

***Rural Community Partnerships for Well-being:  
Enhancing Resiliency, Vibrancy, Prosperity, and Sustainability with Facts and Fantasy***

The CU Expo 2013 is an interactive community-university partnership presentation that builds upon the field study in Tatamgouche and Advocate Harbour, Nova Scotia. This community research has been distilled into findings and submitted for publishing to the Journal of Rural and Community Development. This paper follows and is the basis for the CU Expo discussion on factors that mediate well-being.

Notation:

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**Factors that Mediate Rural Well-being in two Nova Scotian Communities**

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1. Introduction and Background

With no common agreement on the definition of or boundaries defining “rural”, the resulting lack of data for many rural communities contributes to rural populations often being ignored by policy-makers and planners. Several challenges seem intransigent in rural Atlantic Canada. Many rural communities face declining and aging populations, greater incidents of illnesses and health care costs, greatly reduced services (including local schools and healthcare facilities), along with heightened environmental concerns with threats to quality of soils, water, and air as well as to rural vitality and prosperity (Jackson, Minjares, Naumoff, Shrimali, Martin, 2009; Southgate, 2009). In previous generations the bulk of families would have lived in rural settings and earned a significant portion of their income from food related work – whether through fishing, farming, or food processing (Neth, 1995). A declining interest in rural life, agriculture, and agricultural education breeds trouble (Turner, 2011). Concurrently, urbanization is growing at one of the fastest rates in Canada and contributing to busier and faster paced lives. With the occurrence of these trends in rural communities, the investigation of rural communities becomes necessary and urgent.

While many rural communities decline, some are remaining vibrant and prosperous. The purpose of this paper is to investigate well-being of two rural communities in Atlantic Canada. The questions that are to be answered in this pilot paper included:

What do community members think are the factors that contribute to the well-being of their rural community?

What do the community members point to or use as evidence of their well-being?  
What do members recommend to enhance their well-being and that might also be lessons for other towns?

This paper distills the results of an appreciative inquiry into the factors that mediate rural well-being in two rural Atlantic communities: Tatamagouche and Advocate Harbour. This paper provides a review of relevant literature on the use of appreciative inquiry in well-being studies as well as the literature on rural well-being. The use of appreciative inquiry in this study will be explained through the methodology. Subsequent sections will present findings and analyses of these two rural Nova Scotian communities. It is anticipated that the input gained from the inquiry and analyses of these two rural communities will inform a larger regional study on the factors contributing to vibrancy in rural Atlantic Canada.

The significance of this study is the testing of an approach using appreciative inquiry and distilling the findings to form recommendations to enhance well-being in two rural communities. An additional opportunity is to increase understanding of appreciative inquiry as a valuable tool and approach in qualitative research. The challenges of this study include the deciphering of key insights from disparate fields of literature and securing and articulating data relevant to rural settings.

## 2. Background, Literature Review

### 2.1. Introduction to approach to the review of the literature

A brief review of the literature reveals the interconnected issues of agriculture, health, environment, economic development and the profound impact on rural life. Issues searched in the literature were rural life, community well-being, sustainability and quality of life, rural sociology and policy studies, population and migration studies. Some studies were particularly informative, such as the New Rural Economy Project review of literature on social cohesion and social capital (Desjardins, Halseth, Leblanc, & Ryser, 2002).

Interest in well-being has been growing in recent years (Aked et al., 2011; Beckley, 1995; Cox et al., 2010; Huppert, 2009; Stedman et al., 2004). The definition of well-being for rural residents may differ from that of urban residents. Martin (2012) offers a good example of how to re-think the well-being of rural residents based on their history and context. Some researchers have been investigating the role of active rural living and productive senior years and how to access to rural services are helpful in maintaining healthy individuals and communities (Davis et al., 2012; Farmer et al. 2012). Research conducted in rural British Columbia revealed that well-being is connected with the rural community's ability to maintain a healthy and thriving economy, society, and environment as well as its capacity to adapt to external and internal stresses (MacKendick & Parkins, 2004).

As noted above, elements of well-being are considered by many authors throughout disparate fields of literature. Hanavan and Cameron (2012) delve into the concept of *civic agriculture* and note the work of Lyson (2004) and Goldschmidt (1946) that correlate profitable small-scale farm operations with community well-being when these enterprises produce desirable foods, arouse local support, create some jobs, encourage entrepreneurship and leverage local food consumption as a form of community identity. According to Ramsey and Smit (2002) community well-being

is dependent upon individual member well-being as well as stability of the functional and structural aspects of the community, especially when contending with external forces. In Stewiacke, Nova Scotia, a community close to our study sites, researchers found the highest determinants of quality of life were members own health, leisure activities, and family life. Their study found that these factors ranked slightly above other very important well-being indicators, those being independence and freedom, financial security, jobs and personal income (Beesley, Macintosh, & Robinson, 1996). Distaso (2007) and Sen (2002) recommended the need for and benefits from creating a measuring system which accounts adequately for social, economic, environmental, and other elements of society.

A precursor to this study was a review of tools commonly used to measure progress and sustainability in communities, such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The scope of GDP insufficiently captures the complexity and multi-dimensions of economic, social and environmental realities in communities and countries. Consequently, additional analytical tools such as the Genuine Progress Index (GPI) (<http://www.gpiatlantic.org/>), the Canadian Index of Well-being (CIW) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/>) and Gross National Happiness (GNH) (<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>) were studied and elements of their indicators for well-being were adapted for our study's purposes.

This study seeks to consider the diverse elements and different lenses used to view, appreciate, and analyze well-being. Well-being as defined by GPIAtlantic is being “multi-dimensional, consisting of complex interactions between economic, social, health, and environmental realities” (Pennock, et al., 2008). GPI consists of six main categories to measure societal progress and well-being: *living standards, population health, time use, community vitality, education, and environmental quality* (Pennock, et al., 2008, p. 11). GPI was created by GPIAtlantic and has been applied to the investigations of two rural areas in Nova Scotia: Kings County in 1998 and Glace Bay in 2000 (Genuine Progress Index for Atlantic Canada, 2007). Apart from GPI, CIW is another set of measures of vibrant communities in Canada relevant to this research. CIW defines well-being as “the presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breadth of expression” and includes “*good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, an educated populace, balanced time use, high levels of democratic participation, and access to and participation in leisure and culture*” (Canadian Index of Well-being, 2011). Researchers with the CIW indicate that their focus is largely on urban settings with little data disaggregated for rural analysis (personal communication, August, 2012). In addition to Canada, other countries such as the UK and Bhutan also created measures for quality of life or societal progress, which are similar to CIW. GNH is a Bhutanese measure of well-being (Gross National Happiness, 2012). Interestingly, nine domains used by Bhutanese researchers to measure well-being in the GNH overlap with both the CIW and GPI. All three instruments include living standards, health, education, time use, community vitality and environment.

## 2.2. Defining Well-being

Initially, this investigation commenced with the notion of “wellness”. Earlier research on the connections between agriculture, food and wellness revealed that the term “wellness” was too narrowly aligned with health and fitness and insufficiently inclusive to capture the many

dimensions of rural quality of life. The broader term of “well-being” was used to guide focus groups and research directions.

Well-being is dynamic and diverse and includes multiple elements. In this study well-being was defined as the conditions under which individuals and groups enjoy and maintain a sense of high life satisfaction arising from factors such as a healthy community, economy, government, environment along with an adaptive ability to withstand hardship. Consequently, well-being was viewed as the collective conditions and attributes that contribute to community and individual vibrancy, resiliency, prosperity, and sustainability. As described by some on and off campus consultation participants, “Well-being is having the physical and mental ability to do things you believe will have positive impact on society.” “Well-being should be foremost agenda for any government – this would save in so many areas” (Unpublished document, consultation notes, 2011).

The study was designed to test out suitable indicators to investigate, appreciate, and recommend improvement for rural well-being in Atlantic Canada. It may help to reinvigorate citizen efforts to increase attractiveness of their small towns and rural areas. An additional opportunity is to increase understanding of appreciative inquiry as a credible approach to research. The challenges of this study include the deciphering of key insights from disparate fields of literature and securing and articulating data relevant to rural settings.

### 3. Methodology

The research method selected as most suitable for this study is *appreciative inquiry*, as proposed by Heron (1996) and articulated by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). "Appreciative Inquiry" is a research method that a) inquiries into the elements and factors that enabled people, organizations, and communities to achieve success, and b) seeks ways to build upon those elements and factors to frame thinking for further effectiveness in the future. “Appreciative Inquiry looks for what has made an [person, organization or community] vital and vibrant and then attempts to build upon those life-giving forces to create a positive vision of the future” (Troxel, 2002, 1). Appreciative inquiry seeks to identify, consider, and document the “life-giving forces” involved in the cooperative action and collective existence. “Appreciative Inquiry proposes reawakening collaborative action research so that it is grounded on a deep kind of participative, intuitive and appreciative ways of knowing, and so that it includes generative theory as a prime mover in organizational innovation” (Heron, 1996, 8). The recognition of polyvocality, as encouraged by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 1037), is also critical in this inquiry. Polyvocality recognizes the importance of a multiplicity of competing values, impulses, and interpretations. The research process also becomes a relational process to encourage a collectivity of voices to reflect together on ideas and possibilities. Thus, appreciative inquiry has a "generative capacity," that may serve to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise probing questions regarding contemporary social life, to examine what is often 'taken for granted' and thereby stimulate possible alternatives (Gergen, 1978).

Community members involved in the study helped to frame the direction of the questions and whether pursuing the particular line of questioning might be helpful to all parties. The voice of all ages was particularly sought after and efforts were made to secure the involvement of young

people. Some representation of voices from diverse age groups was achieved. And all participants in discussions were attentive to and welcoming of the input of all present. The building on remarks made by other contributors also enabled the study to take on a polyvocality quality and to shine light on the areas to appreciate, particularly those that were life-giving forces.

As part of the evolving mission of a Faculty of Agriculture, an inquiry was undertaken about the confluence between agriculture, food and well-being. Participants were asked to share their ideas about the elements that have an impact on rural community well-being. These initial stages of program investigations evolved into asking about rural well-being by residents in Atlantic Canada. This study included investigations in two Atlantic Canadian communities, Tatamagouche and Advocate Harbour, both located in Nova Scotia. These two communities were chosen as pilot test sites because they demonstrate some of the external signs of prosperity, sustainability, resiliency and/or vibrancy. For example, Tatamagouche has an active cultural community and a vibrant, widely supported farmers' market. Advocate Harbour has remained as a regional service site in the form of maintaining health care and education services. Tatamagouche has had a slight increase in population change from 2001 to 2011 of +0.4%. Advocate has had a decrease in population from 2001 to 2011 of -5.6% (gov't source?)

One to two focus groups were organized in the two rural communities, separately. Each focus group consisted of 7-15 participants who had been identified through recommendations by persons termed "community bridgers". These community bridgers were individuals with formal and informal roles as leaders, educators, community builders. The focus groups and interviews were conducted at a time and place suitable to the participants. Prepared questions guided these 'appreciative' discussions revealing experiences in the well-being of rural communities. The participants were asked for their sense of what the input means. The focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The data generated were coded and discussed by the research team. The results were distilled and analyzed to determine meanings and patterns arising from the data. The findings are discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

The seven components of well-being that have evolved through this study are:

- a. Quality of life, community and cultural engagement - captures all the activities and things residents plan, do and create to achieve a higher quality of their desired elements of life
- b. Learning, education, and communications – the formal as well as informal ways of lifelong learning
- c. Prosperity and economy – the avenues for generating supports for one's lifestyle
- d. Political influence and democratic engagement – includes the diverse means in which community members become informed about and take part in democracy, locally as well as at other levels of society
- e. Community sustainability and environmental wellness– all the natural features and elements that are in the area or that effect the area in which a community is located
- f. Vitality and health – are the collective processes and practices that enable a person to maintain high functioning, mobility, utility, and a sense of wellness
- g. Food, Fishing, Farming, and Forestry – this includes an array of resources along with their inputs and outputs that serve to nourish human, animal and plant well-being and protect the resources for future benefits

There are three limitations in this pilot research project.

Firstly, Tatamagouche and Advocate Harbour were two selected communities based on some indicators: hospital/health care, school, services still operating and references from others about their suitability as ‘pilot test sites’. Other communities could have been approached as study sites but were not.

Secondly, this is a pilot study in rural well-being. The two communities studied may be unusual examples and may not be used to represent rural communities in Atlantic Canada. To more fully examine well-being in rural communities on a larger scale, more data are required in subsequent studies. Our long-term research objectives include fostering regional dialogue about practices that could enhance rural well-being and reverse decline in Atlantic Canada.

Thirdly, recommendations are focused on these two communities and not intended to inform other parts of Atlantic Canada. More in-depth follow-up studies with more communities would have the goal of gathering and analyzing more data and increasing the applicability of recommendations for rural life in the Atlantic region.

#### 4. Study Results

The discussions in the focus groups and interviews generated substantial input. The appreciative inquiry approach enabled members to be free to speak creatively as well as critically. Within these open spaces participants offered reflections and recommendations. This section on findings provides a distilled version of the diverse input provided by participants in both communities. Following are the themes, sub-themes and major threads that have been identified and extracted for further analysis.

##### 4.1.1. Quality of life, Community and Cultural Engagement

Major themes that emerged in the discussions on the quality of life in both rural Atlantic communities were: richness and magnificence; social connections and inclusion; vibrant arts, culture and music; formation of community; along with impediments to engagement. The essence of these findings is summarized as follows.

Residents used terms like ‘rich and richness’ and ‘magnificence and beauty’ when referring to Tatamagouche and Advocate Harbour, respectively. Residents could proudly list an array of activities available in their communities, like yoga classes, hockey, farmers’ market, painting classes, meditation circles, seminars and international speakers, wineries, walking and hiking in national parks and trail systems, along with brilliant seaside locations. Two significant issues that arose in quality of life were the available ways to form *social connections* and the initially cautious, but then high degrees of *acceptance and inclusion* by residents. Some participants shared the following sentiments. “Tatamagouche is a place where people come together; money is not the criteria to keep this place afloat ...” “...while we have our differences...in deep disagreements, there is a capacity to maintain decent relationships because we have to work together in the community.” The arts scene is alive in rural Atlantic Canada. In Advocate Harbour, the Log Cabin and the Farmers’ Market in Tatamagouche, are outlets for an array of arts and culture.

The historical importance of organized religion in the region had some remnants. For current residents, deep purpose and shared values were evident in the *formation of service communities*, like the organization of suppers, community events and volunteering. Some members suggested that the former divisiveness arising along church/faith lines had largely dissipated. Also, like in church communities, often the elderly were the ones giving more time to these activities while youth were less visibly involved in both settings. However, facilities in Advocate Harbour and in Tatamagouche, were used to inspire spiritual formation through retreats and nature walks. Many participants showed a reverence for the natural beauty.

Several impediments to community engagement were cited: the adult participants expressed concern about the lack of sufficient involvement of younger people in events and physical activity. Some of the participants co-related this disinterest in community to the youth's high usage of technology and low engagement with elders and the community's natural features. Additional barriers to community engagement were poverty, illiteracy, food insecurity, and social isolation due to lack of transportation options and a lack of sufficient time or money to invest in community activities. A participant in Advocate Harbour provided an emphatic example of this issue, "You guys sit back and not bother with the young people for weeks and then one day you want them all to show up for something. It's not going to happen. They don't care. You have to interact with them *constantly*. They have to be part of your community and you have to be part of their community."

#### 4.1.2. Prosperity and Economy

Core elements of the local economy were identified by study participants as: lack of good jobs; self-sufficiency and innovativeness; population and outmigration; the green economy and right economic relations; and infrastructure.

Many residents exhibited entrepreneurship and self-directedness. Perhaps a symbol of such innovation may be noted in the development of a local currency that was used as real tender in Tatamagouche. As well the formation of an economic development association and highly reputed services in the Advocate area were used as examples of innovativeness. Unusual ways to harness the natural features were highlighted, including bass fishing contests, getaways, youth workshops, spiritual and community retreats, or a golf tournament on the harbor floor when the tide was low. Participants spoke of a willingness to sacrifice income for a higher quality of life. While Advocate Harbour seems self-sufficient, since it houses all types of trades-people, the younger study participants wished they were educated more in the areas of trades for *local* job opportunities. Most young people leave the area for work and for education. Some return in their childbearing years, as it was deemed a "good place to raise children". Others moved to the area only after retirement. Those who remained either started their own businesses or commuted to work at a distance away. There were few employment opportunities in the area that offered high income. Some local employment was seasonal, including tourism, fishing, farming and forestry. Several residents felt reliant on government programs – like Employment Insurance (EI) to supplement their seasonal income. Recipients of EI benefits are required to accept work up to an hour's drive from their residence. Participants also identified a small population, a lack of cultural and ethnic diversity as deficiencies for economic and social development.

Many residents in both communities indicated an interest in opportunities with the Green Economy, as these types of projects would “fit the personality of the town.” Many local residents strive to live sustainably and to support fair trade and creative enterprise. The sentiment shared in both locales was that some people were inclined to think about and support environmental issues, as they were “the right things to do”. One suggested that, “The place has a lot to offer and you could get most everything done by people in the community as we have a school, nurse practitioner, post office, good restaurants, etc.”

#### 4.1.3. Learning, Education, and Communications

The elements that emerged in the discussions about life-long learning, education and communications, were increasing awareness of local learning opportunities and sharing responsibilities; and the role of schools in community building.

Participants shared that generally the primary and secondary teachers who lived locally were well informed and strong ambassadors of community life. However, exogenous teachers or principals tended to be less informed and engaged in the community and thus less inclined to demonstrate or orient students to community development activities. Some participants shared their sense that learning through the arts could be valued as a way to increase creative thinking, problem solving and to increase enjoyment, beauty and community. An orientation towards learning about the power of food was also revealed through the active support for local food. This sense of local power and possibilities also came through with a drive for sharing responsibility for the common good. However, some participants indicated interest in wanting to help with environmental issues but were unsure how to best intervene. Other limitations discussed about local learning were the distances from formal education, high rates of illiteracy, issues of isolation and how these elements may undermine health, food and nutrition. Those with insufficient leisure time and/or money often found themselves unable to be engaged in learning events and/or cultural activities.

#### 4.1.4. Political Influence and Democratic Engagement

The many ideas that were shared about democratic engagement could be summarized as: citizen efficacy and engagement; geographical setting and self-directedness; government regulations and the regional share of public investments.

Like the economy, democracy and how it ought to operate in Tatamagouche and Advocate Harbour were contested territory. Members felt mixed on the degrees of, or opportunities to, influence government. A couple divergent views in Tatamagouche offered these perspectives, “And all government’s subsidies, government’s programs, they all go from the county lines, back to the city. So, we are stuck-up here and we are nothing. We are too far from centers to the certain things. It’s a problem.” Another resident shared, “Perhaps we’re politically and geographically isolated, and that’s our advantage. That helps. That’s a good issue. We are far enough away from the centre that we have to fend for ourselves.” The geographic location of these communities had positive and negative bearings. For Tatamagouche residents, they raised the issue that being poised on the edge of three counties may prompt a sense of being ignored and isolated and with less influence. Or it could foster local independence as well as intimacy. Participants identified governmental regulations as a cause of great strife for small operators in tourism, forestry, fishing, and farming. There were some inconsistencies. Some identified too



much government oversight while others pointed to there not being enough. Examples were the complaint of inadequate monitoring of what was dumped into the ocean or why school children were no longer allowed to pick up debris on the beach. Even though members were proud of their entrepreneurship, they still called upon governments to invest in local initiatives and small operations. Each community voiced concerns about an insufficient rural share of public investments and an aggravation with the short term and disjointed thinking involved in government investments. An example of a disconnect was illustrated with the point that if government transportation departments were to work with the tourism departments this could mean that essential roads would become paved which could significantly improve tourism in the area.

Residents felt that some influence could be exerted on politicians, since they were often known to community members, yet the distance of other elected officials was quite remote. Advocate Harbour's participants in particular indicated significant success in lobbying for and securing funding from all levels of government for library supports, a seawall development project and other initiatives. Similar levels to other parts of Canada, these communities described low voting levels and proposed that citizens may be discouraged by a sense of little influence on the centres of power. Much evidence suggested local consciousness and concern about issues such as: illiteracy; food insecurity; poverty; fracking; water contamination and pollution; and deforestation.

#### 4.1.5. Community Sustainability and Environmental Wellness

Participants identified diverse challenges and opportunities with community sustainability, that could be summarized as: environmental pollution and climate change; natural assets; reducing, reusing, and recycling.

Some participants in Advocate Harbour stated they were concerned about harbour pollution and the loss of the clamming industry. Representatives of the government's environmental office were asked to, but did not, come to investigate why the harbor was closed to clamming. The introduction of fish farms in the area also received mixed reactions due to concerns with pollution.

Many participants in both areas wanted to protect as well as enjoy the unique blend of natural features, topography, seaside vantage points, recent and prehistoric gems like the famous dinosaur fossils. There was also concern for tree growths and fish stocks, among others. A resident in Advocate Harbour suggested that the beauty was so spectacular that people fell in love with the environment and then with each other. Other gems, like the lighthouse, were valuable but some feared they may be lost due to costs of significant upkeep.

Some attention was paid to ways to reduce energy use by more carpooling, insulating and using less space in large homes, along with having one's own garden, walking and cycling. As well, participants identified many obstacles to sustainability, i.e., extensive commuting, reliance on non-renewables and the amount of consumption of all goods. Examples were provided of both communities practicing canning in season, storing produce in root cellars and sharing excess when in season. As with the other topics, residents had varying points of view on the willingness and capability of members to reduce, reuse and take appropriate action. One Tatamagouche

participant stated, “But I think people are environmentally concerned here.” Another added, “But what can we do collectively as a community that moves all of us a little bit further? I’m not totally sure that the whole community is on board with environmental stuff.”

#### 4.1.6. Vitality and Health

A summary of the issues raised about health and vibrancy were: the provision of health services; innovations in health care; determinants of health; and promoting the natural assets.

Maintaining good health, like other themes, appeared to be complicated. In the past, Advocate Harbour experienced frequent changes with their nurse practitioner and as a result several local residents went out of the area to secure consistency in their health care. While serving individual needs, it caused some to fear the erosion of a sustainable, local practitioner as they wanted to retain a nurse in the area. Interestingly, in both communities, a sizable number of participants stated they were responsible for their own health. One participant put it like this, “... how to organize your own health and not be just a buoy on the water, subject to the health system but taking charge.” Participants recommended remote style health services to reduce travel requirements from the isolated rural towns. They called for creative supports for mental health. Resilience and innovation in health delivery were exemplified in the Tatamagouche area by using the example that they had one of the highest rates and durations of breast feeding in the province. Credit here was given to local leaders and public support for this practice.

Evidence of illiteracy, income disparity and poverty were discussed in both areas. Location and costs of accessing services were identified as impediments. Members of the community either experienced social supports or social isolation, which in turn dramatically influenced their health. The availability of activities for adult women and children were appreciated but concerns were raised about suitable events for youth and men. The many natural assets, including the beautiful scenery were thought to be helpful in encouraging healthy living through enjoying the healthy environment, fresh air, and outdoor activities like biking, walking, hiking, canoeing, kayaking,

#### 4.1.7. Food, Fishing, Farming, and Forestry

Food discussions generated a great deal of interest and content. Threads that permeated the conversations were: local food; food and health; fair trade in food; food security; fun with food; and revenue through natural resources.

Residents indicated that over recent years, more attention had been placed on local growth and consumption of good food. Many homes in both communities had gardens and shared the excess from the harvest. Some focus group participants were discussing ways to increase vegetable and fruit consumption in the local community and to promote healthy food choices at a truer costs of quality foods. A sign that was raised as hopeful was that more fresh vegetables and fruit like local blueberries and strawberries were being sold and bought at the Tatamagouche Farmers’ Market. Members in Advocate Harbour noted that residents could buy fish right off the boats. Some women reiterated the importance of canning and freezing fresh foods for the winter.

As in other issues, there were divergent views among participants. While some participants offered a critique of the high reliance on external suppliers and high food miles for Nova Scotians to receive food, others pointed to the role of industrialization and globalization directing

food delivery systems. Some members in the community said food costs were too high while others were willing to pay more for local foods. When farmers inform consumers about the investments of time and resources, more consumers become willing to pay a fairer price so that the farmers could earn more than minimum wage. One respondent summed up the issues like this: “There’s a lot of research too about the true cost of cheap food and the cost to the environment, the cost to so many things and obviously the cost to livelihoods and rural communities when people can’t sustain the life on a fair price.”

Participants complained about the increased availability and promotions of foods dense in fat and sugar yet deplete of nutrients. In contrast, healthier foods had a higher price but were less available. These contradictions, participants suggested, were feeding food and health insecurity. Insecurity around food prompted the development of a food bank in Tatamagouche. One supporter of the food bank stated, “For the people using the food bank in this community, it would be nice to have some sort of kitchen, where you do community meals and you help people and have a party so that people can come and learn proper nutrition and proper eating and have fun doing it.” Both communities offered organized monthly luncheons or community events. Those who went to the market were able to partake of fun social events while also trying out new approaches in making good food. In Advocate Harbour there was some interest in a food coop for the swapping of excess vegetables.

As self-employment was a common trend in these regions, those who created ways to add value to their food businesses may have increased their income security. Participants discussed that some area residents generated income from fish but no longer from clams. Revenues in small operations in farming, fisheries, or forestry netted a partial living but not sufficient as an annual wage. Also fewer younger farmers were poised to take over the farms as farmers age and retire. Participants in both communities stated that some of the land in their region was underutilized and could be a source for food production. As one poignant statement predicts, “If we are going to rebuild our rural communities, the best entry point is food.” This now brings us to our discussion and recommendations arising from the community input.

## 5. Discussion and Recommendations

The recommendations that emerged from this study may be arranged around the themes of: obstacles to engagement, conditions for improving engagement, learning culture and entrepreneurship as well as rurality and beauty of the physical location.

*Obstacles to Community Engagement* - Possible impediments for community involvement for the elderly, youth, and lower income residents were identified as the cost of events, and a lack of transportation and of awareness of opportunities or desire to get involved. The issue of illiteracy was notable in the region as it would influence all other areas of life such as health, community engagement and employment or income. The development of a food bank was a significant expression of a growing variation of levels of income and self-sufficiency in this rural area. Concerns with volunteer burnout also posed challenges as a result of many of the same people extending themselves to several forms of volunteering. Issues of isolation and loneliness were shared remarks by participants. Also, there were some subtle signs of judgmentalism and classism in statements made about the ways of living, making food choices, and engaging in the community.

Elements of the economy and financial power around Tatamagouche and Advocate were contested space. One's financial power may be more influential than one's contributions. For example, "Money can buy you a name on a building even though local contributors of significance may not even have the least of recognition." As well some development efforts in the region involved seeking gas deposits underground and underwater and many are contesting it.

*Conditions for Improving Engagement-* As described by various authors, community members were inclined to become more engaged and committed to community where they could shape their own environment without control by or dependence on external forces (Beesley, Macintosh, & Robinson, 1996; Halseth & Williams, 1999; Maybery, Pope, Hodgins, Hitchnor, & Shepherd, 2009). In the work of some researchers, they appeared to find a connection between a higher quality of life with a lower level of consumption (Martin, 2012). People tended to support one another's ideas and to collaborate on projects. The participants suggested that people came together in times of need. Such community formation may be viewed as a parallel to religious organizations as the center of community life. One member stated this new motivation and approach to engaging in community as, "It's about community. Not charity." While community conflict was not raised as an issue, the discussion of *deep disagreements* suggested the presence and value of abilities to navigate differing points was viewed as valuable.

While participants in the study viewed themselves as generally positive and interconnected, this may not be said for these communities at large. As in the article noted above, Tatamagouche had been the focus of other studies (Hanavan & Cameron, 2012), and such forms of feedback may help with positive identity formation. Other recommendations might include supporting young people in their plans to go away, but also proactively encouraging them to return to enjoy a high-quality life in the years ahead.

*Rurality and Beauty* -Participants seemed cognizant and appreciative of the infrastructure in their communities. Appreciation of rurality may be needed by agents of federal and provincial government services who often do not develop a rural focus. For example, the recent revisions to employment insurance eligibility included the necessity to travel an hour to find work. This added costs of time and money to households and may have the effect of contributing to rural outmigration and depopulation. To address rural and distant concerns, residents recommend rural health assistance like "remote health".

The physical spaces of these communities, their natural and enduring beauty, were seen as treasures to protect. Many of these rural residents were hopeful that people – tourists and community members – would appreciate and enjoy the place, value the history, celebrate the stories of the people, or perhaps invent new ideas for activities. Surprisingly, leisure was not a term used by participants but these areas seemed like superb places to have some! A sense of isolation due to physical location was not considered a disadvantage from a community perspective but it arose as a key factor in the quality of democracy and governance, and as an impediment to healthcare for isolated seniors and residents due to lack of transportation.

*Learning Culture and Entrepreneurship* -Entrepreneurship appeared common place as many in the communities were active in their own businesses and supporting other locals with employment. Entrepreneurship was not necessarily a topic that was formally taught but was learned through watching others and from a willingness to exhibit innovation, risk taking, and calculated investment. “[There is] a lot of self-sufficiency where people know how to patch things together and make it work and not on the government’s dime” (Advocate member 2012). “...this is an area for the most part that industry has left behind. So people have become self-motivated – so I think when you do come here that’s – that’s what this place offers. There’s kind of an aura you can try something because there hasn’t been this parental figure that says, you know, ‘we’ll take care of you’” (Tatamagouche member 2012). Youth workshops on entrepreneurship and innovation within the communities could be beneficial for these rural communities in many ways. Apart from educational purposes, it could also get youth thinking of potential self-employment opportunities locally or even community development opportunities. Developing and promoting green economy opportunities would fit the entrepreneurial and innovative personalities of Advocate Harbour and Tatamagouche.

The average age of farmers in the area is increasing. Fewer young people are taking over the farms. Many elderly farmers retire and the land then becomes underutilized without a new farmer on the land. The ‘lack of interest’ from the younger generation in farming could be due to the inability to access farmland rather than their lack of desire to farm. Various departments of government may be encouraged to support innovative approaches to support younger farmers taking up farm businesses in the region. Incentives may be offered to support land acquisition or supports made for start-up, equipment or other capital expenses. Personal harvesting from fisheries and forestry remain possible and some are proving these ways of life to be sustainable. Efforts that employ local labour and use local knowledge, like forging direct connections between producers and consumers of food are recommended. Tatamagouche, Advocate Harbour and the governments that serve them, should be encouraged to build upon Lyson’s (2004) concept of *civic agriculture* and our notion of *civic commerce* that foster more locally-organized economic-social-cultural systems.

Many forms of learning-by-doing arise through numerous opportunities for informal and non-formal education. People volunteering and participating in many of the community or cultural events were exposed to new concepts and practices. Experience becomes a profound teacher. Flourishing arts and cultural activities require support and encouragement for people of all ages to become interested in them. Ensuring arts in the schools should be valued for enhancing problem solving and decision making. A recommendation would be to develop a way for community members to announce events in the schools to help engage more interest in the arts and culture. Another suggestion for rural communities to ignite greater interest in community initiatives and shared responsibility would be to embrace the identity of “a learning community”. This could involve regular events of sharing one another’s knowledge or inviting in speakers. It could be a year-round activity like the Summer Folk School. Additional paths for learning should also involve experiential learning. For example, working together to develop a small community garden for seniors or to match experienced tradespersons with high school aged youth should be encouraged. Such efforts may harvest greater abilities in the community and allow youth to explore options working locally in the trades.

The community members seemed to be inclined to spark awareness and ignite conscientiousness towards sustainable paths including harnessing renewable energies, like wind, burning wood, as well as reducing personal consumption habits. Aside from the role of social media, the role of local media/or media in general in influencing community and awareness of community building did not come up in these discussions. The role of social media, not surprisingly, was understated as there were few young people present.

Synergistic approaches were orchestrated by the community with beneficial outcomes. Advocate's economic development initiatives and Tatamagouche's Summer Free School and a kitchen-table learning series on agriculture were programs (Hanavan and Cameron 2012) could inspire other locations to channel resources for community enhancement. More collaborative, multi-government interventions are recommended to support local enhancements and synergistic efforts, and bring support for and attention to positive results in communities like Advocate Harbour and Tatamagouche.

### 5.1.Directions for Further Research

While not a policy paper, it is valuable to note that the effectiveness of recommendations and applications may be constrained by unchanged political or governmental systems or by an unyielding commitment to predetermined economic, social, political, or environmental paradigms. This study makes no suggestions about social and sustainable change as these are beyond the scope of this research. But the authors recommend considering these in future studies. Research collaborations will be pursued to build upon this study, to further investigate relevant policy domains and interdisciplinary practice for knowledge creation in rural well-being. Further extended, this research potentially could be used to inform professional practice of rural planners, community economic development officers, greenspace advocates and regulators, agro-economists, and health and lifestyle practitioners. Additionally, the feedback to these communities may reinvigorate citizen efforts for living well in Atlantic Canada and offer ideas to increase the attractiveness of their small towns and rural areas.

In future research we recommend applying measurement mechanisms to pursue more in-depth research on well-being. The following two quotes from the CIW website underscore the importance of considering what we measure. "What we count reflects our values as society, and determines what makes it onto government policy agendas. Governments cannot lead responsibly, with vision, or in an informed way, without a full range of social, economic, and environmental measures of progress and value at hand" (Colman, 2011). And further to our intention of improving well-being, "What we measure gets talked about; what gets talked about becomes part of the public debate; what becomes part of the public debate leads to social change. That's what's at stake in measuring what matters" (Mackenzie, 2011). Subsequent studies are planned that deconstruct the notion of well-being into the large sub-categories of resiliency, vibrancy, prosperity, and sustainability. Additional contributions to the field may be the formation of a campaign to inspire all sectors, including government, to value and incorporate additional economic indicators, like the various measures for well-being. A campaign for the Canada Well-Being Measurement Act was put forward in 2001. Among other actions this Bill-268 would require a Standing Committee to "carry out a study to assist it to make recommendations respecting the definition, development and periodic publication of a set of indicators of the economic, social and environmental well-being of people, communities and

ecosystems in Canada” (Parliamentary Business, Private Member’s Bill, 2001). Further political support is required for it to become Canadian Law.

## 6. Conclusion

Consideration is needed of the roles various agents play in rural well-being. While the onus is on the endogenous, local residents to engage, innovate, and support initiatives, for sustainability and vibrancy other exogenous agents also have roles to play. The intention of this pilot research project was to test out Appreciative Inquiry approach and refine our study on the factors that impact rural well-being. Two case studies were used to formulate a broader, multi-year study that would help to identify results that then could inform policies to help improve rural residents’ lives and sustain and celebrate rural life in Atlantic Canada. These areas both afford possibilities for high-quality social connections, high-quality food and environment, and a high quality of life.

This study proposed ideas for greater well-being in the form of resiliency, prosperity, vibrancy, and sustainability in rural communities. “There is more vitality than funding; that’s the way you want it...” (Advocate resident, 2012). Qualities that seem beneficial for well-being are community members who are: hard working, hospitable; compassionate; justice oriented; economical; entrepreneurial; self-reliant; stewardship; playful conscientious; and who express and receive gratitude.

While many sub-communities in these rural areas of Atlantic Canada may contend with income insecurity, participants suggest that their quality of life is high, while incomes may be low. In these two Atlantic Canada rural communities, the quality of life is rich and deep.

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