

Understanding Social Cohesion:
its nature and manifestations in
Rural Canada

Bill Reimer and Derek Wilkinson
reimer@vax2.concordia.ca
03/07/27
www.crrf.ca
nre.concordia.ca



The slide features four logos at the bottom: CRRF (Canadian Rural Research Forum), CJ Project (a logo with a green tree and the Chinese characters '加' and '加'), SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada), and NRE (National Rural Education Association).

Social Cohesion in Rural Canada: Implications for Policy

- Thanks for invitation
- Collaboration between researchers and policy-makers critical
 - Provide up-to-date insights and research results to people making policy
 - Provide reality-checks for researchers
- Thanks to supporters for our work
 - Rural Secretariat
 - Co-operatives Secretariat
 - Social Cohesion Network of Heritage Canada (Policy Research Initiative)
 - SSHRC – Strategic Grant on Social Cohesion
 - CRRF
 - Rural people

Understanding Social Cohesion

- Conceptualization
 - Social Cohesion is part of rural revitalization
 - Multiple bases for social cohesion
- Measurement
 - Perception and behavioural-based measures only weakly related
- Results and Implications
 - Social cohesion not always under local control
 - Social cohesion effects often conditional
 - Strategic options for communities and households

Social Cohesion is a complex concept

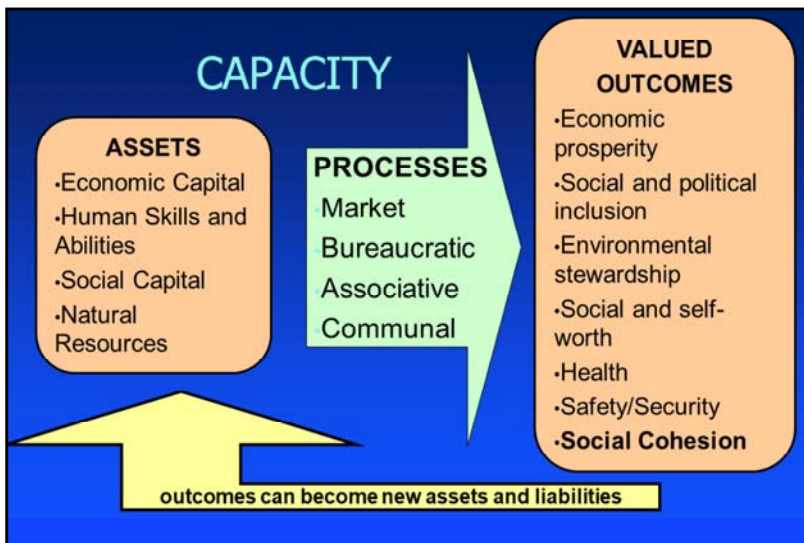
- Perception vs. behaviour
- Multiple levels – local, regional, national, global
- Value-laden
- 4 types – linked to Social Capital, Capacity
- Multiple policy implications

CRRF/NRE Approach: Rural Revitalization

SoCo – the concept

- Complex concept
 - (S) Some focus on perception, some on behaviour
 - (S) Different meanings for different levels
 - (S) How much does one include the values in the definition?
 - E.g. ‘a community of shared values... based on a sense of hope, trust, and reciprocity’ (Jeannotte, 1997: Canadian Heritage, Strategic Research and Analysis)
 - (S) We have found it useful to differentiate by the nature of the social relations on which SoCo is based (4 types)
 - Linked directly to other key concepts: Social Capital, Capacity
 - (S) important because of the many policy implications
- (S) Our approach – consider it from the point of view of rural revitalization
- Add to it – your concern with policy

- [Story
 - At workshop organized by SSHRC for all of the research teams investigating SoCo
 - Asked to write a definition of SoCo
 - One group insisted on including a blank piece of paper
 - Received the most votes]



(Re)vitalization occurs when capital and resources are (re)organized to produce desired outcomes. The ability of rural communities to do this in an appropriate and successful fashion is what we refer to as the community's capacity.

- Social cohesion is an outcome and an asset

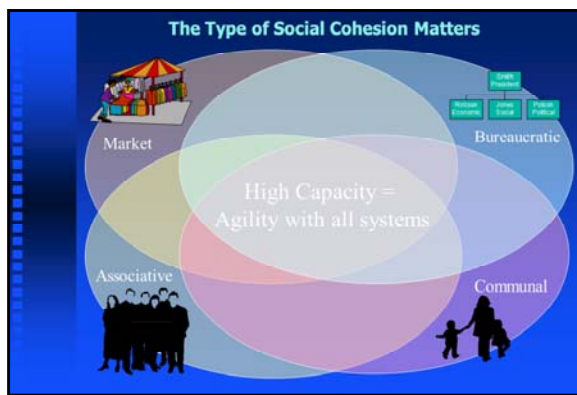
Social Cohesion

The extent to which people respond collectively to achieve their valued outcomes

- SoCo is acting together
- SoCo is temporal – specific to activities
- SoCo scales – specific to groups
- SoCo requires evaluation – may be positive for some, negative for others

(S) Social Cohesion: The extent to which people respond collectively to achieve their valued outcomes

- (S) SoCo is people acting together
 - Focus on behaviour, not belief
 - We have found that there is only a low level of correlation between the 2
- (S) SoCo is temporal – specific to activities
 - Community may be fragmented around where to put the garbage dump, or whether to build a new arena, but cohesive with respect to fighting a fire.
- (S) SoCo scales – specific to groups
 - Community may be divided into 2 or more cohesive groups – producing a lack of cohesion for the community in general
- (S) SoCo requires evaluation – may be positive for some, negative for others
 - Cohesion of biker gangs may be negative for the rest of society
 - Not equated with conformity or homogeneity
- Using this point of view, we have asked how the changes in rural Canada have affected the level and type of social cohesion
- Approached this question using a framework that has been developed over several years of our research (see following slide)



- This insight arises from our recognition that social cohesion is based in social relations (bring people together. It's what we mean by cohesion (the glue that binds)).
- Social relations are organized in different ways
 - Expectations, norms, institutions, rights, obligations are all different and integrated
- Each is supported and enforceable by socially recognized institutions (norms, entitlements, laws)
 - (S) Market relations (e.g. commerce, labour markets, housing markets, trade)
 - Based on supply & demand, contracts
 - Supported and controlled by trade agreements, competition legislation, labour law, better business bureau, and the courts
 - (S) Bureaucratic relations (e.g. government, corporations, law, formal organizations)
 - Based on rationalized roles, authority and status, generalized principles
 - Controlled by legislation, corporate law
 - (S) Associative relations (e.g. baseball, bridge clubs, environmental groups, meals on wheels)
 - Based on shared interest
 - Controlled by civil law, municipal by-laws, social norms, and informal sanctions
 - (S) Communal relations (e.g. families, friendship networks, gangs, cultural groups)
 - Based on family, reciprocity, favours
 - Controlled by informal norms, legislation, family law, and government support agencies
- The systems by which they are organized can reinforce or conflict with one another.
 - Conflict: Associative and Bureaucratic relations:
 - Bureaucratic require competition for resources and accountability in their use.
 - Associative require commitment to the shared interests of the group
 - Partnerships between bureaucracies and volunteer groups are therefore problematic
 - Bureaucracies divert people from the shared interests and
 - Associative suffer stress from lack of finances and membership burnout
 - Complement: Several of our research sites relied primarily on associative relations in the face of school closings. In some, the citizens learned how to articulate, lobby their case on the basis of bureaucratically recognized principles, and got their school back. Social cohesion based on associative relations were used to build capacity in bureaucratic ones.
 - the Hutterite community next door to one of them uses communal relations intensively (family supported by religious belief) and combines them with bureaucratic relations (again legitimized by religion) to successfully compete using market relations (have even been able to expand while others fail).
 - In this case, the three systems reinforce one another
- Primary thing to note: (S) All forms are necessary in a complex, changing environment - The more agile a group is in being able to use all systems, the greater will be their capacity - especially under conditions of change. Each of them forms the basis for people working together – for social cohesion.

Measuring Social Cohesion

Perception-based

- Subsets of Buckner scale
- Cohesion, commitment, attractiveness, neighbourliness
- "I feel like I belong in my community"
- "I believe my neighbours would help me in an emergency"

Behaviour-based

- Household-level information
- Use of market, bureaucratic, associative, communal relations
- Within 30 minutes where appropriate

Perception vs. Behaviour-based Indicators

	Market	Bureau	Assoc.	Comnl	Total
Community Cohesion	.10	.11	.25	.18	.24
Psychol. Cohesion	.09	.12	.25	.17	.24
Attract-iveness			.14	.08	.09
Neighbour-liness	.13	.08	.15	.20	.21

All correlations significant at .01 level (2-tailed) NRE HH survey, 1995 respondents

- Overall relationships low: cf. Total column, .24 maximum
- Variation by type of SoCo (Behaviour)
- Perception-based narrow?
- Perception more sensitive to identity?
- Perception less sensitive to incidents?

	Market	Bureau.	Assoc.	Comm.	Variety
Global Economy	High	High		High	
Stable Economy	Low		Low	Low	Low
Metro Adjacency			Not Adjac.		
Capacity	Low			Low	Low

SoCo is not necessarily under control of local people

•Variations in social cohesion are often due to factors beyond the control of local people

- Exposure to the global economy
- Stability of the economy
- Adjacency to metro centres
- Institutional capacity

•Effects vary by the type of social relations involved.

•This does not mean that local people have no influence at all, however.

Conditions for use of social cohesion (Conditions -> SoCo)

•Social cohesion does not occur in a vacuum.

•Examined some of the external conditions where we found high levels of social cohesion

- Social Cohesion based on all types of social relations

•Most of them were linked to conditions which are largely beyond the control of local communities

- (S) Global or local economies: Global markets -> higher levels of market-based SoCo

- Does this mean that as rural areas become more involved in the Global economy, we will see the increased importance of Market-based relations for social cohesion (people working together)? And lower use of bureaucratic, associative, and communal?

- (S) Stable or fluctuating economies: Stable -> higher levels of communal-based SoCo, lower levels of bureaucratic-based SoCo

- (S) Metro adjacency: Adjacent -> higher levels of communal-based, but lower levels of market-based and associative-based SoCo

- (S) Institutional Capacity (schools and hospitals): (provincial and federal jurisdictions) more capacity -> lower levels of all but associative-based SoCo

- Reflects other findings regarding social capital: The availability and use of social capital are not strongly related

•NOTE: Bureaucratic-based social cohesion:

- Local economies
- Fluctuating economies
- Low Institutional capacity
- Do bureaucracies serve remedial roles – provide a safety-net for vulnerable sites?

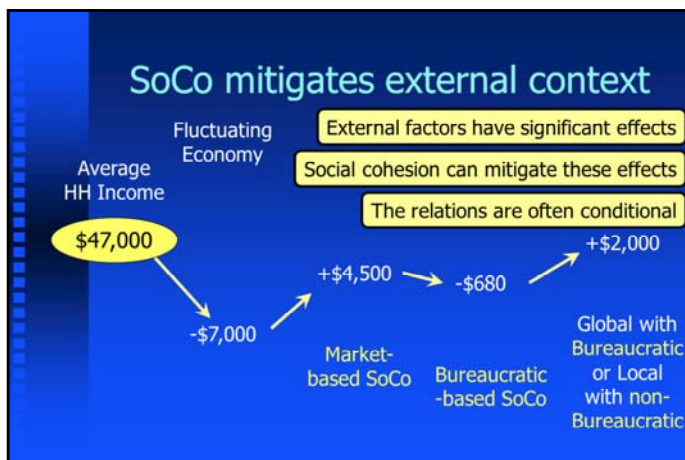
•Two main points:

- We shouldn't treat social cohesion as a single phenomenon – it has roots in a variety of social relations

- The type of 'glue' that binds people in rural areas varies by characteristics that are beyond their control

- Often the result of more general policies and programs

•Regression analysis (pscoh30) (1995 HHs)

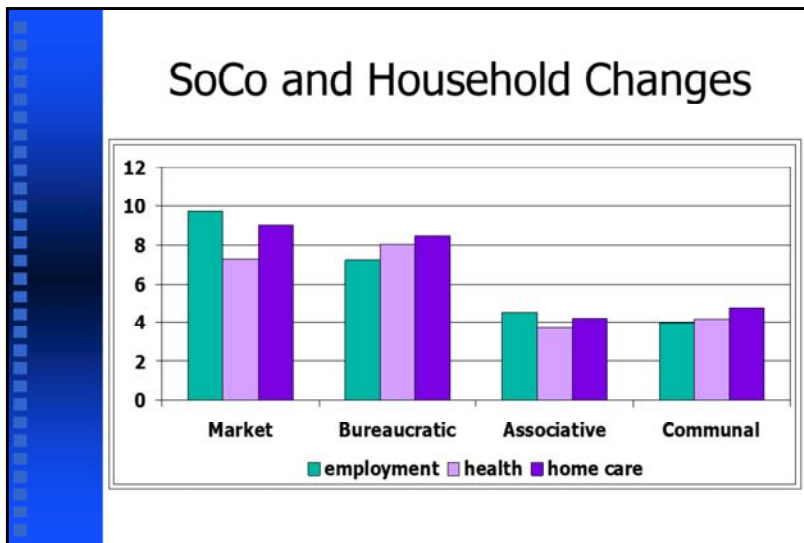


SoCo -> Income

- One of the major advantages of a systematic study such as the NRE
 - Allows us to estimate interactions among variables: Relative, Additive, Conditional effects
- What happens to a rural community that faces a fluctuating economy?
- (S) Focus on household income for simplicity
- Multiple regression analysis
- (S) If household is located in a site with a fluctuating economy -> Decrease of \$7,000
- (S) If they rely on market-based social cohesion -> Increase of \$4,500
- (S) If they rely on bureaucratic-based social cohesion -> Decrease of \$700
- (S) However: important interaction effect between Globalization and reliance on bureaucratic-based SoCo
 - Bureaucratic-based in Global or Non-bureaucratic-based in Local economy: higher incomes (+\$2000)
 - Bureaucratic-based in Local economies or Non-bureaucratic based in Global: lower incomes (-\$2000)
 - Perhaps:
 - In Global economies -> best strategy is to build bureaucratic-based social cohesion
 - In Local economies -> best strategy is to build other types of social capital
- Summary
 - (S) Many factors beyond the control of local people: Global, Fluctuating, Location
 - (S) Still some ways in which local action can mitigate those exogenous factors
 - (S) Beware of generally applied policies – many conditional effects
- Included education in the equation:
 - Not as large an impact (standard error) as Market-based SoCo
 - Not as large an impact as Stability in the economy
 - Increased income by about \$3200

• R² Adjusted = .281

Constant	\$10,346		Associative	\$573	.077
Market	\$445	.517	Bureaucratic	-\$680	-.074
Stability	\$7167	.129	Cap x Ause30	-\$876	-.059
Communal	-\$1097	-.110	High Cap	\$2667	.051
Glo x Buse30	\$1917	.105	Stb x Cuse30	-\$868	-.042



- Major Changes and Social Cohesion
- This examines the type of responses that people made to the major changes occurring in their households.
- Three types of major changes have been selected:
 - Employment
 - Health
 - Home Care
- What types of social cohesion were utilized in response to these changes?
- (S) Employment: Market, then Bureaucratic, then Associative and Communal
- (S) Health: Bureaucratic, then Market, Communal, and Associative
- (S) Home care: Market, then Bureaucratic, then Communal, and Associative
- Main point: Services and supports for social cohesion need to recognize the different types of networks and social relations called upon.
- Research: Are they called upon simply because these are the supports available?
 - We have found only a weak relationship between the availability of social capital and its use.
 - Important questions for service delivery

Understanding Social Cohesion

- Conceptualization
 - Social Cohesion is part of rural revitalization
 - Multiple bases for social cohesion
- Measurement
 - Perception and behavioural-based measures only weakly related
- Results and Implications
 - Social cohesion not always under local control
 - Social cohesion effects often conditional
 - Strategic options for communities and households

Social Cohesion in Rural Canada

A Project of the Canadian Rural
Revitalization Foundation

www.crrf.ca

nre.concordia.ca

03/07/27

Become a
member
today!

