

# Building Community Capacity in the New Rural Economy

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99/11/02



## How can we build community capacity in rural Canada?

- NRE is complex and dynamical
- No single issue or single sector answers
- More than economic, engineering, biophysical



- There are many approaches to Community Capacity-building
- Especially when we recognize other 'languages' for the same thing
  - building human capital
  - building social capital
  - community sustainability
  - community development
  - leading and lagging communities
- We can learn much from these approaches - but often, not about the central question: "How can we build community capacity?"
  - we do learn, however, that:
    - any answers must be appropriate for processes which are complex and dynamical
      - complex because there are many factors involved and they are intricately interrelated
      - dynamical because capacity changes over time and the building of capacity is time-dependent
    - there are no single issue or single sector answers - any examples we find are usually wrong
    - building capacity involves more than economic, engineering, or biophysical issues. We must consider social, political, and institutional factors
- This is the approach we have taken when dealing with community capacity-building
- [We realize that we must devote our energies to both
  - analytical/conceptual work and
  - explorations of methodologies which are more appropriate to these insights.]

## The New Economy: Options and Choices

- researchers, policy-makers, rural people
- 5-year project of the Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation
- national/international
- national data set for rural research
- 32 rural field sites + 2 in Japan
- web site: <http://nre.concordia.ca>



### •“We” means:

- researchers, policy-makers, rural people in CRRF:
  - more than 12 years: research and education in all parts of Canada
  - 2 national meetings: spring workshop and fall conference
  - over 100 publications
- more specifically the NRE project:
  - 5-year project involving macro, meso, and micro-level analysis
  - national data set designed for rural analysis
  - 32 field sites systematically chosen to provide strategic comparisons for understanding the impacts of global changes on rural communities and people
  - 2 field sites selected using the same framework in Japan
  - web site: <http://nre.concordia.ca>

# What is Community Capacity?

- Ability to **identify** issues
  - Ability to be **reflexive**
  - Ability to **realise objectives**
- = The ability to **self-organize**



## What is Community Capacity?

- ability to **identify** and **recognize** issues
  - it includes the ability of a group to be **reflexive**: to see itself in the broader context; to see warning signals; to anticipate and get together to overcome these problems
  - ability to **realize objectives**
- From a systems point of view this is the ability to **self-organize**
- Note: we have not (yet) identified what those objectives might be.
  - In our framework, this is a second issue to be considered - one which we are doing with respect to rural communities.

- Second Question: How does a community build capacity?
  - from a self-organization perspective becomes: **How does a community self-organize?**

## How Does a Community Self-Organize?

- Market Relations
- Authority (Bureaucratic) Relations
- Associative Relations
- Reciprocal Relations



- From the anthropological, sociological, political science, and community development literature, we know a fair amount about the self-organization of communities and groups
- We have chosen to identify four interrelated systems by which self-organization takes place
- Each of them is relatively coherent
  - has its own set of 'rules' and modes of relating
  - has formal and informal mechanisms to sustain itself
- Each of them provides:
  - a basis of social cohesion (a way that people get together and relate to one another)
  - a set of expectations regarding acceptable behaviour
  - legitimization for action and belief
- Individuals, groups, and organizations use these various systems in various combinations
- Each of them are systems which can limit or constrain behaviour
- Each of them are systems by which capacity can be built
- Each are systems by which people organize themselves (self-organization)
- Look in more detail at each of them by way of example*

# Market Relations

- e.g. commodities, labour, housing markets
- rights and obligations determined by supply and demand
- contractual relationships
- favourable conditions: openness, certainty, leaders, absence of opportunism

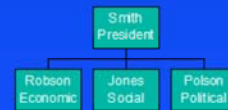


## **MARKET** relations

- predominate in contexts where there is the exchange of commodities, labour, finances, housing, etc.
- rights and obligations are determined by supply and demand
- fundamentally based on contract relations
- most often found in conditions where:
  - easy entry and exit to these relations, easy access to information
  - requires constraints on the extent to which participants can deceive, renege on promises, or otherwise limit free exchange
  - works best with a high level of certainty, openness, absence of opportunism (Granovetter and Swedberg, 1992:61), and a willingness and ability to find mutually satisfactory exchanges
  - “works best” means it produces equality and fairness
- self-organization for market relations requires access to information about the market, ability to anticipate demand, willingness to take risks, having resources or services to exchange

# Authority Relations

- e.g. governments, bureaucratic, legal institutions
- rights based on authority and status
- universally applied rights and obligations by roles
- favourable conditions: clear goals, stable environments, legitimisation for rationalisation of tasks



## **AUTHORITY** relations

- predominate in government, legal, corporate and other bureaucratic institutions
- organized on the basis of authority and status
- reflected in formal, universally applied rules and division of labour
- the rules identify the status rights and obligations of people in various positions - (eg. President, Directors, Project Leader, Secretary, Labourer). Reflects the organization of roles, not people
- Authority systems work best where there are clearly defined goals, stable environments, and high levels of legitimation for the rationalization of tasks
- “works best” means reaching goals and conducting instrumental tasks
- self-organization requires the ability to formulate these goals, rationalize tasks, and revise the rules as a means of changing the status and eligibility rights of participants.



## Associative Relations

- e.g. religious, recreation, farm, environmental, internet groups
- rights based on shared interests
- collective rights take precedence over individual
- favourable conditions: focused interests, frequent interaction, leaders



### **ASSOCIATIVE** relations

- predominate in groups such as churches, recreation groups, farm organizations, clubs, environmental groups, and other voluntary associations. They may also include networks which are geographically disbursed - e.g. Internet networks
- organized on the basis of shared interests
- people organize themselves into these relations for many reasons: recognition, respect, camaraderie, or to share in the resources or benefits of the collective activity
- collective interests take precedence over individual interests
- they are responsive to the changing interests of the community
- they provide a strong force for social cohesion since they often overlap in membership. People in the amateur theatre group also meet on the baseball diamond, or at church.
- they predominate where interests are focused (including natural disasters or social crises), people interact frequently, and where charismatic leaders are found
- self-organization requires the ability to identify interests and maintain them through various techniques of boundary maintenance (symbols, rituals, secrecy, stigmatization)



# Reciprocal Relations

- e.g. families, kinship, gangs, tribes
- rights based on reciprocity
- commitments form to groups or individuals
- favourable conditions: proximity, frequent contact, trust, uncertainty



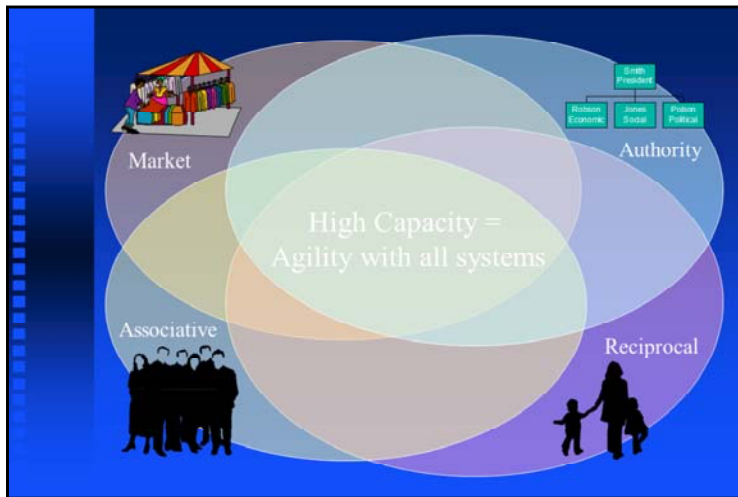
## **RECIPROCITY** relations

- predominate in families, kinship, tribal groups, gangs, close friends
- rights and obligations are based on favours and services previously granted or anticipated
- these obligations are often established in elaborate ways: I owe you a favour because your daughter helped me repair my fence.
- commitments form to individuals or groups, not to particular interests
- they are most likely to emerge under conditions of proximity and frequent and long-term contact - facilitated by ascriptive characteristics
- they require a high level of trust and the expectation of loyalty
- they often survive and sometimes flourish under conditions of uncertainty
- self-organization requires frequent contact, the ability to develop trust and maintain boundaries (e.g. through symbols, shame, identity)

## System Relationships

- all systems used by individuals and groups
- they are interdependent
- they can reinforce or inhibit one another
- they are supported and enforceable by socially recognised institutions
- each contribute to community capacity

- All of these systems are used in various combinations by individuals and groups to self-organize
  - village of Hussar (AB) relied primarily on associative relations in the face of school closings. The citizens got together and lobbied the government.
  - the Hutterite community next door uses reciprocal relations intensively (family supported by religious belief) and combines them with authority relations (again legitimized by religion) to successfully compete in a market system (have even been able to expand while others fail).
  - In this case, the three systems reinforce one another
- this is not always the case
  - The Marshall decision in Atlantic Canada, for example, and the reaction which followed it, illustrates a situation where bureaucratic-legal systems, reciprocal systems, and market systems come into conflict. The bureaucratic structure of the fisheries operated with little sensitivity to the associative and reciprocal systems binding Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal fishers.
  - Our research on voluntary associations demonstrates how the regulations of government bureaucracies have a difficult time with the ways in which associative relationships are organized. Project-driven, short-term funding creates significant problems for the management of initiatives based on informal associations or friendship networks.
- Each system provides a different basis for social cohesion
  - in Cap à l'Aigle, cohesion was built through a network of people interested in lilacs (associative)
  - the town municipality (bureaucracy) shared its offices and bureaucratic structure, thereby increasing both the capacity and effectiveness of the informal group.
  - The two systems reinforced each other and produced a new opportunity for strengthening market relations through tourism.



- The systems are interdependent
  - Our research has shown, for example, that business entrepreneurs are more likely to be involved in non-business associations than non-entrepreneurs
  - An Alberta farmer told us how his Internet-based business network (maintained with others in the cut flower business) provides him a primary support group even though his family is close by.
- Each are supported and enforceable by socially recognized institutions (entitlements, laws)
  - market relations supported and controlled by trade agreements, competition legislation, labour law, and the courts
  - authority relations controlled by legislation, corporate law, and the better business bureau
  - associative relations controlled by civil law and municipal by-laws
  - reciprocal relations controlled by legislation, family law, government support agencies, and public norms
- Each contribute to capacity in different ways
- 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



## Build Flexible Capacity

- many of the conclusions which come from our perspective and the research on which it is based, support those of the New Economy Development Group “Perspectives Paper on Community Capacity Building” (March 19, 1999)
- we emphasize, however, that capacity is multidimensional - it is built in different ways in different systems. Policies, programs, and measures must be sensitive to these differences.
- Once doing so, there are many opportunities for capacity-building which emerge.
- Some of these may form the basis of an **NRCan Action Plan**:
- identify and support transferable between the systems skills
  - organizing the infrastructure for a conference on lilacs can create a marketable service as a conference centre
  - if a community has strong associative relations at the local level, then these skills may be used to develop them at a global level
- design programs for local system mix
  - Reciprocal relations play a more important role in Aboriginal communities than in others.
  - One objective would be to see how these reciprocal relationships and their associated skills might be made compatible with other of the three systems
  - understand the relationship of NRCan to the organization of local governance - if the bureaucratic relationships are incompatible with the local systems, there is bound to be trouble.
- increase synergy between systems
  - If you wish a community to become more market-oriented, then look at the ways in which associative systems might support this- by increasing the extent of the networks, for example.
  - Health care delivery might be improved by training local people as “community health aids” (cf. Alaska): building on reciprocal and associative relationships to improve bureaucratic obligations.
- respect and support local self-organization
  - clearest problem in our voluntary sector study: more than 30% of the organizations had to modify their mission in order to get funding
- orient for the long term
  - commitment to rural communities must be long term - we are now discovering new information in our sites after 2 years there
  - results are long term - therefore short-term project driven approaches are inappropriate

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.... building rural economies for the 2000s