking, and place-based development strategies. This narrative is transferable and holds significant implications at all levels, from local to global. This book does not offer a “recipe” for rural resilience. Rather, the contributors have provided illustrations of how this has been achieved in other rural communities. The stories of this book dismiss the old adage of rural as a drain on the national economy and as areas of demise. *From Black Horses to White Steeds: Building Community Resilience* offers a new narrative for the future of rural communities.