



GROUNDSWELL 2014

Funded by Vancouver Island University through a VIU Research Award
to Alison Taplay, Faculty of Health and Human Services

Post-Conference Summary Report March 15, 2014

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Data Collection

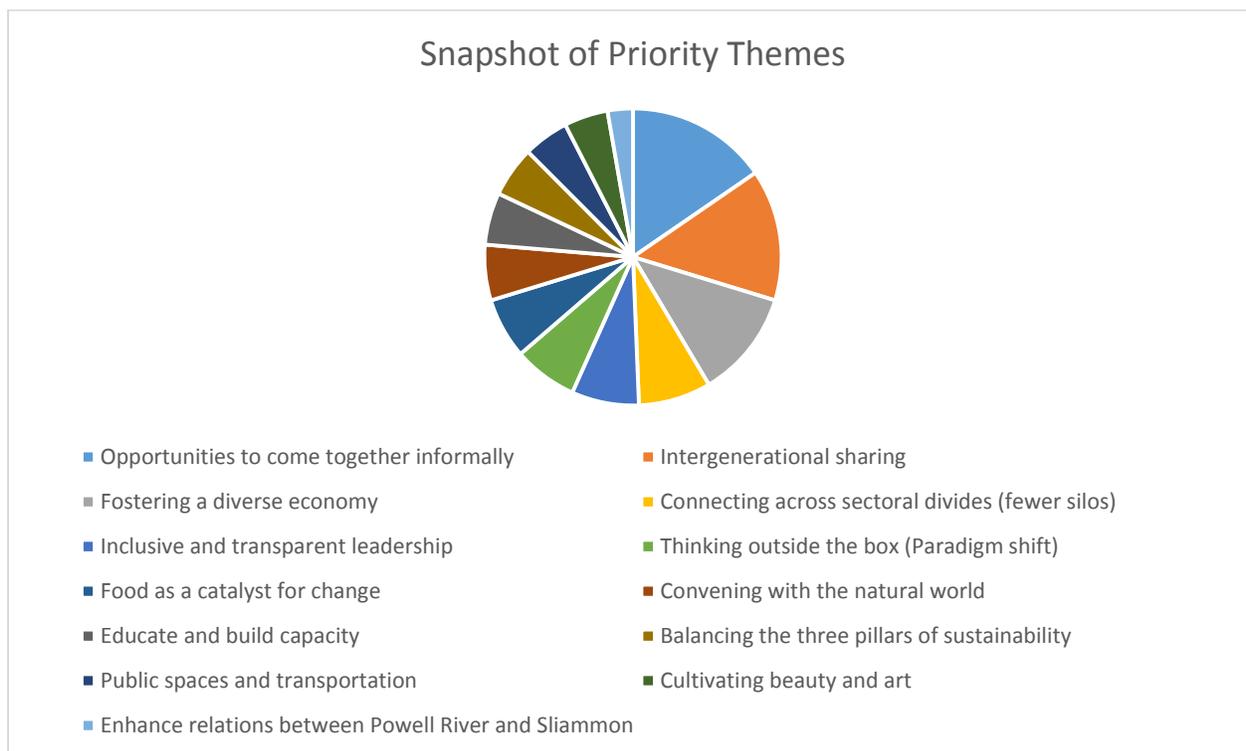
The 2014 Groundswell conference was designed to be as accessible as possible, and registration was free. This, coupled with the fact that some presenters and volunteers did not register, means there is no certainty that we have accurate information about who attended. 161 people pre-registered for the conference, and our best estimates (based on food consumption and seating space) suggest this is a good approximate number of attendees. Among pre-registrants there were 104 females and 57 males. We know, based on presenters and volunteers that the conference attracted a diverse range of citizens including: high school students from the Coast Mountain Academy program at Brooks; university students from the School and Community Support Worker program at VIU; elected officials and staff from the City of Powell River and the Regional District; teachers in training, elders and other members of the Tla'amin First Nation; representatives from the business community, the arts community, the agricultural community, and the non-profit sector in the region; and a number of other self-selecting individuals who have an interest in the conference theme.



Although it is clear that the information collected does not represent the values and intentions of a complete cross-section of the people in this region, it is valuable information nonetheless as it represents the views of an important segment of our community. The community members who participated in this conference demonstrated a keen interest in the wellbeing of the people in this region – not only by spending a full day participating in this event, but also by the range of initiatives they are already involved in in the community about which they spoke. We strongly believe that the ideas they shared are powerful and worthy of serious consideration when decisions are being made that impact this region.

The Groundswell conference was a participatory event, and included opportunities to collect data that was generated by participants themselves. The morning included several opening addresses, two panel presentations, a keynote presentation, and remarks by Tla'amin elders. Following these activities, there was a 'world café' which brought people together into small and large group discussions in order to synthesize their own ideas with what they'd experienced so far throughout the day. The remainder of this report is informed by the data that was collected through the world café process, as well as all of the material generated by the graphic facilitator, who documented all conference proceedings, including workshops. It should be noted that there were also important discussions and information sharing that took place at the information tables during lunch and at other times throughout the day that unfortunately could not be captured in this report.

Priority Themes



The priority themes identified in the snapshot above were not pre-determined, but emerged from the data collected. The following discussion will explore each of these in more detail, drawing content directly from the notes made by participants in the conference. Each section will include mention of emergent action items that arose. The action items are not linked to particular community members or groups (ie. Government, teachers, service providers, business owners, young people, etc). Readers of this document are encouraged to consider where they see themselves in relation to the items listed and how they might participate in some of these actions, moving forward.

The themes are addressed in order of priority below, based on the data collected. This order was determined by the number of times the theme was noted in the data collected. While important, other items that appeared in the data collected are not considered to be priority themes due to the fact that they were mentioned much less frequently.

It is often the case that priority themes captured in research projects fall into distinct categories or focus areas. But it is worth noting that most of the themes generated at this conference emphasize the need for *connections among existing efforts to be established*, rather than privileging certain existing focus areas or developing new priorities. Thus, rather than being read as distinct focus areas, it might be useful instead to read these priority themes for the overlaps and points of connections that exist among and within them. It is not the identification of - *but the relations among* - various focus areas that seemed to be of greatest significance for conference participants. Moving forward as a community with this in mind could open space for

new possibilities in our future, as it can enable us to see how one action could potentially meet multiple goals, enabling us to do more with less.

Discussion of Priority Themes

Opportunities to come together informally

Participants valued the opportunity to gather at the Groundswell conference in large part because it was a chance to connect with people and have informal conversations. Many of them noted they would like to have more such gatherings. They also identified a desire for other opportunities to cultivate relationships, get to know each other, and informally convene. This was noted as significant because it can facilitate our ability to effectively work together as a community towards our common goals. Participants stated that kindness, generosity, compassion, respect, safety, wellbeing, and understanding can also be cultivated through such simple means.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: hosting another Groundswell conference, holding other events like the Groundswell conference, community dinners, community gardens, community conversations, supporting a youth resource centre, holding inclusive community events at low cost, celebrations, pot lucks, and more.



Intergenerational sharing

Participants expressed deep appreciation for the wisdom of both youth and elders, and a desire for more opportunities for us all to connect with and learn from each other. This is seen not only as significant in terms of cultivating healthy relations in our community, but also as a way of accessing existing knowledge, passion, energy, and assets when considering how to move forward. There were many remarks about the competence of young people and the need to create space for their important perspectives.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: involving youth in decision making in various organizations (including the School Board and City Council), learning from elders about the old ways to inform how we face our current challenges, engaging with the Sliammon Youth Council, making the region more appealing for youth and young families (by supporting small businesses, arts and culture, job creation, etc), supporting family caregivers, supporting the youth resource centre, offering more recreational opportunities for young people, ensuring accessibility for elders (including transportation, access to buildings and parks, and connections with community), investing more in youth, connecting elders with youth groups, creating mentorship opportunities, establishing multigenerational classrooms (ie. DIGS),

elected officials spending time where youth are, integrating elders' wisdom into the education system, and more.

Fostering a diverse economy



Participants expressed concern about the economy of the region, and explored a wide range of possibilities. There seemed to be an underlying belief that rather than seeking a single major industry to fill the economic role the mill has historically played, we can move forward by fostering economic diversity. This does not only mean investing in a diverse range of things; it can also mean widening our understandings of viable economic development to include capitalist practices, cooperatives, bartering, sharing, and other economic practices. Many participants noted that diversity can build resiliency; thinking about our economy in these terms might increase our ability to weather global economic storms and enhance each of our abilities to contribute to the creation of our local economy. Tapping into the skills and other assets that already exist among us was seen as a way to facilitate the development of a healthy economic future.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: sharing resources, building bridges between local businesses and organizations in ways that are mutually beneficial (as Townsite Brewing does), creating sustainable and ethical business models, local ownership of BC ferries, developing cottage industries, enhancing barter skills, paying family caregivers a living wage to recognize their contribution to the health care system, managing waste (including commercial compost), promoting tourism differently (creating recreation packages and ecotourism, for example), creating cooperatively owned value-added wood products logged locally, increasing the focus on agriculture, creating incentives to support local businesses and farmers, collaborating across the region around sustainable food production, recognizing people as resources, developing cooperative ventures and social enterprises, supporting alternatives to the cash economy (including Powell River Dollars, time banks, skill sharing, gift economy, and barter/trade arrangements), exploring e-commerce (internet based jobs), creating incentives for local investment in small businesses, developing an art academy summer program and/or residence program, restricting the development of farm lands, supporting small scale (community) forestry, developing housing cooperatives and collectives, creating incentives to shop locally, having inclusive hiring practices, and more.

Connecting across sectoral divides (fewer silos)

While a lot of important work is being done by non-profit organizations, special interest groups, businesses, elected officials, and engaged citizens, participants noted repeatedly that there needs to be better cross-sectoral communication and collaboration. Engaging across divides can help

us to more effectively and efficiently enact many of the changes that are already being pursued. It can ensure time, resources, and energy aren't spent reinventing the wheel or duplicating efforts. It can also enable partnerships to emerge that might increase momentum and alleviate human resources or financial burdens people feel when they are working in silos.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: developing protocols for improved communications among groups, encouraging youth representation on all significant decision making bodies (including government, boards of directors, PRREDS, SD47), creating opportunities for citizens, governments, and organizations to share ideas and create concrete collaborations and partnerships, connecting different pockets of people together, developing more community media for sharing and gathering ideas (print, web, TV), hosting world café events on a regular basis, regularly having a 'think tank,' and more.



Inclusive and transparent leadership

Participants in the conference prioritized both grassroots initiatives and government led activities, and saw leadership as something that can take many forms. In addition to recognizing the various kinds of leadership, they identified participatory decision making, accountability, openness, and transparency as important priorities. Conference participants are interested in being engaged in decision-making and leadership, but would like these processes to be made more accessible. This includes inviting people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds into these processes. Widening the scope of who we consider to be leaders and increasing communication and visibility among us are important priorities.



Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: inviting everyone to participate in decision-making processes (youth, families, elders, those with special needs, newcomers, etc), developing more collaborative leadership and decision making models, facilitating public engagement

processes, mapping existing assets, adding measures to existing charters (such as the sustainability charter) so they can inform action, providing annual updates on existing charters, creating community forums, developing more social policies around local issues, sharing more concrete information, ensuring diverse representation in local government, creating opportunities for informal and proactive engagement between citizens and decision-makers, using a common vision to drive our activities, ensuring fiscal responsibility in City Hall, one government, elected officials going to where youth spend time to connect informally, and more.

Thinking outside the box (Paradigm shift)

Many participants expressed that a new way of thinking is necessary for our community to move ahead in ways that are healthy and sustainable; old models will keep us replicating old patterns. They articulated that opening our minds, inviting in new ideas, practicing mindfulness, and thinking creatively are important if we wish to be able to embrace new possibilities, and bring ourselves to a place of action. For some, this was described as a paradigm shift. There was concern that without such a shift, real and lasting change may not be possible. The paradigm shift was described in various ways: thinking outside the box, focussing on positives instead of problems, intentionally updating Powell River's identity, and starting with existing assets. The new paradigm described seems to be one of celebrating and starting with what we have, rather than focussing energy and resources on what we lack. Still, critical engagement was considered to be an important part of this process.

Many of the **action items** that appear in other sections of this discussion can be seen as contributing to this priority theme, particularly those that involve cross-pollination of ideas. Additional action items include: listening to each other, creating opportunities for inspiration, 'unpacking' the meanings of many of the words we use, acting outside of normalized practices (ie. 'Doctors without Boxes'), turning collective ideas into movements, and more.



Food as a catalyst for change

Food was prioritized not only in terms of health and nutrition, but also as a tool for community building, economic revitalization, and long-term sustainability of the region. Conference participants noted that bringing people together around food is one of the ways we can facilitate some of the priority themes listed above and below, such as intergenerational sharing, connecting across divides, fostering a diverse economy, balancing the three pillars of sustainability, and cultivating beauty and art. Thinking and acting creatively when it comes to food production,

distribution, and consumption enables us to approach these priority themes as interconnected, rather than in competition with one another. Participants see great potential when it comes to food as a catalyst for change in this region. Becoming more food independent can also reduce our vulnerability to the outside world and can increase our capacities to provide for each other, and the natural world in this region over the long term.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: using a permaculture approach to production, drawing knowledge and practices from old ways (mentorship around food), creating more community gardens and supporting those that exist, developing more urban agriculture, protecting farm lands, developing commercial composting, encouraging and subsidizing small farms, creating a central local food hub, increasing the focus on (large and small scale) agriculture in the

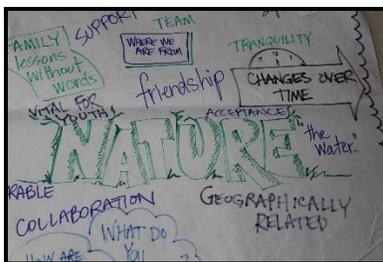


region, incorporating local food and permaculture into the school curriculum, collaborating across the region and among generations around food production and cottage industries, creating better incentives for people to support local producers, creating more opportunities to share ideas and skills around food, creating ecovillages within the municipality, facilitating the exchange of goods, and more.

Convening with the natural world

Many participants choose to live in this region because it is rural, slow, and beautiful. They noted that seeing ourselves as part of the ecosystem in which we are living means we have a responsibility to protect it. Just as we rely on it for our livelihood; it also relies on us. Protecting existing opportunities to convene with the natural world, and providing new ones, was a priority theme for many participants. Some of them note that since we tend to protect that which we think is beautiful, these opportunities to convene with nature will increase the likelihood that we will hold onto and nurture these natural assets for future generations. This holds value for individuals in terms of physical and emotional health as well as the long-term sustainability of the region. It also is one of the ways the area is made appealing for people who move to this region, and therefore is also an important component of our economic wellbeing.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: growing food, creating land conservancies, developing local stewardship of forest lands, creating more green spaces, building more trails in the city, promoting ecotourism, creating more recreational opportunities for youth, supporting experiential and outdoor education (such as Coast Mountain Academy and DIGS), learning about local traditions, celebrating our natural beauty, and more.



Educate and build capacity

While many of the priority themes address appreciating the knowledge that already exists, mobilizing this knowledge is also important. Participants noted the importance of creating opportunities for deeper learning, critical engagement, and transfer of information. Educating ourselves and each other around such things as food production, diversity, diverse abilities, inclusion, traditions and new ways was a significant theme of discussion at the conference. Educating and building capacity is a way to ensure more of us can be active participants in whatever processes take place as we move forward as a community.



Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: holding community conversations and world cafes, creating mentorship opportunities between elders and children, ‘unpacking’ ideas such as inclusion, mapping assets that exist, offering more (collaboratively developed) programs

that teach life skills, continuing to support the accessibility of online learning, enhancing community participation in the education system (and vice versa), creating an arts school, developing a web-based resource directory, teaching computer skills to elders, critically engage with what’s happening in our community, and more.

Balancing the three pillars of sustainability

Sustainability is often spoken of in terms of economic, environmental, and social wellbeing. The participants at Groundswell articulated a commitment to balancing these three priorities and seeing how they can in fact contribute to one another, rather than understanding them as competing interests. If one of these three pillars is prioritized over the others, then the general sustainability of this region will be compromised. Participants placed emphasis on the place where these three pillars intersect and work together.

Many of the **action items** that appear in other sections of this discussion can be seen as contributing to this priority theme, particularly those under the headings ‘fostering a diverse economy’ and ‘food as a catalyst for change.’ Additional action items include: using the sustainability charter to inform action, creating a Powell River sustainability group, checklisting the charter in terms of balancing the three pillars, and more.



Public spaces and transportation

Participants identified access to public spaces and transportation as important priorities that both serve to reduce isolation. Public spaces that allow for informal connections was seen as an important aspect of a healthy, democratic, and vibrant community. Access in this sense means eliminating both economic and physical barriers that might exclude people. Transportation was discussed both in terms of getting around within our community and getting people or supplies in and out of the community. Increasing transportation options can reduce our reliance on the outside world while at the same time increasing our access to it. It can also contribute to some of the other priority themes such as increasing our ability to come together informally, balancing the three pillars of sustainability, and convening with nature.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: developing a cooperative to enable citizen ownership of BC ferries, developing a cooperative to enable citizen ownership of BC forestry, cultivating green spaces and community gardens, recreating infrastructure (such as bus stops, shops, and parks) so elders and others with limited mobility can be more engaged, making the ferries part of the highway system, implementing equal fares for ferries throughout the province, developing alternative transportation methods, improving public transit north and south of town, creating our own ferry system, enhancing the airport, creating safer cycling infrastructure and culture, having better transportation services connecting

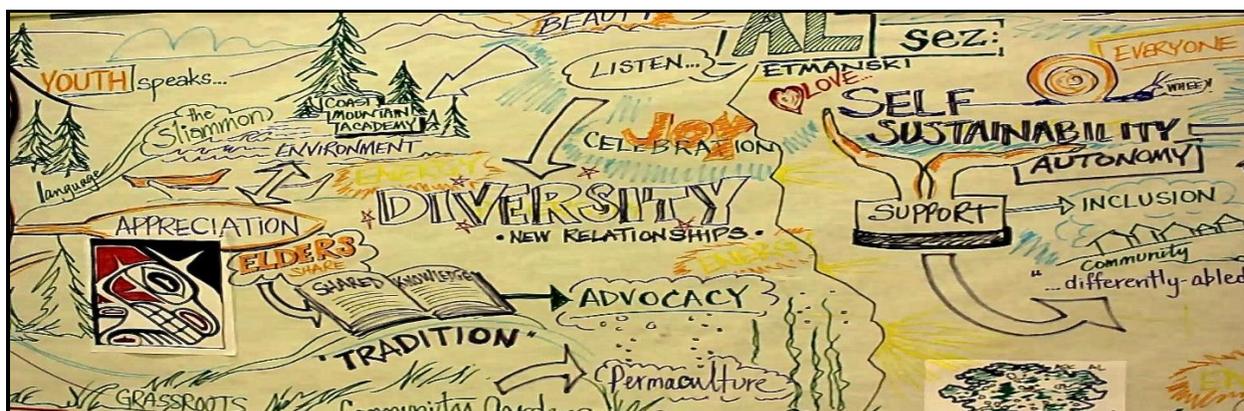


Powell River and Sliammon, building a road out of town, funding the youth resource centre, implementing a tax to discourage the use of oversized personal vehicles, building more community trails, building a neutral meeting place (ie. Gazebo) for people to meet, improving (and repainting) street crossings, and more.

Cultivating beauty and art

Rather than understanding the cultivation of beauty and art as a luxury, participants at Groundswell noted that it can play a crucial role in the development of a sustainable community. It was noted that people are more inclined to be lifted up into action through inspiration than through fear. Aesthetic beauty can also foster the conditions for love and connections among us. Beauty of the natural world, noted above, is part of this equation, but a lot of participants also noted the significant role arts and culture play in cultivating social and economic wellbeing. In addition to the fact that creative engagement can lead us to new ways of seeing and interacting with the world and each other, it also serves an important function when it comes to education, economic development, and innovation.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: cultivating green spaces and gardens, preserving the natural world through land conservancies, developing artist residency programs (for musicians, writers, filmmakers, and artists) with events and public showings, investing money in planting edible streetscapes, investing in parks and beautifying streets (ie. Malaspina art benches), teaching art and music to children, developing more art infrastructure (such as a Summer School of the Arts), creating more opportunities for young people to engage in the arts, creating a mentorship program between local artists with students, linking local art initiatives with Emily Carr or other universities, creating opportunities for fun and celebration, installing beautiful signs and maps around the region, refurbishing buildings in the historical Townsite area, and more.



Enhance relations between Powell River and Sliammon



Many of the priority themes already addressed focus on building bridges – between community groups, generations, or government with citizenry. But one area in which building bridges was noted as of great significance is between the communities of Powell River and Sliammon. Some participants expressed gratitude for the connections that are already being made and others expressed a

deep interest in doing more to foster opportunities for meaningful relations between these communities. This requires education, information sharing, transportation, culture shifting, openmindedness, self-reflection, and reconciliation. Continuing with the important work that is already taking place when it comes to enhancing relations between Powell River and Sliammon is a priority theme for participants at Groundswell.

Some **action items** that were noted by conference participants include: learning from elders, listening to each other, learning from the youth group in Sliammon, bridging divides through protocols, ensuring diverse representation on decision-making bodies, increasing communication among leaders, improving transit services between Powell River and Sliammon, inviting elders into schools, embracing diversity, pursuing reconciliation, learning the local First Nations history, eliminating barriers, and more.

Conclusion

This collection of priority themes and action items is extensive, and of course within it there are contradictions. Rather than believing we need to reach consensus in order to move forward, we can instead embrace this as an opportunity to move forward drawing strength from the diversity of ideas, values, and practices represented among us. Some of these action items are already being pursued, some could be strengthened by connecting up with others, and some are still waiting to be picked up and carried.

The action items identified will hold different meaning for each of us, depending on our position in the community. For instance, an elected official, a young person, and a business owner will each have different roles to play in relation to any of the items identified in this report. It is up to each of us to find our own places in this bigger picture, depending on our skills and passions.

Participants in the Groundswell conference contributed important ideas, and we wanted to make sure these could be shared with the wider community in order to increase the reach of their contributions. Our hope in publishing this report is to make visible some of the community values and intentions that drive current activity and have the potential to inform future initiatives. Please feel free to share this document with others, draw from it, and consult it when making decisions. This report is one among many concrete outcomes of the Groundswell conference.

