Knowledge and action in support of small town economic transition

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Overview

• Rural restructuring
• Creating community / university relationships
• Community receptor capacity
  – McBride Community Forest Corporation
• Lessons for developing university-community relationships
  – Beyond instrumental partnerships
Rural Restructuring

Industrial restructuring

- Industrial consolidation
- Labour shedding technologies
- Fluctuating commodity prices
- International trade uncertainty
- Increasing global competition
Rural Restructuring II

Service restructuring

• Neo-liberal policies
  – Reducing government expenditures

• Services offloaded, downsized, regionalized, or closed

• Retrenchment of government supports

• Job losses and out-migration
The Challenge

• Small places face many changes
• Seek information to make decisions
  – Timely, relevant, and useful
• Academics enter research task seeking to improve questions
• Mismatch of expectations
  – Communities want answers
  – Academics want questions
Community Receptor Capacity I

- Small municipal offices – few staff
  - Experience
  - Turnover and institutional memory
  - Limited technical support and resources

- Getting mutual commitment

- Relationship demands
  - Difficult on time / staff
  - Often need financial commitment
Community Receptor Capacity II

- Bottom-up ‘may not be equipped’ to mobilize knowledge
- Need support for building relationships / capacity
  - Poorly understood by funding programs
  - Academic and funding institutions talk ‘engaged’ language but not equipped to follow through with infrastructure / support
Economic Renewal: The case of McBride, BC
The Local Context

- McBride is located approximately halfway between Prince George and Jasper along the Fraser River.
The Local Context

- Population approximately 660
- Services broader community of about 1,500
MCFC established in 2002
Goal to provide greater socioeconomic diversity
Wholly owned by the Village of McBride
Board of directors reflective of broader community
Staff: general manager, operations supervisor, part-time clerical help
McBride Community Forest Corp

- Field operations by contract
  - Preference to local businesses
McBride Community Forest Corp II

- Sell commodity grade logs to larger companies
McBride Community Forest Corp

- Small market logger program
  - Smaller licenses sold to develop specialty forest products
  - 53 users around the province
• Building resiliency
• Transition from commodity to value-added markets
McBride Community Forest Corp III

- MCFC income paid to Village of McBride
- Leverage to obtain other funding
- Support for community projects
  - New community hall
  - Community Foundation
  - Employ an economic development officer
  - Small fund for community groups
McBride Community Forest Corp

- In-kind support / expertise
  - Development of tourism strategy
  - Public trail system
McBride Community Forest Corp IV

- Need for receptor capacity to be open
- Links with UNBC
  - CDI (Future Forest Summit), Kathy Lewis (Forestry Roundtable)
  - Darwyn Coxson (Future Forest Ecosystem Scientific Council research proposal)
- Links with others
  - BC Community Forest Association
  - OBAC
- How can receptor capacity be better supported?
• **Energy** (Waste wood bio-energy)
  - Business cases / models
  - Technology options
  - Environmental impacts / monitoring
    - Waste, transport, emissions, ash, etc
  - Feasibility studies for new power lines
  - Bio-fuel for other industrial plants

• **Forestry**
  - International market ‘surveillance’
  - Maximizing wood values
  - Possibilities of non-timber forest products
    - i.e. devil’s club, mushrooms, medicinal plants / herbs
• **Transportation**
  – Alternatives for moving wood / forest products
  – Traffic studies
    • Impacts of changing traffic mix
    • Highway and ‘off-highway’ safety
    • Truck and traffic impacts on highway maintenance

• **Business-Related**
  – Key trends for small and medium-sized businesses
  – Human resource needs
  – Infrastructure needs
• **Marketing and Exporting Products**
  – Market options / product options
    • Case studies of successful small places/exporters
  – Marketing / distribution models for local products
  – Use / access to e-commerce
Marketing Example – 2010 Winter Olympics

• BC’s Wood First Initiative
• Quality of Life
  - Role of a healthy, diversified economy in attracting residents / businesses
  - Services to improve quality of life
Summary: Community-University Relationships

- Tool to support community economic development
- Can enhance local capacity / responsiveness
- Surrogate for building social cohesion and social capital
- Spur innovation / enhance competitiveness
- Key input into policy development
Lessons for Community-University Relationships

1. Creating / maintaining a relationship
2. Link community partnerships with appropriate university resources
3. Develop bottom-up research ideas
4. Research design should be driven by community partners
5. Involve community partners in execution of research projects
6. Guide knowledge mobilization
Creating / Maintaining Relationships

• Need to build relationships, project partnerships
• Requires investment of time / resources
• Requires routine interaction
  – To develop trust / credibility
  – Share power / decision-making
  – Responsibilities / accountability
  – Mutual learning
Link Communities with Appropriate University Resources

• Need to know what types of research universities offer
  – Difficult to browse university websites
• Outreach to promote research areas
  – Provide valuable contacts / info
• Speaker’s series, newsletter, website
• UNBC’s North First Initiative
  – Requires resources to follow through
• Rural infrastructure underutilized
• Meetings concentrated in urban areas
Develop Bottom-Up Research

• Research should be collaborative, community driven
  – Make research relevant, useful, and timely to support decisions
• Platform for ongoing dialogue / exchange of ideas to support community / economic renewal
• Opportunities to extend community-university relationships
Research Design Driven by Community Partners

• Involvement in project design:
  – Ensures fit with community goals
  – Improves understanding of questions and how results can be used
  – Develop realistic expectations
Involve Community Partners in Execution of Research

• Builds capacity
  – (i.e. data collection, writing, promoting results)

• Become invested in mobilizing results

• Logistical support
  – (i.e. field costs, accommodations, access to records, donated items)

• Adopt a flexible approach
Guide Knowledge Mobilization

- Communicating research
- Identify importance of results for informing action
  - Local networks
  - Update letters, newspaper articles, radio interviews, posters, copies of research products, websites, community forums, council presentations
  - Posting solely on a university website does not work!
Guide Knowledge Mobilization II

- Must share decision-making and project responsibilities
  - To increase ownership and mobilize new knowledge, relationships, and processes
- Respect, patience, and flexibility
- Follow-up on a routine basis
- Broker dialogue and relationships to initiate and implement actions
- Build momentum!