

Alberta Centre for
Sustainable Rural Communities

2020-21

ANNUAL REPORT



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA



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MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR



Greetings,

Like all other institutions and organizations, the Global Covid-19 Pandemic has made a significant impact on the operations of the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC). The 2020/21 reporting year began amid the emerging pandemic in April of 2020, forcing us to cancel several events and offerings. At the time, perhaps somewhat naively, we hoped they could be “postponed” for just a month or two. How wrong we were! Many rural research projects and outreach events we were involved with were slowed, delayed, or outright cancelled as the pandemic stretched on over the subsequent year. Of course, we followed everyone else into the world of online “Zoom” meetings and webinars and, if one small positive has emerged out of this period, it is that we have grown much more confident in our ability to reach a larger, more geographically diverse audience in our outreach efforts as well as a larger pool of potential research collaborators as we navigate this unprecedented landscape. In fact, we have already scheduled several online events that will be unveiled as the reporting year 2021/22 rolls on. Of course, we also remain hopeful in terms of hosting in-person events soon as well.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 Pandemic was not the only event to significantly affect the ACSRC over the past year. On January 1, 2021, we were sad to say goodbye to the founding director of the ACSRC, Dr. Lars Hallström, a highly accomplished academic who began his post in 2009 and led the ACSRC in so many fruitful and innovative directions over his tenure. Dr. Hallström is now the Director of the Prentice Institute at the University of Lethbridge. In addition, our long-time Executive Assistant Carole Preston, very much the glue that was holding the centre together for the past several years, moved on to a new position as well.

After working for the ACSRC as a Senior Research Associate for 3 years, I was subsequently appointed Acting Director of the Centre and asked to engage in a process of “strategic reimagining” with respect to potential future directions for the ACSRC. Throughout this period, I have had the pleasure of meeting many of you and I look forward to meeting many more over the next several months. In conjunction with the Executive and Advisory Boards of the Centre, I look forward to launching new research initiatives and collaborations across a variety of issues pertinent to the future of rural communities in Alberta as well as a number of innovative community outreach events over the coming year. Please stay-tuned for further announcements in this regard!

Dr. Clark Banack

Acting Director, Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities

ABOUT THE ACSRC

Established in 2008, the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) is a partnership between the Augustana Faculty and the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences of the University of Alberta. The ACSRC fills the gap for research and policy in rural areas by fostering constructive dialogue, promoting interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and developing partnerships between the University of Alberta and rural communities in Alberta and beyond.

VISION

The vision of the ACSRC is of resilient rural communities across Canada linked closely to the discovery, dissemination, and application of new knowledge at the University of Alberta through teaching and learning, research and creative activity, community involvement, and partnerships. Such resilient rural communities will hinge on informed citizens actively participating in community governance and development in order to support and sustain the people, livelihoods, regional and local capital, economic development and long-term social viability of rural communities as a key element of the Canadian economy, the natural environment and as home to many Canadians.

MISSION

The mission of the ACSRC is to link the research, outreach and educational capacity of the University of Alberta with students, researchers, rural communities, rural community organizations and policy makers at multiple levels across the province, nationally, and internationally in order to support the improved sustainability of rural communities and populations.

VALUES

- **Collaboration:** The ACSRC recognizes the contributions and capacity of individual citizens, private, public, community and other non-governmental organizations, faculty, staff and students of post-secondary institutions in Alberta, in collectively advancing the development and sustainability of rural communities.
- **Methodological and Theoretical Rigour and Pluralism:** The ACSRC encourages both theoretical and methodological pluralism, and the critical reflection upon the suitability and implications of the theories and methods used.
- **Capacity Building:** The ACSRC is committed to supporting the ability of rural communities via research, outreach and knowledge transfer; to not only govern themselves, but to participate in a meaningful and efficacious manner at and with all levels of government and administration.
- **Transparency:** The ACSRC seeks to adopt best practices in all of its activities in order to ensure fair and open operations, and to comply with the appropriate FOIPOP legislation, etc.
- **Local Knowledge:** The ACSRC recognizes that the sustainability of rural communities in Canada varies from region to region, from community to community, and that factors such as culture, geography, natural environment, socio-economic context and political history can all lead to varying outcomes. The ACSRC, therefore, recognizes that the knowledge, experience and expertise present within communities has equal value and standing to that generated within an institution (university or college) setting.
- **Evidence-informed decision-making:** While keeping to all other values listed here, the ACSRC supports the application of systematically gained knowledge to guide the decisions, policies and programs of (1) the Centre; (2) rural communities; (3) regional, provincial and national policy makers.

GOALS

The ACSRC has established 5 goals which, through their accomplishment, will move the Centre toward achieving its mission in a fashion consistent with its vision and values. Each goal is supported by key objectives which, in turn, will guide the day-to-day operations of the Centre:

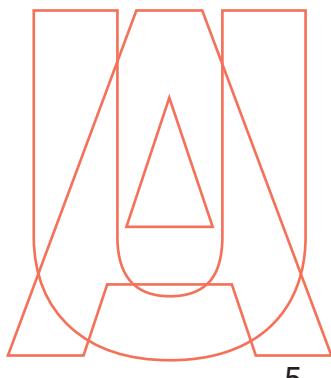
1. Research- Stimulate, support and conduct research on the multiple elements of rural community sustainability.
2. Education- Stimulate and support innovative education in rural community development, sustainability and policy.
3. Outreach- Generate greater interaction and collaboration with rural community stakeholders.
4. Knowledge Synthesis, Translation and Exchange (KSTE)- Stimulate, support and conduct KSTE to support evidence-informed decision-making and governance at multiple levels, from the local to the international.
5. Sustainable Operations- The ACSRC strives to have internally sustainable operations through stable funding sources.

CHALLENGES

The ACSRC has four main challenges:

1. To provide research leadership, profile and coordination to the University's commitment to rural engagement;
2. To foster research of relevance to rural communities, including interdisciplinary and inter-Faculty collaborative research, that may be regional, national, or international in scope;
3. To think respectfully and reciprocally with, not just for, rural communities, and to facilitate knowledge transfer;
4. To develop collaborative relationships with other university-based rural centres in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

for more info, visit acsrc.ca



ACSRC EXECUTIVE AND ADVISORY COUNCILS

The ACSRC is pleased to count the following individuals as key participants in our work:

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS



**Demetres P.
Tryphonopoulos, PhD**
Dean, Augustana Campus



Stanford Blade, PhD
Dean, Faculty of Agricultural,
Life & Environmental
Sciences



Debra Davidson, PhD
Professor, Faculty of
Agricultural, Life &
Environmental Sciences



**Rebecca Purc-Stephenson,
PhD**
Professor, Augustana - Social
Sciences



Brent Swallow, PhD
Professor, Faculty of
Agriculture Life &
Environmental Sciences



Ian Wilson, PhD
Director of the Chester
Ronning Centre, Assistant
Professor, Augustana - Fine
Arts & Humanities

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Gerald Rhodes (Rural Municipalities of Alberta)

Cathy Goulet (Battle River Alliance for Economic Development)

Ella Mayer (InMotion Network)

Arnold Hansen (Battle River Alliance for Economic Development)

Malcolm Boyd (City of Camrose)

Don Gregorwich (Camrose County)

ACSRC PROJECTS - ONGOING

BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES IN RURAL ALBERTA

Funding Source: Government of Alberta Anti-Racism Community Grant (\$25,000), Canada Summer Jobs Program (\$6,300), University of Alberta SIG Grant (\$5,000)

Project Lead: Dr. Clark Banack

Role of ACSRC: Principal Investigator

Project Dates: January 2019 – May 2022

Description:

This project, led by Dr. Banack and initially funded by an Alberta Government Anti-Racism Community Grant, has involved both a research and community outreach component. The research component utilized an ethnographic approach designed to better understand how and why citizens form the political preferences that they hold, especially with respect to their views toward racialized and religious minority communities and Indigenous Peoples. This project involved the researcher's immersion into 23 regularly occurring conversational "coffee groups" across 16 rural Alberta communities (Camrose, Tofield, Wetaskiwin, Vegreville, Round Hill, Killam, Sundre, Carstairs, Drayton Valley, Barrhead, Westlock, Fort McLeod, Pincher Creek, Picture Butte, Vulcan, Kingman). Initial results of this research were presented at the *Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Sustainable Communities Conference* in St. John's, NL, in October 2019 and an academic journal article further elaborating on these results was published in the spring of 2021. A second article has been compiled for an edited volume entitled *Building Inclusive Communities in Rural Canada* which is currently being co-edited by Dr. Banack and is an additional branch of this project.

With respect to community outreach activities, an initial "community conversation" on the topic of cultural diversity in rural Alberta, devised largely from the findings that emerged out of the ethnographic research described above, entitled "Hello Neighbour!" was delivered in Viking in the Fall of 2019. Additional events were scheduled throughout March and April, 2020 in Camrose, Tofield, Camrose County, and Flagstaff County, before being cancelled due to the pandemic. In lieu of these in-person events, the ACSRC published a online video resource for rural communities that can be accessed [here](#).

Finally, a grant application was submitted to the Federal Government's Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program in January 2021 requesting additional funds to significantly expand on this work, combining additional academic research and a carefully designed set of community outreach interventions involving multiple rural communities across Alberta.

Publications: Banack, Clark, "Ethnography and Political Opinion: Identity, Alienation, and Anti-Establishmentarianism in Rural Alberta," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 54 (1), 2021.

ACSRC PROJECTS - ONGOING

THE ECHO NETWORK (ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITY, HEALTH OBSERVATORY): STRENGTHENING INTERSECTORAL CAPACITY TO UNDERSTAND AND RESPOND TO HEALTH IMPACTS OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Funding Source: CIHR Funding Amount: \$2,083,753

Project Lead: M. Parkes

Role of ACSRC: The ACSRC is the rural and Alberta hub for the ECHO activities

Project Dates: 2016-2021

Description: Health is influenced by resource development through interrelated socioeconomic, ecological, cultural, and political pathways, which demand upstream, intersectoral responses. These relationships are especially important in Canada, where the economy remains tightly coupled with the development of natural resources and where the rate and scale of social and environmental change occurring in resource-rich regions is fueling debate regarding health impacts, especially for rural, remote and Indigenous communities. Our project, titled 'The ECHO Network (Environment, Community, Health Observatory): Strengthening intersectoral capacity to understand and respond to health impacts of resource development', aims to:

1. make evidence-based recommendations on the form and function of a cross-jurisdictional ECHO that will foster understanding of the complex dynamics of resource development and health, and;
2. trial and evaluate intersectoral strategies to address the cumulative determinants of health that interact over time and space, targeting actions and responses that cannot be achieved by the health sector alone.

The ECHO Network team has several key features:

1. our research team is informed by experienced health, environmental and social science researchers;
2. the research program is also anchored in four regional cases (New Brunswick, Alberta, British Columbia and Northern BC). In each regional case, knowledge-users have identified decision-support needs or issues that demand a better integration of environment, community and health impacts. The ECHO will provide a platform of integrative tools and processes that connect people to a network of information, practices and people in order to develop a shared perspective and more effective responses to the cumulative impacts of resource development. The research will involve four components, each linked to specific objectives, mentorship and capacity building processes over five years.

The ACSRC is currently in the process of launching an online portal called I-ASK. The portal is a decision support tool that systematically sorts a collection of literature and data from the Observatory themes in a singular location.

ACSRC PROJECTS - ONGOING

CARRYING CAPACITY SURVEILLANCE: INDICATORS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR EQUITABLE SUSTAINABILITY

Funding Source: SSHRC KSG

Funding Amount: \$46,422.00

Role of ACSRC: Principal Investigator

Project Dates: April 2020 - March 2021

Description: This knowledge synthesis project seeks to inventory, catalogue, and assess the numerous Canadian-based indicator and indices-based frameworks focused on measuring the different dimensions of carrying capacity, such as the 5 pillars of sustainable development, human and cumulative impacts, and their intersection with population health. Utilizing a broadly comparative method, this project positions that inventory against three core research questions: (1) How do contemporary data collection and measurement initiatives select, aggregate and represent key performance measures that link social, ecological, economic and population health changes? (2) How do such initiatives rise to the integration imperative, and specifically the modeling or representation of change (both positive and negative) within, and across, related sectors? (3) How are such initiatives positioned to inform decision-making and action, whether across private, public or third sectors?

KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION AND PARKS

Funding Source: SSHRC Partnership Development Grant

Funding Amount: \$200,000

Additional Partnership Funding: \$232,587

Project Lead: Elizabeth Halpenny

Role of ACSRC: Co-applicant

Project Dates: 2018-2020

Description: Parks are considered one of the most effective approaches for protecting key ecological processes and slowing biodiversity loss. However, parks play other essential roles such as provision of fresh water and source material for biomedical innovation; mitigation of the effects of climate change by reducing the impacts of disease migration, droughts and storm events; and delivery of restorative and developmental benefits to humans.

Park-related knowledge mobilization (KM) is needed for effective park management, and human factors should be accounted for, the goal of this project is to enhance the generation and use of knowledge, especially social science, local and Indigenous knowledge, for parks and protected areas policy, planning, and management. By extending established park agency-researcher relationships and creating new connections, this project will create a multidisciplinary, inter-institutional, cross-sectoral partnership to elevate park-related KM in Canada and globally.

ACSRC PROJECTS - ONGOING

FOOD SECURITY AND RURAL SENIORS LIVING INDEPENDENTLY

Funding Source: OMAFRA Research Grant

Funding Amount: \$134,000

Project Lead: Al Lauzon (University of Guelph)

Role of ACSRC: Co-applicant Organization

Project Dates: June 2018-2021

Description: This research project proposes to examine the issue of food security/insecurity for rural seniors living independently, a population and context that has largely been ignored. It will take place in Grey, Bruce, Perth and Huron Counties. This study is exploratory and will look to engage multiple perspectives by engaging primary care providers, public health professionals, home care workers, service providers, municipal planners and seniors through interviews and/or focus groups. Interview and focus group data will be analyzed through a constant comparison methodology and triangulation will be conducted by comparing the emergent themes among the various stakeholders. In addition, the services currently providing support as it relates to food security in the 4 counties will be identified, mapped and service gaps identified. Once the research is completed, webinars will be conducted for each of the audiences identified in the letter of intent in addition to the various stakeholder groups with a focus on the 4 counties.

ENTREPRENEURIALISM AND RURAL/SMALL-TOWN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Funding Amount: \$97,000.00

Project Lead: Greg Halseth (UNBC)

Role of ACSRC: Collaborator

Project Dates: Summer 2020 to 2023

Description: This project will investigate the 'entrepreneurial' activities of local governments as they adjust to rapid economic restructuring, and changes in public policy and governance. This project focuses on local governments because they are the managers of critical community infrastructure and have basic responsibilities for community land-use and economic development planning. When dramatic changes occur, local governments are 'on the ground', dealing with immediate effects and long-term impacts. Yet, local governments struggle with outdated financial and jurisdictional structures and a senior government public policy agenda that asks them to become more creative, innovative, and 'entrepreneurial' in their approach and responsibilities. The outcomes both senior and local governments are looking for, but are in no way guaranteed by the structural conditions of rural communities and path dependencies of past development approaches, are transformations towards more resilient rural communities and more sustainable rural economies. Given this context and research gap, the project thus addresses two main research questions: -How are rural and small town local governments dealing with dramatic economic restructuring and the transition towards entrepreneurialism? -How are rural and small town local governments approaching entrepreneurial solutions under their current regime of financial resources and jurisdictional authority?

ACSRC PROJECTS - COMPLETED

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Funding Source: Government of Alberta Community and Regional Economic Support (CARES) Grant w/City of Camrose

Funding Amount: \$36,000

Project Lead: Malcolm Boyd, City of Camrose

Role of ACSRC: Co-applicant

Project Dates: June 2019 - May 2020

Description: Artificial intelligence, machine learning and other emerging technologies are expected to have a significant effect on the agriculture, health and manufacturing sectors that currently provide the economic base for Camrose. This project will gather data from seventy Camrose businesses to ascertain: (a) the degree to which businesses are anticipating, planning and/or preparing for technology-driven disruptions; (b) new and existing business models that business owners and managers predict will become the basis of the future rural economy; and (c) workforce reskilling needs that should be introduced into the current workforce.

Publications: Haugen, S., Hallstrom, L., Grant, P., Cha, J., & MacQuarrie, P. "Policy responses to automation in Canada." *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 16(1), 68–85, 2021.

BUILDING MENTAL HEALTH RESILIENCY FOR A SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Funding Source: University of Alberta Sustainability Enhancement Fund

Funding Amount: \$26,963

Role of ACSRC: Project Lead

Project Dates: 2017-2019

Description: "Building Mental Health Resiliency for a Sustainable Campus Community" is a pilot project that is the first step to systematically understanding and supporting the mental health and wellness of students attending the University of Alberta, Augustana Campus and in rural communities more broadly at the high school level. The long-term goal of this project is find innovative ways to decrease the prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression in undergraduate students, including the upstream factors that precede moving into post-secondary education. This project and its results will be presented to the school boards and to the University of Alberta Augustana leadership.

FINANCIAL REPORT

OPERATING BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

The operating budget of the ACSRC is funded by the Augustana Faculty of the University of Alberta.

		AUGUSTANA	EXTERNAL REVENUE	TOTAL
ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET		\$45,932.00	\$ 1,214.26	\$47,146.26
EXPENDITURES	Human Resources and Benefits	\$39,032.01	-	\$39,032.01
	Operations	\$ 5,093.15	-	\$ 5,093.15
TOTAL EXPENDITURES		\$44,125.16	-	\$44,125.16
EXPENDITURES/REVENUES		\$ 1,806.84	\$ 1,214.26	\$ 3,021.10



Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities

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