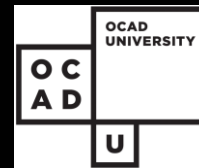


# (Re)Framing Rural Innovation: Smart Specialization in Non Metro Canadian Regions

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# What is Smart Specialization?

**Policy approach developed to foster regional development that:**

- Leverages research and development strengths
- Applies them in contextually appropriate ways

**Developed to address uneven regional development.**

**This was a good starting point, but we made adjustments to it to:**

1. Deal with the complexity and uncertainty of differing contexts;
2. Expand the profile of potential entrepreneurs to include public, not-for-profit,, and private sector actors;
3. Avoid over-specialization and strengthen related economic variety;
4. Strengthen communication, knowledge exchange and trust among community stakeholders and potential external partners.

# What is Smart Specialization?

## Limited use in rural communities:

- Focus has been on predominantly R&D related development, with smaller communities supposedly using R&D in to develop local applications
- For more remote communities, or those with low R&D capability or more traditional industries, this would be problematic

**How do we introduce innovation strategy and the opportunity to discover new sectors, or rejuvenate existing ones, in communities generally ignored by mainstream innovation policy and investors?**

# Project Purpose

## Objectives:

1. Develop Practical Framework for Stakeholder use. Test and refine the combination of tools as part of framework.
2. Develop cases for two regions: map strengths/weaknesses/opportunities for innovation.
3. Co-generate innovation strategies. Co-design a strategic plan per case based on the framework.
4. Evaluate the initial approach, iterate and prepare for phase 2.

# Project Approach

## 1. Literature review:

- Determining the characteristics of the local economy
- Forming ideas of stakeholders and key organizations

## 1. Interviews:

- Information about the local economy, strengths, and challenges
- Determining interactions and links between organizations

## 1. Workshops:

- #1: confirm and expand the network maps of the community.
- #2: determining the desired future, and how the present future can be transformed through community actions.
- #3: co-generative strategy building based on the desired future.

# Case Study Regions

## The Boundary - BC

- Population: 13,332
- Largest town: Grand Forks (4,112)
- Non-Urban Adjacent
- Economic: agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism
- Geography: arid, mountainous



## Grey-Bruce - ON

- Population: 100,000 + 74,000
- Largest town: Owen Sound (32,712)
- Urban Adjacent
- Economic: sales/service, tourism, agriculture, trades, manufacturing
- Geography: forest, water, wetlands



# Variation in Project Approach

Workshops varied slightly due to COVID and opportunity to bring people together.

***Boundary region:*** Two online workshops, 10-15 attendees

- Workshops were conducted using Zoom, including breakout rooms, and a whiteboard app through which participants were guided by facilitators to add to network maps and tables with “sticky notes”

***Grey-Bruce counties:*** One in-person workshop, 81 attendees

- Large format based on opportunity a conference provided
- Multiple tables set-up and facilitators floating amongst tables to guide activities around networking mapping and opportunity identification
- 3 frameworks: Community maps, specialized collaborations, and future states

# Key Findings: The Boundary

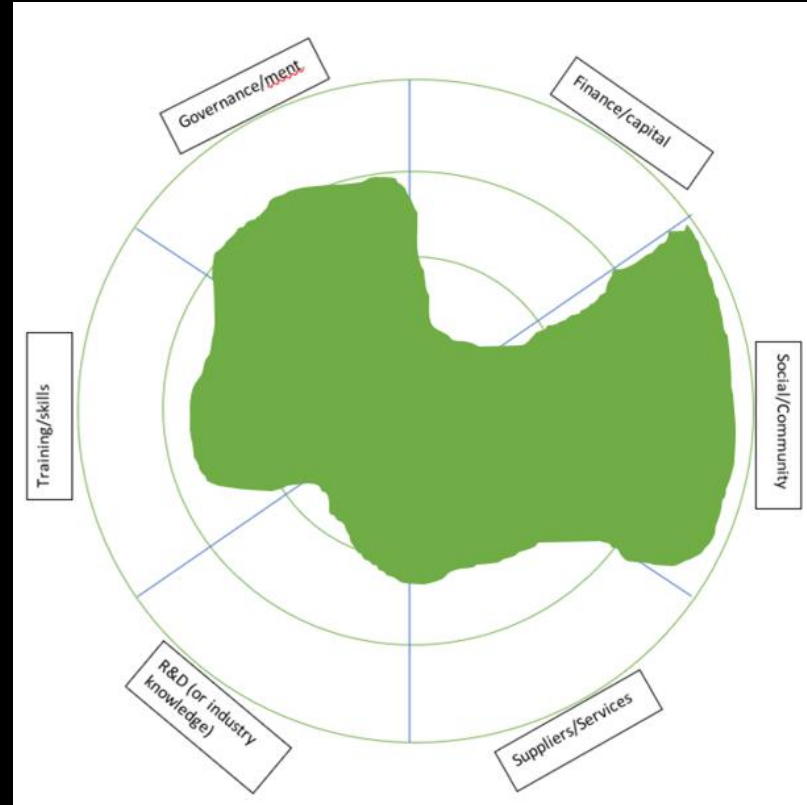
Mix of traditional and cutting edge

## Strengths

- Social connections & social capital
- Entrepreneurship
- Arts and culture
- Geography

## Challenges

- Geography
- Infrastructure
- Culture
- Burnout





# Key Findings: The Boundary

## Desired Futures?

- Green growth and disaster resilience
- Local control of resources
- Regional knowledge and resource sharing
- Innovative food and agricultural sector
- Enhanced Infrastructure

## How will we get there?

- Policy change
- Adopting new and innovative practices
- Enabling diversity
- Increased training and skills
- Better access to financing

## What is essential?

- Sense of community
- Natural environment
- Lifestyle
- Community spaces

## What holds us back?

- Inconsistency
- Fear

# Key Findings: Grey-Bruce Counties

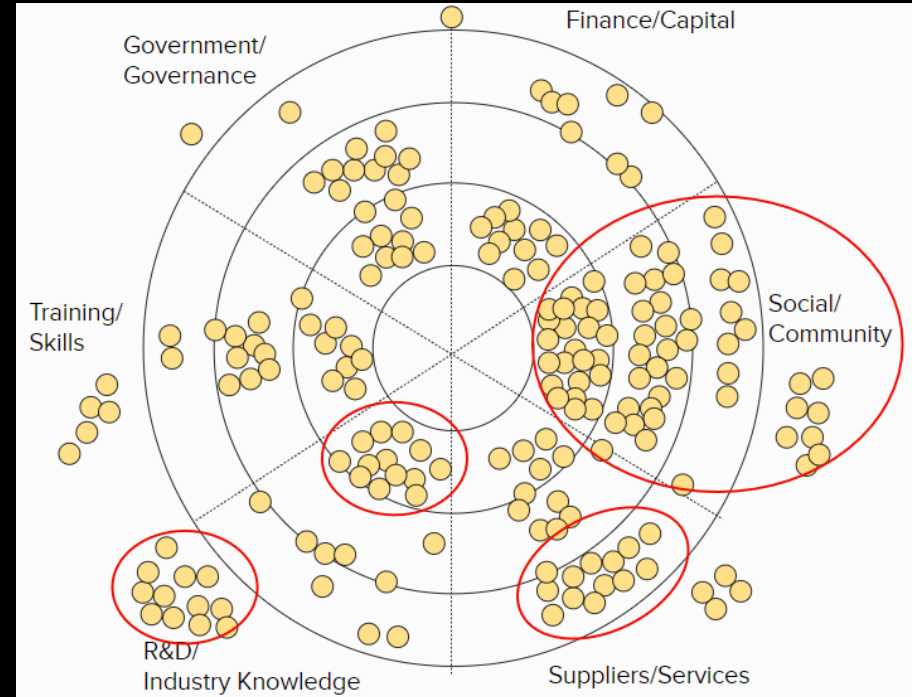
Mix of traditional and innovation

Regional Strengths:

- Social connections and social capital
- Entrepreneurship and innovation
- Arts and culture
- Connection to natural environment

Regional Challenges:

- Labour shortages
- Infrastructure (transportation, internet)
- Aging population



# Key Findings: Grey-Bruce Counties

## Desired Futures?

- Housing is affordable
- Seniors supporting community
- Local (sustainable) labour force

## How will we get there?

- (Uncommon) Collaboration
- Education/Training/Awareness
- Innovative opportunities
- Better access to funding

## What is essential?

- Cultural values (eg. age acceptance)
- Intergenerational living
- Senior inclusive infrastructure
- Workforce development/training
- Sustainable work economy

## What holds us back?

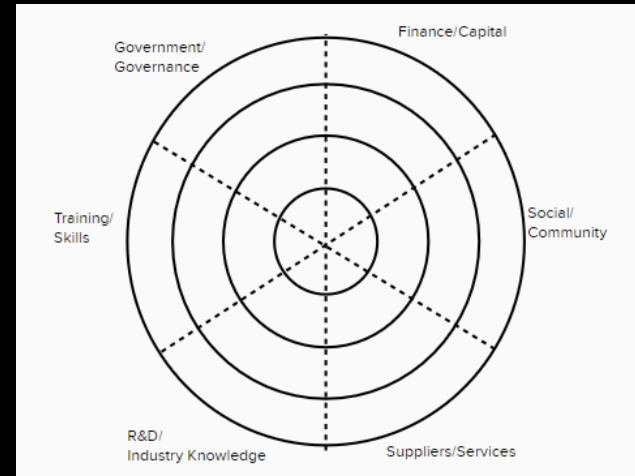
- Traditional thinking and policies
- Uncommon actors coming together

# Draft Framework

The draft framework components that have proven themselves useful as tested are:

- The Initial Profiling of the community through grey literature and interviews
  - This provides clear understanding of features, strengths, challenges, and key players.
- The network mapping analysis through the circle diagram
  - This provides a visual anchor for community members to identify key players, and begin seeing the social capital reservoir's they have in their community to draw from.

Both of these components offer flexibility in approach, and are fairly straightforward to execute without specialized training or expertise.



# Draft Framework

Strategy Building - How do we get to a new Innovative result for the community?

- Approach option 1: co-generate a community-wide strategy in a workshop setting that builds on identified Desired Future
  - This would be a comprehensive, system-view strategy
  - Could help coordinate different community members to achieve goals, and identify external network linkages needed
  - Would need a trained facilitator to keep the eye on the whole, rather than specific issues.
- Approach option 2: Creating community ripples
  - Focus on the “uncommon pairings” and social capital resources per community, and let community members self-identify opportunities and pursue them
  - Perhaps feature a collective “data base” or board of pairings to track and inspire
  - Not likely systemically coordinated
- Approach option 3: A mix of option 1 and 2
  - How best to combine to avoid duplication of effort and/or discord?

# Next Steps

1. Complete the current case studies
  - Test approach to a co-generated strategy through facilitation.
  - Note ideas that emerge organically, record and share.
2. Prepare for Phase 2 of project
  - Apply for funding
  - Explore changes to approaches for framework, aiming for independent community use
  - Test in new communities, in partnership with representative organization (e.g. college, economic development office)
  - Confirm approaches and package.
3. Phase 3 of project
  - Share with communities the finalized approach
  - Offer training and/or initial facilitation to get things moving
  - Create a community support centre around the method (?)



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# Thank You Questions?

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