

Measuring Canadian Rural
Diversity and Social Capital

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Bill Reimer (10/31/2021)1

- Acknowledgements:
 - US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service
 - The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation
 - The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
 - Colleagues in the New Rural Economy Project

- Thanks for invitation
- Daunting to be billed as representative of Canadian position on the issue of diversity since we have as many approaches to the issue as you do
- Therefore, I will focus on what I know best
 - What we have done
 - What it implies for the general problem of measuring rural diversity
- Will provide an overview only
- Details can be found in my paper published in *Regional Studies* (November issue)

Typologies, Indicators, and Units of Analysis

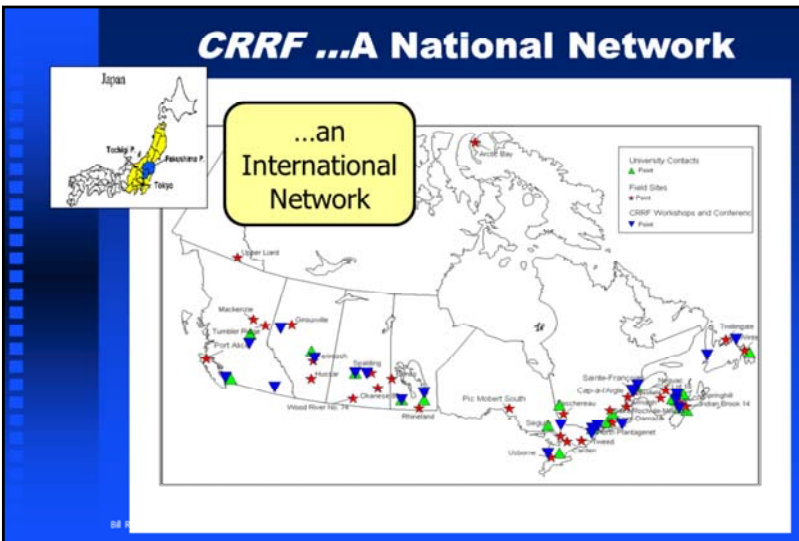
- Imply specific perspectives
- Serve particular interests over others



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Typologies, Indicators, and Units of Analysis

- (A) Typologies and indicators are highly selective windows on the world.
 - I would like to add our 'units of analysis' to this list as well
- This is an elementary observation, but it can easily be forgotten as we seek to refine the indicators we count on and develop more sensitive measures for the concepts we feel are important
- Like paradigms, they can lead us astray by making important things invisible even as they reveal critical aspects of the world
- This process is compounded when the typologies, indicators, and units of analysis get institutionalized
 - (A) Vested interests get attached to particular typologies and they tend to resist change even in the face of new conditions
- I have interpreted this conference to be inspired by a recognition of this process and a request for us to pause with the elaboration of details and consider whether we might be blinded by the old frameworks.
 - It asks us to consider how these frameworks might make us insensitive to new conditions and thereby miss some of the most important processes.
 - It should also cause us to ask "Whose interests are served by a particular typology, and who stands to lose by it?"
 - This latter question reflects by sociological bias:
 - Where words, classifications, and typologies are are treated as part of the way we construct social reality
 - They are often contested spheres where the claim of 'objectivity' is only one rhetorical strategy to protect and advance particular interests. (e.g. in USA 'rural' and 'poverty' have implications for funding)
- I will try to take up this challenge by focusing on two things:
 - How have we in CRRF attempted to deal with the challenge of representing diversity in the changing conditions of rural Canada? And
 - What are some of the insights we have gained in our research that suggest more appropriate frameworks for the new rural economy?



- When referring to “we”, I am referring to those of us in the **Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation**
- This is a network of rural researchers, policy-makers, and rural citizens who have been collaborating over the last 15 years around our common interest in rural issues.
- This has taken the form of annual workshops and conferences
- In 1997 we initiated a 5-year project entitled *Understanding the New Rural Economy: Options and Choices (NRE)*
 - It is a project that includes
 - Data collection and analysis at macro, meso, and micro levels
 - Integration of rural people into the research process
 - Establishment of a research infrastructure across the country
 - (A) It also includes collaboration with a number of international partners
 - The most formal is with colleagues in Japan (have adopted our framework)
 - Provides useful comparison of administrative regimes.
- It is this project that forms the basis for the results and insights I will outline today

Four Rural Challenges



- Commodity trade competition
- Economic uncertainty
- Metropolitan dominance
- Institutional reorganization

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Four Rural Challenges

- As stated in our name, our central concern is 'rural revitalization'
 - This emerged from our perspective that rural people face significant challenges that have devitalized their economic and social conditions – especially at a local level.
 - We were also aware that there was considerable diversity within rural Canada regarding the impacts and responses to those challenges
 - We felt this diversity was an indication of considerable capacity and many options available to rural people
 - What was needed was high quality research and collaboration.
- Our analysis at that time identified four important challenges to rural Canada
 - (A) Trade** – especially the increase in global competition within the commodity trade that has traditionally been part of the Canadian economy
 - Trade in fish, timber, agricultural products, minerals, and oil continues to be a key element of the Canadian economy
 - All of these resource-based industries are labour-shedding, however, creating a population crisis for many remote locations.
 - (A) Economic fluctuation** and de-stabilization have been particularly difficult for smaller centres to deal with, since their relatively specialized and small economies make them vulnerable to dramatic changes when one industry faces a crisis.
 - (A) The growing influence of metropolitan regions** – through labour force, political, and cultural hegemony.
 - This is reflected in migration, changing commuting patterns, homogeneity of mass culture, and growing urban political representation.
 - (A) The reorganization (restructuring) of basic institutional structures** in Canadian society – especially those relating to the state such as health, welfare, and education
 - This is seen in the withdrawal of state services, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the undermining of the traditional institutional bases of rural places (voluntary groups and family).
- We were also struck by the increasing **complexity** of the rural economy, society, and political spheres.
 - All of the pressures above interacted to make the traditional modes of operating less reliable and the future look more unpredictable and risky.
- Our research approach was therefore rooted in all these insights.

			High Capacity		Low Capacity	
			Lead	Lag	Lead	Lag
Global Exposed	Fluctuating	Adjac.	175	27	46	15
		Distant	251	13	124	44
	Stable	Adjac.	4	26	8	19
		Distant	5	16	18	30
Local Exposed	Fluctuating	Adjac.	4	5	4	9
		Distant	12	16	5	13
	Stable	Adjac.	12	100	7	45
		Distant	15	99	16	56

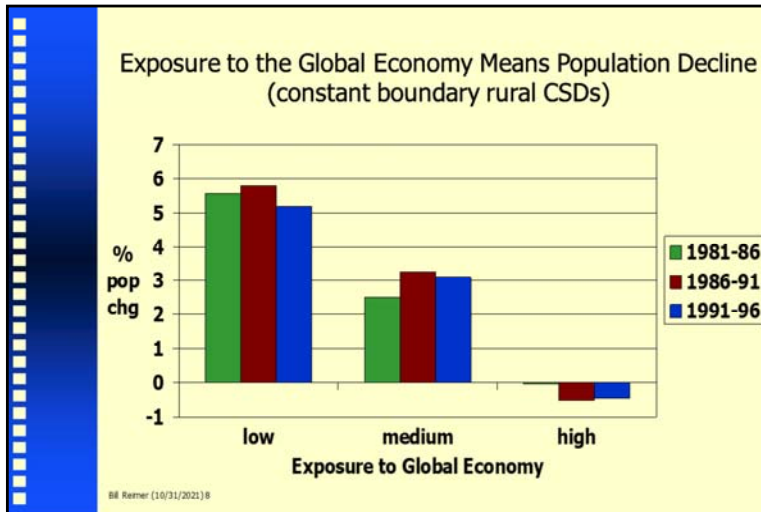
The NRE Sample Frame

- Using the basic tools of social science research, we chose to construct a framework that would allow us to make comparisons among rural locations with respect to these 4 challenges:
 - (A) Those that were integrated into the global economy compared to those that were predominantly local
 - (A) Those where the economy fluctuated compared to those where the economy was relatively stable (A)
 - (A) Those that were adjacent to major urban centres compared to those that were distant from them (A)
 - (A) Those that had a high level of institutional capacity compared to those that had only a low level.
- By selecting examples from each of these types, we would be able to examine not only the effects of each dimension alone, but some of their interactions as well.
- Our research was also rooted in the more political agenda that I mentioned before.
 - Taxonomies serve particular interests
- In this case (as so often), it was driven by our need for funding.
- Our funders tended to be interested in a rather narrow economic view of rural issues – and this was primarily expressed in their question “Why do some rural areas seem to do well in economic terms while others do not?”
 - OECD preoccupation at the time with a comparison between ‘leading’ and ‘lagging’ regions.
 - Interpreted from an economic point of view.
- (A) Since there was some resonance of this question with the researchers among us, we included this comparison in our framework (in spite of the introduction of *post hoc* design features into our research).
 - Those that were leading on a number of socio-economic dimensions with those that were lagging on them. (A)
- This provided a sample frame with 32 cells (2x2x2x2x2).
- (A) We placed all of the rural census subdivisions (CSD) in one of the cells according to their location on these 5 dimensions.
- Then we randomly selected one CSD from each cell.
 - This serves as the basis for our ‘Rural Observatory’



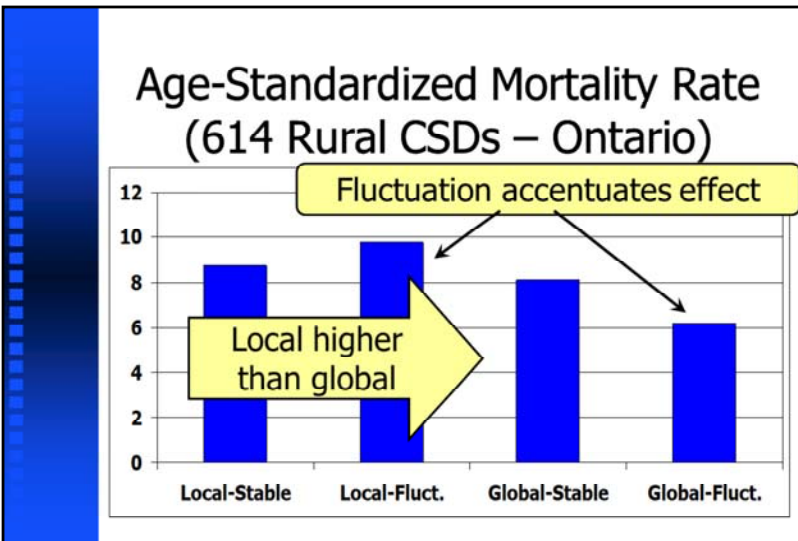
What have we found?

- More specifically – Do the differences we identified matter?
- The simple answer is – Yes
- The more complicated answer is – Not in a simple fashion
- Will demonstrate this by:
 - A quick look at some of the USDA indicators that are relatively easily available in our data
 - Population
 - Health
 - Employment
 - A look at some of the complexities revealed by the framework
- An extremely brief selection;
 - Invite you to check out more details at our website (nre.concordia.ca)
 - Most documents and information can be found there.

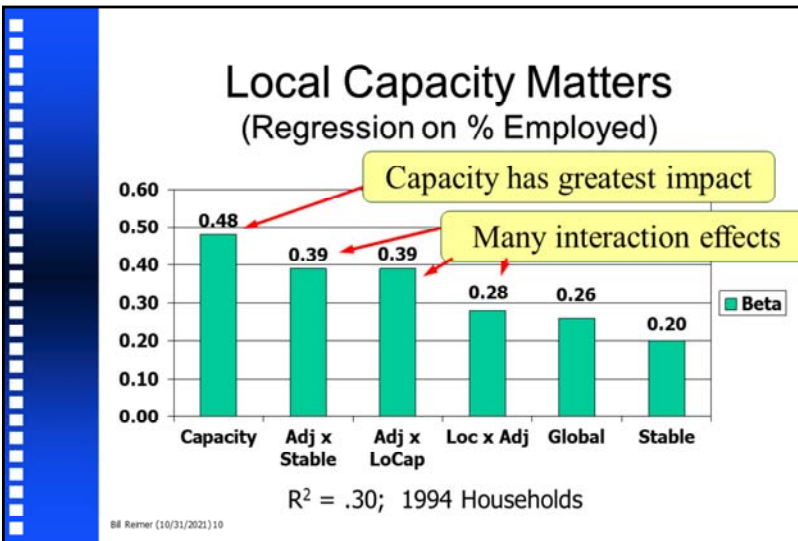


Exposure to the global economy matters

- Commodity trade has undermined community cohesion
- Our commodity trade policy has been very successful in economic terms
 - 1999: Rural and Small Town contributed 15% to GDP and 17% to national employment
 - Primary and natural resource sectors account for about 40% of total national exports
- Competitive pressures, technological innovation, and market concentration have meant that rural community cohesion is undermined, however:
 - Outmigration
 - Depopulation
 - Outflow of capital and resources
- Illustrate by analysis of rural CSDs (discuss chart)
- Note:
 - Greater involvement with the global economy is encouraged by government policy and programs
 - This exposure is often beyond the control of local citizens
 - It also highlights the tradeoff we are making between wealth and identity or lifestyle
 - At present, wealth has got the upper hand under the pressures of globalization (commodity trade)
- Implications for Research Agenda? → Trade policy and effects**



- Thanks to Roger Pitblado
- Local higher than global
- Effects accentuated in fluctuating economies
 - Fluctuating economies increase mortality in local economies but they reduce mortality in global ones.
- Implications for Research Agenda -> Refine indicators for local economies (Global/Local trade and Stability)**



- Data – NRE Household Data (1995 households)
- Capacity has greater impact on employment than any other (including adjacency)
- Global exposure remains important
- Interaction effects also important
 - Metro adjacent and Stable or Non-metro adjacent and fluctuating -> higher employment levels
 - Metro adjacent and Fluctuating or Non-metro adjacent and stable economies -> lower employment levels
 - Metro adjacent and Low Capacity or Non-metro adjacent and High Capacity -> higher employment levels
 - Metro adjacent and High Capacity or Non-metro adjacent and Low Capacity -> lower employment levels
 - Global and Non-metro adjacent or Local and Metro adjacent -> higher employment levels
 - Global and Adjacent or Local and Non-adjacent -> lower employment levels
- Implications for Research Agenda -> Conditions and Processes of Capacity-Building**

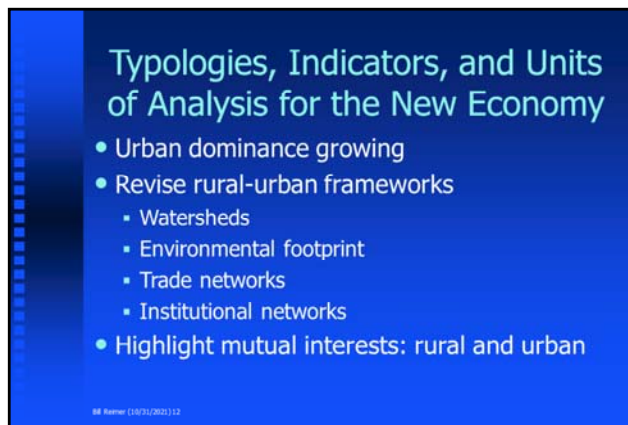
Accomplishments and Plans

- Integration of Japanese sites
- Development of NRE sample indicators
- Refine site boundaries
- Build longitudinal analysis
- Develop hierarchical analysis
- New Project: Building Rural Capacity in the New Economy

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Accomplishments and Plans

- We have been pleased with the explanatory power of the dimensions we chose for our sample frame.
- It has encouraged us to move beyond the work in new directions.
- Integration of Japanese sites
 - 4 years – 2 sites in Japan
 - Replicating our framework and research
 - Advantages of different economic and governance structure
- More sophisticated indicators
 - Global/local – using trade data with local employment (under development)
 - Fluctuating/stable – using annual economic indicators and linking it to sites via local employment (under development)
 - Adjacency – km to CMA > 100,000 people (completed)
 - Institutional Capacity – potential link via Postal Codes with administrative data (future)
- Redefine site boundaries
 - Remain with people in the CSD, however
 - Expand to their relevant boundaries – for work, leisure, commerce, education, etc.
- Build longitudinal analysis
 - Began in 1997
 - Site surveys in 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005
 - Census data linked to constant boundaries: 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001
- Hierarchical analysis
 - Examine context as well as household
- Recent funding: Building Rural Capacity in the New Economy
 - 4-years
 - What are rural capacities?
 - How have they changed?
 - How might they be built?
 - Services
 - Governance
 - Communications
 - Environment
 - Welcome collaboration



- Our research has revealed the importance of urban conditions and urban-based processes for the future of rural areas.
 - (A) The future of rural depends on urban-based decisions and institutions
 - Rural people have little access to those centres of power
 - There are many interests that we share in common
 - Few are recognized or explored
- Most of these are invisible so far – partly due to the dominant taxonomies we use
 - Those focusing on rural and urban distinction are part of the problem.
- (A) Could be made more visible with more appropriate (and strategic) taxonomies
 - (A) Watersheds
 - Would reveal the heavy dependence of urban people on quality environments
 - Expand the compensation for it to ensure its quality
 - As is done in Japan, or between New York and the Catskills
 - Creates new options for rural areas in the watershed
 - eg. Mirimaschi watershed organization brings together small business people, larger forestry and fishing industry players, Aboriginal peoples, and several municipal leaders.
 - By doing so, they have begun to ask for new information more appropriate to the interdependencies they see between such things as sewage, fish, transportation route construction, administrative organization, and many other previously disconnected aspects of their environmental, social, and political world.
 - (A) Environmental footprints
 - How much land does it take for Washington to function?
 - Once we take into account the way in which rural provides its food, processes its pollution, restores its stressed population
 - USA: 24 acres per capita
 - This perspective will shift our thinking about which types of information are important, how they might be juxtaposed, and what they imply about how we measure economic growth, development, and sustainability. Already we see shifts in approaches through modifications of development indicators in the UN and World Bank reports.
 - (A) Trade networks
 - Mapping trade at local, regional, national, and international levels
 - Andrew Errington and his group are examining ways this might be done via transportation records for market towns in England
 - Make visible our interdependencies for food, processed goods, and services
 - (A) Institutional networks
 - Who knows who? Who works with who?
 - Reveals access to information – rural/urban
 - Raises options for new forms of service delivery
- (A) Each of these would not only encourage us to think about the complexity of our research and lives, but would also create new opportunities for social innovation that are sorely needed in the current polarization of rural and urban regions.

The NRE Project:
Building Rural Capacity in the New
Economy

A Project of the Canadian Rural
Revitalization Foundation

www.crrf.ca
nre.concordia.ca
November 21, 2002



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