



**Realizing New Economic Futures, One Community at a Time**

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## **Realizing New Economic Futures, One Community at a Time**

**Janet Newbury**

### **Abstract**

As British Columbia, Canada, and the rest of the world scramble in response to fluctuating economic realities, some important lessons are being learned about what does and does not move us in the direction of wellbeing for individuals, families, and communities. From time to time, it is crucial that we step back and take stock of what we know so that our next steps can be as informed as possible. In order to get a clear picture of the material realities at play amidst abstract discussions about policy and economics, it can also be useful to zoom in for a time on a particular place to see how these discussions play out on the ground. Dominant ideas about what good economic development looks like may dramatically differ from the concrete experience of working out what real people in real places need. The current paper examines a range of economic discourses and practices and how they are being taken up in one rural British Columbia community. Powell River is undergoing massive cultural, political, material, and economic changes as the pulp and paper mill downsizes and the community struggles with the big question of ‘what’s next?’. Although all communities face their own sets of unique challenges and assets, exploring possibilities for new economic futures in the context of this community can provide important insights for provincial and national policy discussions and raises important questions about the implications of them for communities.

## The Trend

For democracies to work, we need to know the full consequences of our policy choices. We need to evaluate public policies with the same rigor that we use to evaluate new drug treatments and medical devices.<sup>1</sup>

As the world faces increasing economic fluctuations, we live in constant fear of economic recessions. The popular response to these recessions seems obvious enough: reduce spending on what doesn't generate revenue and increase spending on what does. However, in their book, *The Body Economic*, Stuckler and Basu convincingly assert that “ultimately austerity has failed because it is unsupported by sound logic or data. It is an economic ideology” (p. 140). They demonstrate with compelling evidence from around the world how this approach deepens recessions, while increased social spending in fact *helps* recovery from recessions. Sadly, the trend at the moment seems to follow the ideology rather than the evidence.

Here are a few examples of how our current economic policies impact wellbeing:<sup>2</sup>

### *Child Poverty*

Since our 1989 commitment to eliminating child poverty in Canada, we have actually seen an increase in it. And in British Columbia, the province which has experienced the greatest economic growth, child poverty rates have increased the most. In fact, all over the world, similar trends have occurred: in times and places when economic growth increases, so too does child poverty. And yet we continue to pursue the former as a means to avoid the latter.<sup>3</sup>

It is important not to simplify the complex issue of poverty, as it is also implicated by a number of other factors such as gender, family, geography, age, community, and more. Currently child welfare policies and practices in Canada can be seen as intricately connected to ideological shifts towards neoliberalism.<sup>4</sup>

Even though the European Union and Canada spend approximately the same amount of money on social services, the way they distribute resources differ greatly. Canadian programs are increasingly targeted at ‘high-risk’ individuals and families, whereas countries in which poverty rates are lower are more likely to provide universal supports. Social democratic regimes in Western Europe are more likely to:

support programs promoting the material, educational, emotional, and physical well-being of all its citizens – to prevent poverty ... This is done through the implementation of generous parental or maternity leaves, paid health and family related leaves, employment supports, accessible child care programs, national housing strategies, etc.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stuckler & Basu, 2013, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from the next two sub-sections drawn from Newbury, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Albanese, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Foster & Wharf, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Albanese, 2010, p. 104-105.

This is quite a contrast to Canadian programs (with Quebec being an exception), which are increasingly targeted in their approach and often require that people are truly in dire straits before support can be offered (and sustained support is often contingent on their ongoing 'need' of intervention). This individualized approach to support keeps people trapped in a state of dependency, leaving little room for proactive decisions on either an individual or policy level.

### ***Mental Health***

Policies adopted in British Columbia since 2001 that have had an impact on mental health have included:

... dramatic reductions in government funding for a broad range of social services, tax cuts that have directed the greatest benefit to those who are better off financially, the use of legislation to curtail collective bargaining and roll back wages in the public sector, and strong emphasis on the privatization of service delivery, and downsizing of the provincial civil service.<sup>6</sup>

Although often presented as nothing more than necessary 'economic' measures, policy analysts and academic researchers have "documented the extensive social and personal costs that have flowed from these measures" particularly for women and other marginalized groups (p. 30).

Teghtsoonian draws a connection between these policies and the increased rates of depression. She says:

Since poverty, stress, fatigue, and lack of control over one's environment are all factors understood to be associated with depression, it is arguably the case that these policy directions – and the increased levels of job insecurity, the intensification of work, and the reduced level of public services which they have entailed – have themselves contributed to its widespread prevalence within the province. And the gendered effects of these policies sit suggestively alongside the fact that, as is the case elsewhere, depression is diagnosed twice as often among women as among men in BC. (p. 30)

This is not to be interpreted as a direct causal link; social processes are much more complex than would allow for such an interpretation. It is to say, however, that there is a relationship and that none of these developments occur in isolation from one another; economic development decisions cannot be made in isolation.

### ***Health Care***

An estimated "two thirds of health care expenditures go to the care of people with chronic conditions, and there is evidence that better outcomes and lower costs can be achieved with a greater focus on community (as opposed to hospital) care." This means funds would be well-spent supporting preventative community-based programs that contribute to public health and wellbeing - but such programs are increasingly at risk. The international literature on health care reform provides a great many examples of the importance of "looking beyond the hospital walls

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<sup>6</sup> Teghtsoonian, 2009, p. 31.

when trying to resolve wait time, quality and efficiency issues in hospital care” and reducing the burden on hospitals – the most expensive part of the health care system.<sup>7</sup>

In 2011, the Wait Time Alliance concluded that the most important action that could be taken to improve timely access to both emergency and elective surgical services is ensuring “access to appropriate community care services.” Evidence from BC and beyond shows that “hospital admissions could be significantly reduced by establishing a more effective system of care in the community for people with chronic conditions and complex needs.”<sup>8</sup>

Nova Scotia’s *Genuine Progress Index* recognizes and measures the interrelations among multiple aspects of community life (including employment, education, and crime as well as social supports and stress) and public health. For example, “the epidemiological literature points to higher levels of sickness, disability, and premature death among the unemployed, and to the close association between high levels of literacy and good health outcomes.” The GPI asserts that “the evidence quite clearly shows that investments that reduce preventable chronic diseases and risk behaviours will produce a very substantial rate of return and long-term benefits to Nova Scotians.”<sup>9</sup>

All of that said, community-based interventions - such as community resource centres and family resource centres – that serve the preventative functions of reducing isolation and enhancing wellbeing continue to face the prospects of severe funding cuts and closures<sup>10</sup> in British Columbia and the rest of Canada while the burden on hospitals grows. It is clear that there are direct links between social supports and improved health outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

### ***And More***

Similar explorations can be conducted in terms of public education,<sup>12</sup> child care,<sup>13</sup> transportation<sup>14</sup> and other public services. Even though wealth in Canada has increased between the years 1999 and 2012, we have not seen an equitable distribution of this wealth. 66% of this increase has moved to the hands of the wealthiest 20% of Canadians.<sup>15</sup> Thus there is no strong reason to believe that prioritizing economic growth is best for the majority of Canadians, and there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that it actually serves to increase the disparities among us and weaken our economic and social systems. Social spending, on the other hand, decreases gaps between rich and poor, which brings more of us to positions from which we can be active and contributing citizens rather than dependent members of society. *This* is in fact what brings about both economic and social prosperity.

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, McGregor, Ivanova & Kinkaid, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, McGregor, Ivanova & Kinkaid, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Pannozzo & Colman, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> See for examples: <http://www.canada.com/story.html?id=f5c817bd-5fa8-4be6-9c9a-8d7016e393bc>, <http://www.prpeak.com/articles/2012/07/13/news/doc4ffcc96d97739459455381.txt>, <http://www.prpeak.com/articles/2013/01/28/community/doc50ff3ee36f72b719752605.txt>,

<sup>11</sup> Lansdowne, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Nussbaum, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Matthews & Schmit, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Burwell, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> MacDonald, 2014.

So while we are repeatedly being sent the message that the fiscally responsible measure is to cut back on social spending and invest where revenue is generated (such as resource extraction),<sup>16</sup> the truth seems to be otherwise. In fact worldwide, when faced with recessions, “governments that have *increased* public-sector spending have seen faster economic recoveries, which in turn helps them to grow out of debt.”<sup>17</sup>

### Some Responses

What other possibilities exist? How might we move forward in a way that is more productive?

#### *Community Economies*

According to J.K. Gibson-Graham and the Community Economies Collective,<sup>18</sup> as citizens we all co-create our economy by the way we live our lives. This means other economic realities are not only possible, but already exist. Through decades of participatory action research, they have demystified the economy and grounded it in the real practices of everyday citizens.

A community economies approach reminds us that capitalist activity comprises *one component* of our economy, not its entirety. Throwing all our eggs into that basket has led us to overlook some of the other important economic activities people are participating in all the time.

Widening our gaze to include other activities involved in the “production and distribution of goods and services”<sup>19</sup> helps us to recognize the many other ways economies are enacted.

Importantly, doing so draws attention to the work that often goes unrecognized by mainstream accounting systems – particularly unpaid labour.<sup>20</sup> This is usually the work performed by people who are underserved and marginalized by our mainstream economic policies (which include cutting back on social spending and prioritizing economic growth over equitable distribution). When we take the time to acknowledge the diversity of our economic lives, we can see that what is so often described as *the* economy actually relies on other economic activities (child care, volunteering, food production, and so on) in order to be sustained. Rather than being in competition with the formal capitalist economy, these activities can in many ways be understood as *the backbone of it*. From this perspective, social spending can be better understood as *real* economic investment, since it supports these activities without which our entire economy – formal and informal, capitalist and otherwise – would collapse.

Developing a *diverse economies framework* can help us fill in the blanks of what economic activities are really keeping our communities and citizens going:

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<sup>16</sup> Lee, 2014

<sup>17</sup> Stuckler & Basu, 2013, emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.communityeconomies.org/Home/Key-Ideas>

<sup>19</sup> Healy, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Bjornholt & McKay, 2013.

LABOR	TRANSACTIONS	PROPERTY	ENTERPRISE	FINANCE
Wage	Market	Private	Capitalist	Mainstream Markets
ALTERNATIVE PAID Self-employed Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Fair trade Alternative currencies Underground market Barter	ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE State-managed assets Customary (clan) land Community land trusts Indigenous knowledge (Intellectual Property)	ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST State owned Environmentally responsible Socially responsible Non-profit	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Cooperative Banks Credit unions Community-based financial institutions Micro-finance
UNPAID Housework Volunteer Self-provisioning Slave labor	NON-MARKET Household sharing Gift giving Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, piracy, poaching	OPEN ACCESS Atmosphere International Waters Open source IP Outer Space	NON-CAPITALIST Worker cooperatives Sole proprietorships Community enterprise Feudal Slave	NON-MARKET Sweat equity Family lending Donations Interest-free loans

*The information in cells are examples of what might be included.<sup>21</sup>*

Such a thorough picture includes capitalist practices and so much more. By acknowledging that economies are comprised of such diverse activities, many more possibilities open up for us when it comes to responding to current economic realities (such as globalization, recessions, widening wealth gaps, and finite natural resources). It also helps us better see the interdependencies within our communities and recognize strengths and assets we might want to foster and mobilize. This information is crucial when deciding where to invest (money, energy, time, and other resources) in order to sustain our communities and economies as whole and complex systems.

### *Soul of the Community*

Without a clear understanding of the relationship between the two, investing in people over the economy may seem to be misguided and altruistic, rather than smart long-term planning. However, research indicates that investing in people *is* smart long-term economic planning. Furthermore, research also suggests that prioritizing economic return *over* people is only beneficial in the short-term, and for the few – if at all. Depending on the measures used, making investments on the basis of financial return only can also be seen as counter-productive to long-term economic and social planning for wellbeing.<sup>22</sup>

With the current economic challenges facing us all, community leaders are looking for new ways to attract citizens, create jobs, strengthen the economy, and contribute to wellbeing. A three-year study that spans 26 American cities explored what it is that attaches residents to communities. The results may be surprising:

The study provides empirical evidence that the drivers that create emotional bonds between people and their community are consistent in virtually every [American] city and can be

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.communityeconomies.org/Home/Key-Ideas>

<sup>22</sup> Boarini, Johansson, & Mira d'Ercole, 2009

reduced to just a few categories. Interestingly, the usual suspects — jobs, the economy, and safety — are not among the top drivers. Rather, people consistently give higher ratings for elements that relate directly to their daily quality of life: an area’s physical beauty, opportunities for socializing, and a community’s openness to all people.

Remarkably, the study also showed that the communities with the highest levels of attachment had the highest rates of gross domestic product growth. Discoveries like these open numerous possibilities for leaders from all sectors to inform their decisions and policies with concrete data about what generates community and economic benefits.<sup>23</sup>

When we widen our definition of economy, as discussed above, these findings make a great deal of sense. For citizens to be committed enough to their communities to stay in them, participate in them, and contribute to them they need to feel a sense of attachment. And according to this research that sense of attachment comes when city planners, policy makers, and citizens in general put energy into beautification, social opportunities, and fostering a welcoming and open community culture. Thus these are the areas it makes sense to focus on when it comes to long-term economic and social development.

### *Shrinking Cities*

What might policy makers do differently, in light of this kind of information?

Economic instability is a characterizing feature of most single-industry communities, so much can be learned from taking a closer look at them. Mining and other resource towns regularly experience decline due to such things as: 1) global economic booms and busts, 2) environmental degradation, and 3) technological advances that shrink, alter, or shift the workforce.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, these kinds of changes are at least to a certain extent predictable in industrialized countries where economic and population decline occurs in resource towns due to global forces. For instance, other than in mega-regions such as the Greater Toronto Area and Greater Montreal, most of the rest of Canada “experienced zero population growth or absolute decline” between 1991 and 2001.<sup>25</sup> We need to find realistic ways to respond to this state of affairs, rather than endlessly pursuing growth.

Schatz<sup>26</sup> notes that most cities still respond by taking a growth-oriented approach and market their cities to new investors, but this often comes at a social cost with the gap between rich and poor widening. There are examples, however, of what she calls *smart shrinkage*. In these cases, the emphasis shifts from continuing to grow, to shrinking responsibly and with foresight. Doing so fosters citizen-community attachment which, in the end, also makes good economic sense.

All cities will have their own sets of challenges and assets, and thus require different plans. With this in mind, Schatz identifies urban regeneration as more contextually responsive (and ‘smart’) alternative to growth at all costs:

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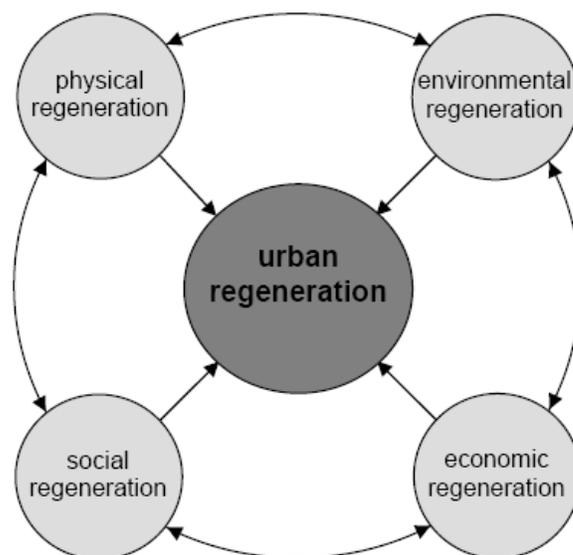
<sup>23</sup> Knight Foundations, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Martinez-Fernandez, Wu, Schatz, Taira, & Vargas-Hernandez, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Schatz, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Schatz, 2008.

**Fig. 1: The Concept of Urban Regeneration**



Graphic by Laura Schatz<sup>27</sup>

Urban regeneration does not require growth in economic or population terms; it allows for reinvestment in what is already working in order to foster the quality of community life. The three priority areas identified in the *Soul of the Community* study (aesthetics, social offerings, and openness) can be easily read into this notion of regeneration. In this way, citizens are supported to be healthy and engaged, which in turn enables them to contribute to their communities - not only to be served by them. This contributes to both the economy and quality of life, as supported by Stuckler and Basu's observations at the opening of this paper.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Application**

A number of rural communities in British Columbia and throughout Canada are currently facing the challenges that come when populations and (capitalist) economies shrink in a world entranced by a growth narrative. How might the above ideas be brought to life when explored within the context of one such community?

Powell River, BC is located on Tla'amin territory on the Sunshine Coast, north of Vancouver. It is accessible only by ferry or airplane, and is home to what was once purportedly the largest newsprint mill in the world. At its peak the mill employed over 2500 people;<sup>29</sup> today it employs just over 400.<sup>30</sup> The economy of the community significantly diversified in the time in between

<sup>27</sup> Schatz, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Stuckler & Basu, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Hayter, 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Powell River Regional Economic Development Society, 2011.

and the population has remained relatively stable (in terms of numbers, not necessarily demographics).<sup>31</sup> Questions remain about how to best sustain the region.

It is not difficult to find information about growth-oriented approaches to rural development. Dominant ideas about pursuing major industrial projects in order to grow the economy are commonplace; these are not the focus of the current discussion.<sup>32</sup> Critiques of a growth paradigm are also accessible elsewhere, and while important, are not the focus of the current discussion either.<sup>33</sup> Instead, the remainder of this paper explores what is being said and done by leaders and community members in the region when it comes to *community-based approaches to economic and social development*. In light of the above discussion, what activities are already taking place in the Powell River region that strive to sustain children, families, and the community in a way that enhances wellbeing? How can Community Economies ideas such as those discussed above be implemented and what are the implications of doing so?

It is important to note that this discussion takes place in the midst of ongoing community transformation. This paper, then, is to be read not as a final statement about what does or does not work but rather a reflection on what has been learned so far, and what possibilities are being explored, so as to contribute to ongoing decision-making as it happens. In particular, there are *five significant lessons* that – if taken together – may contribute to economic and social shifts that could benefit more of us over the long term. Because many of the challenges Powell River is facing are happening elsewhere, perhaps these lessons can inform policy on a provincial and national level as well.

## The Lessons

### 1. Invest

In 2014, Ivanova wrote that in order for BC’s Jobs Plan to be really effective, we need to think differently about investment. Resource extraction is often identified as the biggest opportunity for return on investment in this province, but despite the rhetoric, only “2 per cent of British Columbians are directly employed in mining, oil and gas extraction, and forestry and logging combined.” Even doubling or tripling the jobs in this sector will not make a dramatic difference to employment rates in the province, given this small number. Her work indicates we would be better served to recognize public spending as a sound investment practice, particularly when it comes to a jobs plan. Ivanova recommends public investments such as: “high quality, accessible and affordable childcare, and education at all levels; making our homes schools and hospitals more energy-efficient; and a large-scale reforestation program to aid recovery from the pine-beetle devastation.”<sup>34</sup>

In Powell River, similar discussions are taking place. While the legacy of the mill (and broader public discourses) sustains ‘industry’ in the public consciousness as the picture of economic

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-cma-eng.cfm?LANG=Eng&GK=CMA&GC=945>

<sup>32</sup> See for example <http://www.northerndevelopment.bc.ca/>

<sup>33</sup> See for example <http://postgrowth.org/>

<sup>34</sup> Ivanova, 2014.

development and job creation, the perspectives and experiences of some political leaders, business leaders, educators, and engaged citizens suggest we are already seeing the benefits of the kinds of community investment recommended by Ivanova.<sup>35</sup>

### *Investing locally*

There are a number of citizen-driven initiatives in the Powell River region that facilitate local investment. The *Powell River Money Society*<sup>36</sup> has launched a local currency that simultaneously strives to support local businesses, support local non-profit organizations, and keep money circulating in the region in order to bolster the economy. At present, there are 37 participating businesses and 42 participating non-profit organizations. *Local Logic*<sup>37</sup> is a member-based program that offers incentives to consumers to shop locally in order to foster sustainable economic development. Cardholders can get reduced prices on certain products and services from the 120 participating businesses. The *Powell River Community Investment Corporation*<sup>38</sup> provides a low-risk way for people to invest their money in local businesses. It offers fair rates of return for investors and profit-shares with local non-profit organizations and charities, with the overall aim of increasing prosperity in the region. These are three examples of how citizens have taken it upon themselves to take action when it comes to long-term economic and social wellbeing in the community.

*“We need a solution to help the local economy in general. My professional life [as a certified financial planner] let me know that we have the assets locally to do something about it. But we needed a mechanism to meet the needs of the local citizenry to be a low-risk solution so that they could help support their community. ... It was not for a lack of assets or a lack of will, but it was for a lack of risk tolerance. So I felt I had the opportunity to build something in the middle that was a local investment fund that could allow people to direct their hard-earned money towards causes they wanted to support.” - Sean Melrose, President of Powell River Community Investment Corporation*

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix A for a discussion on the research methodology.

<sup>36</sup> <http://powellrivermoney.ca/>

<sup>37</sup> <http://locallogic.ca/3-ideals/>

<sup>38</sup> <http://prcic.blogspot.ca/>

The Powell River region has implemented a Sustainability Charter<sup>39</sup>, but putting the charter into action has been a struggle. With minimal investment, these already functioning initiatives could be supported with such things as: access to space, tax breaks, in-kind donations, cash grants and more. Rather than starting from scratch, investing in these local projects could enhance social and economic wellbeing in the region – and could be meaningful ways of realizing the ideals expressed in the Sustainability Charter. The municipality has recently convened a Sustainability Steering Committee to “promote and facilitate social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability in Powell River.”<sup>40</sup> It may be the case that grassroots and government-led initiatives are on their way to being more mutually supportive moving forward.

*“There were probably two or three things that I think council was really focused on, with good intentions perhaps, but not reflecting what the community was looking for. ... There was kind of the typical old model of we have to help out big industry any way we can and that’ll help us in the end. You know, the trickle down. Where, what I was starting to see was, if we’re going to change things there’s a trickle up that needs to happen.” – Russell Brewer, City Counsellor*

### ***Investing in people***

The examples in the section above demonstrate how people can invest in local initiatives. There is great evidence to suggest however, that it is not only investments *by* people that help a region thrive, but – perhaps more significantly – investments *in* people. Investments in people generally require much less in terms of outputs, but greater (and longer lasting) returns than investments that send money outside of the region (by depending on outside investors) or rely on a ‘trickle down’ effect within the community.<sup>41</sup>

*“Success stories are when we pay people to come and attend [our programs]. Where if we can actually give a person some sort of allowance, usually it’s not much. Enough to kind of cut the major bills, and then they can kind of step out of their life for a while and ... plan for what they do next. So these programs are like a gift. They’re nice and participants really like them. We measure [success of the program] by how many people become employed, or return to school for other training. I think participants measure it by how they feel at the end.” – Lyn Adamson, Program Director of Career Link*

Inclusion Powell River Society<sup>42</sup> is a non-profit organization that supports individuals with disabilities and their families. It has made a significant impact in the community when it comes to creating the conditions in which all people can be included in work, play, and community life. Relatively minimal investments in such things as the Personal Network Project<sup>43</sup> make it possible for citizens to partner and support each other in helping family members and neighbours become more self-

sustaining. Reducing isolation and increasing support for people in the community who have

<sup>39</sup> <https://powellriver.civicweb.net/Documents/DocumentList.aspx?ID=2720>

<sup>40</sup> <https://powellriver.civicweb.net/Documents/DocumentList.aspx?ID=10416>

<sup>41</sup> Stucker & Basu, 2013; Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> <http://inclusionpr.ca/> (Formerly called Powell River Association for Community Living)

<sup>43</sup> [http://inclusionpr.ca/?page\\_id=312](http://inclusionpr.ca/?page_id=312)

disabilities has concrete implications for social and economic wellbeing by reducing reliance on more expensive social services, contributing to health and wellbeing of individuals and their caregivers, and incorporating more people into the workforce – among other things.<sup>44</sup>

There are a wide range of other initiatives in the community that prioritize investing in people in order to foster independence and interdependence (both of which can reduce dependency on formal social assistance and health care).<sup>45</sup> Some successful examples include: the Skills Link<sup>46</sup> program previously offered through Career Link, the BOND<sup>47</sup> program (Babies open new doors) offered through the PREP Society, the Employment Skills Access Program<sup>48</sup> at Vancouver Island University, and more.

*“In order for communities to be economically sustainable – whatever that looks like – you could have ten different sort of economic opportunities on the go at any time. But unless you’re dealing with the health and the social, you’re never going to be successful. The community will not be successful.”* -  
Marlane Christensen, Manager of Training and Development, Vancouver Island University and founding member of Industry Council for Aboriginal Business

Other impactful ways investing in people can take place include: childcare subsidies, maternity and paternity benefits, and increasing minimum wage to reflect increases in costs of living.<sup>49</sup> In particular, investing in children with early interventions bring both economic and social benefits for us all.<sup>50</sup> All of these investments increase the ability of citizens to contribute meaningfully to social and economic activities and decrease their dependence (and their children’s dependence) on social services

over the long term.

Spending cuts to public health care, education, and other public services are ... shown to have a strong negative effect on overall economic performance. Therefore, as opposed to providing a justification for cutting public spending, the crisis in the economy may provide us with an opportunity to justify public sector investment in key areas that support the wellbeing of families and wider communities.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Investing small***

In 2013, a Final Report<sup>52</sup> was published by the *Mayor’s Task Force on Economic Revitalization*. The Task Force consisted of the mayor, two city councillors, members of the Powell River Regional Economic Development Society,<sup>53</sup> and citizens selected through a public call for applications. After approximately a year of meeting, the report included a wide range of possible

<sup>44</sup> Lord & Hutchison, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Cohen, McGregor, Ivanova, & Kinkaid, 2012; Lansdown, 2007.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/epb/yi/yep/newprog/skillslink.shtml>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.prepsociety.org/BOND/BOND.html>

<sup>48</sup> <http://careerlinkbc.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/vius-building-service-worker-program-may-13-june-8/>

<sup>49</sup> Albanese, 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Aked, Steuer, Lawlor, & Spratt, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Bjornholt & McKay, 2013, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.prpeak.com/media/pdf/news/2013/MayorTaskForce-112013.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.prreds.com/>

*“You’ve got these massive, huge, heavily investment-dependent projects – I’m not saying you shouldn’t go for it. I’m just saying try and do things small scale and see what we have, and put the money there. ... There’s enough resources here in this community.”* - Claudia Medina, filmmaker and member of Mayor’s Task Force for Economic Revitalization

directions when it comes to where the city would like to make investments. Items include large-scale projects such as airport and marina expansions, aquaculture projects, and water bottling facilities, as well as small scale initiatives that would rely on local expertise and time commitments such as bike trails, a car-share co-op, expansion of child care and elder care services, and the creation of an arts and culture investment fund. The commitment of the municipality as outlined in the report to these various projects sat on a scale ranging from ‘participate’ to ‘encourage.’

While the potential financial return on large-scale projects might be enticing, there is good reason to believe that *multiple, small* investments – when they are local and people-focussed, as identified above – could be far less risky and more likely to contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of the region over the long-term.<sup>54</sup> The ownership of these projects remains in the community, the investment of energy relies on local people which enhances attachment to the community, and the ability of these smaller projects to be in line with the city’s commitment to upholding the Sustainability Charter can be greater. The environmental and health costs of these various investments was not assessed in the Task Force’s report, but should also be taken into consideration before anything is deemed to be a sound investment for the community.<sup>55</sup>

Asset Based Community Development<sup>56</sup> is an approach that identifies the value of working with *existing* resources and assets. Research has shown that identifying, mobilizing, and enhancing the wide array of existing assets in a region is conducive to positive – and lasting – community change.<sup>57</sup> It is also a way to reduce costs, since it is not about seeking outside resources to fill gaps, but making small investments in what has already shown itself to work well, so that those efforts may be bolstered. Recognizing the cumulative effect of small investments can be a responsible way to pursue economic and social development in rural communities like Powell River that don’t have a lot of capital to invest up front, but have a great deal of human capital ready to be tapped into.

*“There are restaurants and hotels that would not exist in Powell River if they couldn’t have festivals coming in. The Rodmay Hotel gets, you know, \$100,000 a year from the people who are put up there because they’re the students and participants in the symphony program. So [the Pacific Regional International Summer Music Academy] is a big economic driver. I figured it out using the province’s method of economic analysis, of what is direct income, what is indirect income, and what is reused income - that is, people who get jobs and money that’s transferred that gets then reused and reused. So this little two-week symphony program puts about half a million dollars into the Powell River economy every year.”* – Paul Schachter, President of Powell River Employment Program Society and retired civil rights lawyer

<sup>54</sup> See Gibson & Cameron, 2005 for theoretical background and examples.

<sup>55</sup> Boyd, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/>

<sup>57</sup> Cameron & Gibson, 2001.

## 2. Diversify

There is a lot of talk about diversifying our economy, but usually this means increasing the range of things we invest capital in in order to get a greater return. While this is indeed important, the Diverse Economies Framework<sup>58</sup> (DEF) presented earlier also offers another way of thinking

*“In northern Italy in the time just before my father was born, I was amazed to find out they had a dairy cooperative, the banking cooperative, there was the farmer’s cooperative. It was incredibly organized and it involved everybody taking part. And then you can go into the First Nations history here and find a wealth of information about how resources were used, which is such an ignored history but I think it offers a lot of insight into how we can go forward to try to create a more just local economic base.”* - Claudia Medina, filmmaker and member of the Mayor’s Task Force for Economic Revitalization

about economic diversification: increasing the range of things we understand to be economic practices in order to be wiser about where we invest our capital, time, expertise, and other resources. Some of the economic activities in Powell River that would likely be recognized via the DEF includes: the Farmer’s Market, carpooling, the vast volunteer sector in the region, household production and sharing, charitable giving, child care, the food bank, festivals, community soup kitchens, community radio, wild food harvesting, hunting, fishing, co-operatives, and bartering.

Broadening the scope of what is taken into economic consideration – including *all* activities that fit the definition of ‘production and distribution of goods and services’<sup>59</sup> – can give us a more accurate picture of our community’s economic landscape.

Diversifying our notion of economy in this way takes into better account what more people in the region

are actually doing. Then, we are better equipped to be wise about the *local, people-centred, and small* investments we make, as discussed above.

Many people and organizations are already working to re-think how to sustain ourselves and each other in response to market fluctuations and government cut-backs. Relying on the capitalist economy alone makes us very vulnerable to these dynamics. As a result, some people are pursuing other means of economic development including: the creation of co-operatives, strategic organizational partnerships, social enterprises, and self-employment.<sup>60</sup> Widening the scope of what is seen as possible beyond business as usual creates opportunities for those who have not been benefiting from the capitalist system over time.<sup>61</sup> This not only provides means for people to meet their basic needs,

*“That’s why I would like to see more co-ops and things. Because it’ll take a long time but it’s a cultural shift, right? And right now people just are very much in kind of a service/client model. I like to think that we can actually increase a kind of public participatory democratic model.”* – David Parkinson, founding member of Skookum Food Provisioner’s Co-operative

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.communitypartnering.info/diverse25.html>

<sup>59</sup> Healy, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013.

<sup>61</sup> See for examples: McInturff, 2014; Parker Harris, Renko, Caldwell, 2013.

but also serves to reduce the scarcity mentality that can be so destructive to community life. And diversifying in this way lessens the risks associated with any one initiative, since the responsibility for economic and social wellbeing is held more collectively.

In terms of policy, there are ways this kind of diversification can be – and is - supported. For example, Community Futures<sup>62</sup> and certain government grants and initiatives help small businesses<sup>63</sup> and other projects<sup>64</sup> get on their feet or develop; the municipal government offers in-kind donations (of public space, for example) for public events and services. But there is certainly room for much more progressive action to support diverse community economies, one clearly impactful action would be to embrace tax structures that explicitly promote equality.<sup>65</sup>

### 3. Stack Functions

The idea of diversifying the local economy in these ways and making more, smaller investments can quickly become overwhelming because it feels like spreading assets, resources, and energy too thin. But this is not the case if we understand the systemic nature of how community life is organized. ‘Stacking functions’ is a term that comes from permaculture, which basically means the opposite of multi-tasking. Rather than trying to simultaneously do too much, stacking functions enables us understand how one activity can accomplish multiple goals. It also encourages us to recognize that systems can be built to be more resilient if redundancy is built into them: one function can be met by multiple elements in the system.<sup>66</sup>

*“Off this back stone wall here, this is just the perfect microclimate to have an adjoined greenhouse that could also help to heat the building, right? It would catch all the heat here, warm up that air, send it into the building, and potentially reduce heating costs of the building.” – Ron Berezan, Permaculture Design instructor and Master Gardener*

In January, 2014 there was a community conference called *Groundswell* held at Vancouver Island University in Powell River. Because it was a participatory event, there was a great deal of data generated by the approximately 160 community members who attended. The data was compiled into a post-conference summary report<sup>67</sup> in which the value of ‘stacking functions’ when it comes to social and economic development can be seen. The report is organized into 13 priority themes that emerged from this data (which, interestingly, loosely support the findings of the *Soul of the Community* study, referenced earlier). Within each priority theme are action items, generated by conference participants. Significantly, many of the action items appear under two or more ‘priority theme’ headings. This means that with minimal investment from multiple partners, a single action item can be supported to meet several identified priorities in the community. As stated in the report:

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.prfutures.ca/who-we-are>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.workbc.ca/Employers/Start-your-business/Funding/Explore-Loans,-Grants-and-Funding.aspx>

<sup>64</sup> See for example: <http://www.firstvoices.com/>

<sup>65</sup> Ivanova & Klein, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> <http://theurbanfarmer.ca/resources/permaculture-design/>

<sup>67</sup> <http://wordpress.viu.ca/ddcc/files/2014/03/Groundswell-2014-Post-Conference-Summary-Report.pdf>

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. ... 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. (p. 4)

One way to ‘stack functions’ in order to support the mandates of multiple initiatives with limited resources within the community is strategic community partnering. There are a number of ways this can take place, and resources exist<sup>68</sup> to support the development of effective partnerships among organizations, businesses, and governments.

An example of effective partnerships within the Powell River region comes from a grassroots initiative called Powell River Voices. In May 2013, the organization was granted \$5000 from the Taos Institute<sup>69</sup> to support its speakers series. In the 12 months that followed, they brought in speakers from Victoria, Vancouver, Montreal, and even Australia. They also held other community events and created a website<sup>70</sup> and facebook page.<sup>71</sup> Since the intention of

*[The course] brought people together that previously had wondered about each other a lot ...And so that's why we're working together with Model Communities now, instead of the same people partnering that already partner quite well together. Doing it differently is one of the key themes behind this [participatory action research] project as well.” - Alison Taplay, Disability Studies Coordinator at Vancouver Island University*

the group’s efforts is to stimulate meaningful community dialogues, partnering with other organizations made sense in that it helped to bring together diverse groups of people. These partnerships also helped to cover costs associated with running the events. As it turns out, at the end of one year the group still had almost half their original grant money, which means their activities could continue making a difference in the community. These community partnerships helped to not only lighten the financial burden but also the workload. They also injected new energy and perspectives into the speakers series and helped establish significant connections in the community. Importantly, partnering in this way is not about finding ‘support’ for Powell River Voices events; it is about creating events that become part of the meaningful work of all partners. Finding overlaps in organizational mandates can facilitate the

development of this kind of partnership model in which collaboration helps *all* partners fulfill their commitments.

<sup>68</sup> Such as <http://www.communitypartnering.info/community22.html>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.taosinstitute.net/>

<sup>70</sup> <http://prvoices.org/>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/powellrivervoices>

Another significant set of partnerships has been cultivated by local craft brewery, Townsite Brewing.<sup>72</sup> Townsite Brewing has established relationships with local farmers in order to dispose of the grains used in the beer making process; they have partnered with cottage industries who make soap and other products out of some of their byproducts; they've partnered with the Coast Mountain Academy<sup>73</sup> whereby students learned about permaculture as part of their curriculum while simultaneously building and maintaining the gardens outside the brewery; and they partner with non-profit organizations and local charities with their growler program through which proceeds are shared with the community. Stacking functions raises some logistical and even legal concerns, as it often means sharing material goods, contributing sweat equity to collaborative projects, and blurring lines around ownership and responsibility. As a way of addressing the potential for confusion that can arise, lawyers Orsi and Doskow have published a book that includes explanations, worksheets, and contract templates in order to help us make the shift from individualistic to collaborative practices in communities.<sup>74</sup>

*“We need to look at different models even, where it's not just council and local government making decisions. We need to be dialled in more with the local groups and organizations that really are delivering a lot of services at a local level. And with a little help or support or more collaboration with local government we could do so much more.” – Russell Brewer, City Councillor*

These examples demonstrate how rather than increasing competition, pooling our resources and stacking functions can help us to accomplish more collectively.<sup>75</sup> But again, there is much more that can be done.

Particularly, bridging the gaps between government, business, and non-profit work through meaningful partnerships is needed. There is great success in other cities with processes such as participatory budgeting,<sup>76</sup> for example. This process is one way of enacting democracy that brings more voices to the table with concrete implications that contribute to economic and social development in communities.

#### 4. Situate

*Investing wisely, diversifying, and stacking functions* require deep knowledge of a place, its people, and its histories. Moving forward without situating our actions in place risks making grave mistakes that can have very real consequences for the place and its people. Canada's colonial history has left such a legacy, which is part of the conditions inherited by present-day elected leaders and citizens.<sup>77</sup> In order to ensure next steps are thoughtfully enacted, an understanding of the overlapping and ever-changing historical and present-day realities of place is crucial.

<sup>72</sup> <http://townsitebrewing.com/>

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.outdoors.sd47.bc.ca/cmaWhat.html>

<sup>74</sup> Orsi & Doskow, 2009.

<sup>75</sup> Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013.

<sup>76</sup> Moir & Leyshon, 2013.

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>

*“Our territory was vast. Now, you have different parts of the government having pieces of – say the forest, and the oysters, the clams and stuff. They’re all under different jurisdictions. And we’re trying to work with that. – John Louie, Men’s Support Worker, Tla’amin Health*

Powell River sits on Tla’amin territory, and the Tla’amin Nation has been busy negotiating a Treaty agreement that is expected to be in effect in 2016. It is currently at stage five of a six stage process.<sup>78</sup> Both the Tla’amin Nation and the province

of British Columbia have approved the Final Agreement, and the last step is for approval from the government of Canada. In order to meaningfully situate any economic or social development in this place, a deep understanding of the complicated relationships with the land as well as ongoing policies that effectively privilege certain practices and people over others is necessary.<sup>79</sup> Such understandings are not simply a matter of fact-finding, but require cultivating relationships with people who have been and continue to be impacted by changing political and material realities. This includes First Nations, new immigrants, and others.

*“Is it possible to think locally or build localized economies without building that reconciliation in a true sense? Because what does localism really mean? It has to mean really understanding your place deeply, and part of that is understanding the history of the place and all the histories of the place that sort of lend itself to where we are now.” – Claudia Medina, filmmaker and member of Mayor’s Task Force for Economic Revitalization*

The word ‘situate’ is deliberately chosen over ‘contextualize.’ Thinking of place as ‘context’ risks viewing complex histories and material realities as simply the backdrop of current activities.<sup>80</sup> “What is especially problematic about prevailing views of economics is the lack of focus on the very ... systems that first make economic activity possible, but that are typically viewed as ‘external’.”<sup>81</sup> By situating our policies and actions within a vast array of other realities, the responsibility to engage with others and to critically engage with our own decisions and actions is heightened. Recognizing each initiative as one component among many that collectively *comprise* a situation (rather than simply being nested inside a context) requires that we also recognize that all of our initiatives have implications beyond our own goals or

mandates. And conversely, we are impacted by the decisions and actions taken by others. The Treaty negotiations mentioned above are one significant project that has far-reaching implications for this region and must be situated alongside municipal and regional politics, grassroots efforts, business activities, family life, and other aspects of community. None can be taken in isolation of the others.

Situating economic and social development in this way also demands that we take into consideration the environmental and health costs of our pursuits. It has long been recognized that Gross Domestic Product is an insufficient measure for prosperity<sup>82</sup> because it only measures

<sup>78</sup> See <http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/firstnation/sliammon/> for more information.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Clarke, 2005; Newbury, 2011.

<sup>81</sup> O’Hara, 2013, p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> [http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/Survey\\_of\\_Existing\\_Approaches\\_to\\_Measuring\\_Socio-Economic\\_Progress.pdf](http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/Survey_of_Existing_Approaches_to_Measuring_Socio-Economic_Progress.pdf)

the value of goods and services that are exchanged for money and it does not account at all for costs or damages (among other reasons). Fortunately, other, more situationally-oriented tools exist and are being developed. GPI Atlantic's *Genuine Progress Index*<sup>83</sup> is one example,<sup>84</sup> which counts both contributions *and* costs to wellbeing. As such it is a much more sophisticated tool for measuring prosperity:

The GPI system and framework is based on a capital accounting framework, in which the value of human, social, and natural capital are recognized along with the manufactured and financial capital that are currently measured. Like conventional capital, this human, social, and natural capital is seen as subject to depreciation, and requiring re-investment in the event of depletion or degradation. Based on this approach, the GPI assesses the economic costs of liabilities like crime, pollution, sickness, and natural resource depletion, rather than counting defensive expenditures in these areas as contributions to prosperity (as current measures do).

*"... considering biodiversity at every turn, linking our own personal and economic development into the ecology that's around us. It isn't just about restoring natural systems but finding ways to integrate people into those natural systems so that our needs can be met along the way."* – Ron Berezan, Permaculture Design instructor and Master Gardener

Incorporating into decision-making processes measures that enable us to better account not only for economic growth but also 1) other forms of wellbeing and 2) the environmental, social, and health costs of our activities would equip us to develop better policies and practices.

The creation of Powell River's Sustainability Charter can be considered an initial step towards such holistic planning, and the steering committee that has recently been convened is hoped to breathe life into it. But much more

needs to be done to better situate local policy decisions. Another effort towards building a richer picture of wellbeing in this region is the *Vital Signs*<sup>85</sup> report, published by the Powell River Community Foundation. Among other things, the report identified six 'gap reducing' services that serve to shrink the gap between rich and poor in the community. These include the Community Resource Centre, Family Place, Career Link, Food Bank Action Centre Society, Skookum Gleaners, and the Good Food Box program. This information, coupled with the understanding that shrinking the gap between rich and poor is an indicator of community wellbeing,<sup>86</sup> can inform policy makers and citizens alike as to where contributions can be made that would make good social and economic sense. At present, all six of these services struggle to stay afloat, but require minimal investments to support their services. Being simultaneously local, people-centred, and small, the impact of investing in these gap-reducing programs would

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/gpi.htm>

<sup>84</sup> Others include, but are not limited to:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green\\_gross\\_domestic\\_product](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_gross_domestic_product)

<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>

[http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/human\\_development.htm](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/human_development.htm)

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.prvs.ca/>

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/gpi.htm>

be far-reaching when it comes to economic and social development in Powell River, and the risks of doing so would be low.

Being situated within a provincial, national, and global context that continues to rely on economic growth as the primary indicator of progress contributes to the challenge of supporting such initiatives. With this in mind, a situational perspective invokes engagement on these multiple levels where possible.

## **5. Emergent Design**

It is relatively easy, when removed from a particular place, to come up with answers as to how things should move forward or what should ‘work.’ But when situated in place, things get complicated and rarely play out as anticipated. We then find ourselves with the ethical and practical imperative to think relationally about policies and practices. Abstractions disappear and we begin to see the very concrete implications (anticipated and otherwise; direct and indirect) of every decision.

Certain fields (such as human services like nursing, child and youth care, and social work) readily embrace these relational dynamics as part of the complexities of their work.<sup>87</sup> Researchers and practitioners in these fields are trained to take into consideration the interpersonal dynamics of their work, and also the implications of institutional, cultural, and political realities for practice. For the most part, though, economics continues to be understood in decontextualized technical-rational terms. The economy is spoken of as a ‘machine’ that simply needs to be tweaked until it operates optimally or as something completely out of our hands to which we must adapt or comply.<sup>88</sup> It is outside of us, and bigger than us. We respond to the economy, rather than the other way around.

Relational theories of change have much to offer economic and social development that is grounded in particular communities with real people and environments at stake. There are three ways we might think about how relational theories inform economic and social development in communities, such that they can contribute to emergent design:

### ***Systemic processes***

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<sup>87</sup> See for example: Garfat, 2003; Gergen, 2009; Gharabaghi, 2008; Hoskins & Artz, 2004; Madsen, 2007.

<sup>88</sup> Nelson, 2004.

Situating policy and other decisions in a particular place, as described earlier, can help us better recognize the relational nature of the systems within which we are operating. Whether social, natural, or otherwise, there are always ongoing relational dynamics at play. Clarke's notion of

*“That’s why when the Royal Commission went out: alcoholism, residential schools, diabetes. All those things, those are what I call sparks. We’re busy running around trying to put the sparks out. We’ll take care of this side of the fire, and then the fire grows on that side. Then we run over and try to deal with that.”* - John Louie, Men’s Support Worker, Tla’amin Health

‘situational analysis’ can help us to better understand that systems are comprised not only of various parts, but – importantly – of the (often unpredictable) interactions that take place among those parts.<sup>89</sup> The intention of this kind of analysis is not to predict normative patterns, but to more deeply interrogate the situation in order to recognize possibilities for action that may have been unintelligible when viewed through other frames, or when parts of a system are taken up in isolation.<sup>90</sup> While situating policies and political analyses in particular places adds complexities, it is vital that we do this up front rather than

developing decontextualized policies that do not play out as expected once implemented.

This type of analysis equips us to better understand how we might effectively engage in such practices as: strategic planning,<sup>91</sup> goal setting,<sup>92</sup> public engagement,<sup>93</sup> advocacy,<sup>94</sup> and evaluation.<sup>95</sup> There is great reason to believe that taking relational considerations into account as part of *all* economic and social processes – rather than sifting them out and developing policies that best work in a vacuum – is a much more realistic and effective way to proceed. This is, in fact the thinking that informs attempts as such large scale systemic shifts as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.<sup>96</sup>

Recognizing all work as part of broader systemic processes requires a simultaneous understanding of the bigger picture and how smaller, interpersonal dynamics contribute to it.

*“And you know with my leadership program [at Royal Roads University] right now one of the big things we studied ... is complex systems. And it amazes me that I’m reading these text books on, you know, on true leadership. Things like systems thinking. For us traditionally, everything was connected. Everything was a system. My great, great grandparents ... that’s how they lived their life.”* –Marlane Christensen, Manager of Training and Development, Vancouver Island University and founding member of Industry Council for Aboriginal Business

<sup>89</sup> Clarke, 2005.

<sup>90</sup> See Newbury, 2011 for an example of how this shift in frame leads to different practice decisions.

<sup>91</sup> Cameron & Gibson, 2001.

<sup>92</sup> See for example <http://postgrowth.org/asset-mapping-occupy/>

<sup>93</sup> See Herman & Corrigan, 2002 and Lenihan, 2012.

<sup>94</sup> Lee, Jorgenson Smith, & Henry, 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2007.

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>

Clearly these are not new ideas, but taking them up in new ways – particularly in relation to the economy - might help us more effectively engage with the economic and social realities in which we now find ourselves. Relational thinking on a systemic level leads to sophisticated understandings about how we can better incorporate relational theories of change into organizational development<sup>97</sup> leadership models,<sup>98</sup> business practices,<sup>99</sup> and governance.<sup>100</sup> These considerations can mean the difference between good ideas and good practices.

In Powell River and elsewhere, citizens and leaders alike struggle to bring this perspective to bear on actual practices, as we continue to work within existing systems. However, as one research participant articulated, there are ‘cracks’ in which room can be made for different ways to be fostered. All of the initiatives identified throughout this report – and others – develop in these cracks and provide opportunities for new ways of engaging in social and economic development to be done. Even if experimental at this point, when we understand all actions as part of the system in which they take place, none are inconsequential.

### *Interpersonal processes*

Interpersonal relational theories of change are based in the assumption that rather than being distinct individuals who come together in relation to one another, we are actually relationally constituted: our environments, our upbringings, the food we eat, the media we are exposed to, the way we are loved, and the opportunities we do or don’t have all play a role in who we are and how we engage in the world.<sup>101</sup> As a result, we are always shifting (and shifting each other) as we move through life. From such a perspective, everything we do has relational implications. Rather than seeing these relational implications as secondary or somehow side effects, these need to be taken into account during decision-making around our how communities will be organized.

Interpersonal dynamics are rarely taken into account in formal economic analyses, but when it

*“Because in my business – financial services – the product is not the annuity or the mutual fund or the stock or the bond. The product is trust. ... The way in which someone is going to make a choice is going to be whether or not they trust me more or less than my competitor.” – Sean Melrose, president of Powell River Community Investment Corporation*

comes to practices, they play an extremely important role. Cultivating relationships with people across disciplines and sectors, establishing relationships between citizens and elected leaders, and building relationships between service providers and clients or customers are all crucial (if often unarticulated) aspects of the work being done by people whose work involves economic and social development.

Locally, there are efforts being made to bring the significance of interpersonal relational processes for social and economic wellbeing to the fore. Social media plays a significant role, with one local organization taking it upon itself to notify the public about council meetings via

<sup>97</sup> See for example Kretzmann, McKnight, Dobrowolski, & Punttenney, 2005.

<sup>98</sup> See for example <http://www.taosinstitute.net/relational-leading-ms-program>

<sup>99</sup> Cooperrider & Mcquaid, 2013.

<sup>100</sup> Lenihan, 2012.

<sup>101</sup> Gergen, 1994.

Facebook in an effort to increase public participation.<sup>102</sup> Certain council members and candidates<sup>103</sup> are forging new paths for connecting with their constituency, including casual meet-ups in public spaces (publicized largely through social media) and online interactions. The local Division of Family Practice<sup>104</sup> brings physicians together to increase communication, enhance supports, and strengthen their abilities to impact policy on a local level. Established organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Ministerial Association also bring together like-minded people, while relationship-building across unlikely divides is also now increasingly understood as significant for the economic and social well-being of the community. For example, informal gatherings playfully named the Chamber of Commoners strive to bring together unlikely groups from the non-profit, business, and government sectors; and the Newcomers Social bring service providers, businesses, and newcomers to the community together several times a year.

*“Relationships are immensely important. ... I think it’s important to get out and go to where the people are, and not expect them to come to where you are. And that changes the nature of the conversation.”* (Russell Brewer, City Councillor)

With so much evidence of relational interpersonal engagement taking place, its significance seems to be well-understood to a certain degree. The relational theories of change and associated practices that are grounded largely in social psychology and so foundational to human services, however, also inform the development of interpersonal relational skills that could be better utilized by those in leadership positions who are pursuing change within the community. Whether running businesses, sitting on committees, or delivering goods and services – we all could benefit from deliberately incorporating consideration of interpersonal dynamics into our work. When the economy is understood as co-created, then technical-rational understandings of how to implement changes within it no longer suffice.

*“I’ve been fortunate to push back [in the face of cutbacks], but still not wreck relationships. I try to find common ground [with policy makers] ...”* (Lyn Adamson, program director of Career Link)

### ***Emergent processes (the two together)***

All complex systems, from human beings to stock markets to global organizations, share behaviours that cannot be explained by their parts. The whole is different than the sum of the parts.<sup>105</sup>

The relational nature of the systems in which we are operating, coupled with the role interpersonal dynamics play, lead us to a situation in which responsiveness may be more useful than prediction. This is challenging, since we have created institutions and procedures that rely

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/powellrivervoices/events>

<sup>103</sup> See for example <http://prpeak.com/articles/2014/06/19/news/doc53a0e1be278b4945763410.txt> and <https://powellriver.civicweb.net/Documents/DocumentList.aspx?ID=2736>

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.divisionsbc.ca/powellriver>

<sup>105</sup> Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2007.

heavily on predicting measurable and anticipated outcomes, rather than *responding to actual outcomes*.

There are ways, however, we can do things differently. Designing for emergence enables us to still be rigorous and accountable, while responding to the dynamic conditions in which we are participants.

One example is *funding structures*. Wesley, Zimmerman, and Patton note that

... the funding community in North America has fallen under the enchantment of measurable outcomes. Most foundations will consider only proposals with clear, specific and measurable outcomes. Such an approach is appropriate when problems are well understood and solutions are known. But for the complex problems that social innovators address, an equally innovative funding approach is required. Perhaps funders should be looking to support people, not projects. Don't expect clarity, which in these early stages of exploration is inappropriate.<sup>106</sup>

There are promising examples of this structure that have a wonderful track record of results. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada<sup>107</sup> has several awards that follow this model, as does the Taos Institute.<sup>108</sup> Both of these organizations require results and regular progress reports, but do not require that results will be identifiable at the proposal stage. Ongoing communication between project leads and the funder are an asset to this process, as it means new considerations can be incorporated into projects as they arise. The allowance for exploration provided by both of these institutions has led to innovative and important work.

Another example is *evaluation methods*, which also tend to rely on the prediction outcomes, despite the complexity of the systems and relationships in which we are enmeshed. Additionally, mainstream forms of evaluation are currently nested within a hierarchy of evidence that has been described by some as problematic:

#### The Hierarchy of Evidence<sup>109</sup>

Rank	Sub-rank	Methodology
1	A	Systematic reviews/meta-analysis of RCTs
	B	Random control trials
	C	Experimental designs
2	A	Quasi-experimental
	B	Cohort-control studies
	C	Case-control studies
3	A	Consensus reference
	B	Expert opinion/Delphi group
	C	Observational studies

<sup>106</sup> Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2007.

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/home-accueil-eng.aspx>

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.taosinstitute.net/tag>

<sup>109</sup> Drawn from Harper, 2010.

	D	Interview/Audit
	E	Qualitative design
4	A	Personal communication/anecdotal/testimonial

While all of these forms of evidence serve certain functions, none – not even the highest ranking in the above chart – serve *all* functions. When evaluating practices that take place in complex, ever-changing systems, the learning that comes from random control trials may not have long-standing implications since they offer results that are ‘true’ for a particular moment in time.

*“We were very fortunate when the ethics board approved it as an evolving thing. ... I think that’s the purpose of action research, right, is to create space for the people participating to create change.”* – Alison Taplay, Disability Studies Coordinator, Vancouver Island University

Westley, Zimmerman, and Patten<sup>110</sup> recommend an emergent evaluation design, which they call ‘developmental evaluation.’ It “offers a process for periodic reflection – systematically looking back and seriously looking ahead – to gauge progress, harvest important lessons and rigorously examine what’s working and what’s not” (p. 86). Developmental

evaluation views evaluation as something that is integrated throughout an entire project or initiative rather than something that takes place at the end. When evaluation takes place at the end it can a) stifle creativity and b) add pressure to minimize mistakes which could actually lead to learning if attention was drawn to them sooner. Developmental evaluation “involves ongoing data collection and assessment to help policy makers adapt their decisions and implement their principles in the face of changed conditions” (p. 87).

Recognizing the systemic, interpersonal, and emergent dynamics at play in our economic and social lives can help us develop the means to better engage in the ongoing change that takes place in our communities. Rather than trying to nail anything down, we might instead find ways to interact effectively as we go.

The organization of the *Groundswell* conference, referenced earlier, is one example of how these kinds of relational ideas informed the emergent design of a smaller, local initiative. According to the post-conference summary report:

Groundswell was hosted by VIU and funded by a VIU Research Award to Alison Taplay, but formally engaged a range of other community partners (Tla’amin Community Health, the Model Community Project, the Powell River and District United Way, Powell River Diversity Initiative, First Credit Union, Powell River Film Festival, Inclusion Powell River, School District 47, Community Living British Columbia, Powell River Community Foundation, Tourism Powell River, Powell River Employment Program Society, and Skookum Food Provisioners Cooperative). The event also informally engaged a number of other community partners, both individuals and organizations, that contributed by participating on the conference planning committee, promoting the event, offering

<sup>110</sup> 2007.

workshops and presentations, volunteering, documenting the proceedings, catering, hosting information tables, and more.

The intention behind such vast community engagement in the organization of Groundswell was to ensure congruence between the content and the form of the conference. That is, real community engagement was not only the hoped-for outcome, but also reflected the process by which the conference developed. Because of this, and thanks to flexibility on the part of VIU, organizers, and supporters, the emergent nature of the conference planning resulted in a program that seemed to reflect the needs and desires of the community at that time. The conference planning committee strongly believes that if there is another Groundswell event, simply replicating the 2014 program would not suffice. Designing an in-depth process by which the event is collaboratively developed and implemented will be necessary in order to best reflect the ever-changing needs and interests of the community.<sup>111</sup>

This initiative was fortunate to have both funding structures and evaluation methods that allow for such emergent design. The Groundswell project continues to be ongoing – and funding sources and evaluation processes continue to evolve.<sup>112</sup> Emergent design allows the project to be tweaked on the basis of ongoing learning, increasing its lifespan (beyond the conference to now also include follow up activities in the community) and in turn, potential impact.

### **Policy Implications and Conclusions**

In November, 2011 a report called *City of Powell River's General Operations, Service Delivery, and Organizational Review*<sup>113</sup> was published by the Helios Group. The City had hired this private, Vancouver-based contractor to review its operations and make recommendations on the basis of its findings. The report begins with an acknowledgement that “the City of Powell River is currently dealing with many of the same social and political challenges facing smaller local communities in British Columbia and across Canada” (p. 2). It identifies changing economic conditions and an increasing imperative to plan sustainably as two such challenges.

The top four key findings of the review include: a need for “improved development and adherence to long-term and strategic plans,” “a need to reduce costs,” “a need for a mentality shift toward a leaner organization,” and a need to address the “inefficient organizational structure.” The overall prognosis was that the current outputs of the local government are not organized in a way that is sustainable, and drastic changes – including reduced spending - are urgently needed for the long-term economic sustainability of the community.<sup>114</sup>

About 10 years prior to this review, the Powell River Regional Economic Development Society (PRREDS) was developed after community consultation. Its mandate is to “diversify the local economy through new investment attraction, as well as support and strengthen existing

<sup>111</sup> <http://wordpress.viu.ca/ddcc/files/2014/03/Groundswell-2014-Post-Conference-Summary-Report.pdf>

<sup>112</sup> See <http://prpeak.com/articles/2014/06/11/community/doc5397aabe57f60010335132.txt>

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.prpeak.com/media/pdf/news/2012/KeyFindingsandRecommendations%20030812.pdf>

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.prpeak.com/articles/2012/03/09/news/doc4f5946f7dc9a8828787231.txt>

businesses and industries.” PRREDS actively pursues potential investors with such services as its “site selection profile” which highlights opportunities for people- or resource-based industries to enter the region from outside, and paints a picture of the area as one which is “continuing to grow”, but has plenty of room for more.<sup>115</sup>

*“To the extent that we have an economy or we have social action, the whole thrust of it should be to make people’s lives better.*

- Paul Schachter, President of Powell River Employment Program Society and retired civil rights lawyer

Taken together, these two responses to the challenges of a ‘shrinking’ mill town are to a) cut back on social spending and b) attract new investors for replacement industries – precisely the approach identified by Stuckler and Basu<sup>116</sup> as those most likely to make a bad situation worse.

The local government convened *The Mayor’s Task Force for Economic Revitalization* which published its Final Report in the summer of 2013. Described in greater detail earlier, this report identified a wide range of possible economic developments for the region, but without a clear vision when it comes to prioritizing. In 2014, the local government shared a draft report entitled, “[DRAFT] A Path to a Powell River Economic Development Strategy.”<sup>117</sup> Again, this document is important in that it acknowledges the need for change and for deliberate strategies when it comes to economic development in the region, but it overlooks many of the considerations raised above. It focuses primarily on revenue generation, overlooking the important and long-term contribution to the economy that is takes place when people and the place are cared for.<sup>118</sup>

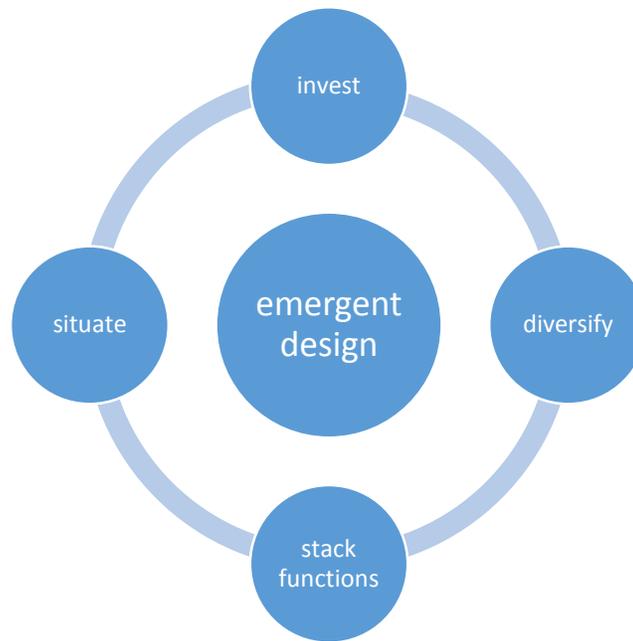
Faced with international competition and financial difficulties, the pulp and paper industry has significantly downsized all over Canada leaving what began as single industry towns such as Powell River with similar challenges. While there seems to be general agreement that change is necessary, the kinds of changes recommended above may not be enough to address this situation. The lessons identified throughout this report show another way forward, and can provide a framework for assessing possibilities as they emerge – such as those raised in the 2013 Final Report and the 2014 Draft Report by the City of Powell River. Policy makers can review the recommendations made in these reports (and elsewhere) through the lens of the five lessons outlined in this document, in order to determine whether a particular possibility may be fitting for economic and social development. Rather than taking the five lessons as distinct criteria, understanding the interplay among them is crucial – possibilities that mobilize all five of these would be considered optimal directions for economic and social development in the community.

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.prreds.com/>

<sup>116</sup> Stuckler & Basu, 2013, p. 143.

<sup>117</sup> Planning Department, City of Powell River, 2014. Retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/janet/Downloads/Economic%20Development%20Strategy%202014.pdf> 14 July, 2014.

<sup>118</sup> Bjornholt & MacKay, 2013.



### *Invest and Diversify*

Recognize that investments in social services and the public sector are indeed real economic investments. When people are supported to be healthy and engaged, even struggling economies improve. Finding creative ways to support local initiatives, invest in people, and promote many small efforts are valuable political priorities. This comes from an understanding that regeneration, not growth, is vital for healthy community economies. Diversifying not only what we invest in, but what we consider to be meaningful economic investments, helps policy makers determine where to best place energy and resources when planning for the future.

### *Stack Functions and Situate Policy Decisions*

Rather than making policy decisions based on abstractions, situating ourselves within the concrete social and material world in which they are taking place can elucidate opportunities for partnerships and stacking functions. Policy makers can create incentives for and eliminate barriers to creative partnerships among existing initiatives. Getting outside of institutionalized boxes and better pooling resources can help more businesses, organizations, and individuals meet their mandates without having to compete with each other or reduce their services. When more people are invested in the outcome of a particular initiative, the greater likelihood that it will be successful and sustainable.

*“Why are those places boarded up? What would happen if you opened them up temporarily to an entrepreneur or an artist who would use the space and create really interesting things in them for a short time frame for little or no rent, but in exchange for fixing it up and make it look good and drawing people to the street. You use the arts as a catalyst for this kind of thing to happen. And pretty much everywhere it’s happened it’s been successful. But it requires building relationships.”*  
 – Claudia Medina, filmmaker and member of the Mayor’s Task Force for Economic Revitalization

## *Design for Emergence*

There is an element of experimentation any time real transitions are made. Emergence must be designed in from the beginning. This means more public engagement, more ongoing (developmental) evaluation, more opportunities for feedback to travel in multiple directions, and more documentation of and reflection on successes *and* challenges along the way. Emergent design means that rather than simply failing or succeeding, courses can be altered on the basis of new learning. This significantly increases the prospects of economic and social wellbeing over time.

*“The answers and ideas and solutions are out in the community. So if you don’t reach out for some of those, you’re not going to get all the answers or new ideas that are out there. So I’ve been an advocate for trying to get out and have just town hall meetings, or meet with people, or solicit ideas. However we do that – formally, informally. But we haven’t done a good job of that as a city.”*

- Russell Brewer, City Councillor

Thankfully, the response of the City of Powell River to recommendations made by the Helios Group in 2011 was not to simply implement them, but to convene the Mayor’s Task Force for Economic Revitalization in 2012, and then the Sustainability Steering Committee in 2013. Both of these committees include interested citizens and elected officials. These had and have the potential to mark significant efforts towards community engagement and more citizen participation in political process, although there are concerns in the public around diversity of citizen representation and how decisions were made – both of which are crucially important for truly democratic process.

Additionally, there remain some questions around the impact these committees can or will have on policy development. There is still room for measures that have more teeth. Campbell River, BC, for example has a Sustainability Department (not committee).<sup>119</sup> Institutionalizing such a department demonstrates a commitment to putting ideas into action – such as the Green City Strategy it implemented in 2008. While there are a range of grassroots, citizen-led initiatives paving the way for economic and social wellbeing in the community, there is still much more to be done for Powell River to bring more of its ideas into action at a policy level.

The framework outlined here can also be employed to inform policy decisions around economic and social development. When presented with an opportunity, decision makers can consider the lessons outlined above by asking the following questions:

<b>Lessons</b>	<b>Considerations</b>	<b>Elaborations</b>
Invest	Is it a local investment?	Does it require that we rely on outside sources of revenue? Does it send our tax dollars and other resources outside of the community? Does it make us

<sup>119</sup> See <http://www.campbellriver.ca/your-city-hall/departments/sustainability/>

		dependent on the whims or needs of others? Does it support or compete with what is already taking place in the community? Can it be strengthened by partnering with what people are already doing? Does it employ local people?
	Does it invest in people?	Will it support people who already live here? Does it decrease or increase the gap between rich and poor? Does it support the public sector or deplete it? Does it contribute to the ability of people to have more leisure time, to join the work force, to spend time with their family, to pursue an education, and to participate in the community and the economy? Does it have a long-term or short-term return?
	Is it a small investment?	Does it require a large share of the resources that exist? Is it high or low risk? Does it allow for other investments to also take place? Can it stand alongside other projects, perhaps even supporting or partnering with them?
Diversify		Does this support the co-existence of multiple initiatives? Does it support activities that fall outside of capitalist notions of development? Does it provide means for accounting for activity that is volunteer, bartered, or cooperative, for example? How are these non-market contributions acknowledged?
Stack functions		Does it provide means by which the mandates of two or

		more initiatives to share resources to accomplish their objectives? Does it allow for the conservation of material goods or human energy through partnerships?
Situate		Does it take into consideration the strengths, assets, and needs of local people? Does it account for the ecological, cultural, and material conditions in which it will take place? Does it follow from what has been learned historically in the area? Does it make sense from a long-term perspective?
Emergent Design	Does it take into account systemic processes?	How does this reflect, contribute to, or create alternatives to national and global trends? Are its implications (intended and potential) deeply considered?
	Does it take into account interpersonal dynamics?	How are citizens and policy makers engaged with the process? What opportunities are made for transfer of ideas in multiple directions? Are perspective sought from multiple sectors and/or partners?
	How are the two brought together?	Is there an opportunity to evaluate progress in process, rather than just at the end? What measures are in place to allow for changes along the way, based on new learning?

In sum, for policy makers at any level to take seriously the responsibility to cultivate the conditions for wellbeing in their communities, *emergent design* can allow for a more engaged and responsive approach. *Situating* policies in the concrete realities of place provides critical information when it comes to what may or may not work and how to best engage and respond to the populace. *Stacking functions* can foster creative paths to collaboration, enabling us to do far more with what we already have. *Diversifying* not only our investments, but also our notion of

what economic activity actually is, can open up far more avenues for meaningful investments: *investments* that are local, people focused, and small.

## Methodology (Appendix A)

We are drawn to a different mode of critical inquiry that is less about tapping into pre-existing knowledge or evaluating current efforts and more about the potential for new knowledge and practices to emerge from the research process itself.<sup>120</sup>

This report is based on research done through a hybrid qualitative methodology, which is described in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>121</sup> It involves three main modes of inquiry:

### *Primary interviews*

Conducting interviews is one of the mainstays of qualitative research. It is a valuable tool in the social sciences, since “a qualitative research interview seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level ...”<sup>122</sup> - the second of which so often gets missed when it comes to policy development but is crucially important with regards to implementation. Qualitative interviews offer a means by which the relational dynamics of community life can be brought into the fold of consideration for policy making.

For the purposes of this inquiry, I interviewed people who were already actively engaged in activities that reflected my research question: *How can children, youth, families, and communities be supported and sustained, socially and economically, in the midst of ongoing uncertainty?* Most of the people I interviewed live in the community in which the research is taking place (Powell River, BC), with two exceptions: 1) Katherine Gibson<sup>123</sup> is an economic geographer who brings with her a great deal of experience, an international lens, and an interest in the current economic and social dynamics of Powell River, and 2) Carol Stuart,<sup>124</sup> who is the Dean of Health and Human Services at Vancouver Island University, which has a campus in Powell River. In total, there were 13 interviews conducted. The remaining 11 are leaders in the community with a vested interest in economic development, social development, or both. They include: a city councillor, educators, people working in the non-profit sector, people working in the business sector, and leaders in the Aboriginal community.

It is worth noting that the activities of the people I interviewed reflect ‘community-based’ approaches to economic and/or social development. The Centre for Co-operative and Community Based Economy at the University of Victoria defines itself in a way which also captures what I mean by community-based approaches to economic and social development:

‘Co-operative and community-based economy’ is taken to refer to collective undertakings, not necessarily co-operatives:

- aimed at providing the needs and wants of some community or group, where any profits are a means of supplying those needs and wants,
- managed autonomously and by democratic processes, and

<sup>120</sup> Cameron, Gibson, & Hill, under review.

<sup>121</sup> Newbury, in press.

<sup>122</sup> Kvale, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.communityeconomies.org/people/katherine-gibson>

<sup>124</sup> <https://www2.viu.ca/directory/employeeDetail.aspx?emp=8B4D2A2701AB56C3>

- in which persons and their participation are given priority over capital in the distribution of any surplus.<sup>125</sup>

Qualitative research does not aim for representation, but seeks to foster generative conversations and depth.<sup>126</sup> For this reason, there is no claim that the views of participants in the research are in any way representative of the community as a whole. The intention of this research was, rather, to explore in more depth some of the perspectives of people who are creatively pursuing economic and social wellbeing in the community in order to generate new possibilities on the basis of the above definition,<sup>127</sup> not necessarily to represent what is already taking place.

### *Secondary sources*

In addition to qualitative interviews which help to provide depth, elucidate context, and highlight some of the relational complexities at play, a range of secondary sources were consulted to inform this report.

Some of these were generated from within the community (including reports<sup>128</sup> and websites<sup>129</sup>). These help to support (or challenge) what research participants said as a way of fact-checking and elaborating. They also draw important links among the sometimes seemingly disparate content areas about which they spoke. Many of these sources were consulted on the recommendation of research interview participants, but at the same time some of the research interview participants were invited because of information gleaned from these sources.

Other secondary sources include reports written from provincial and national vantage points,<sup>130</sup> which help to contextualize the activities that are taking place within this community. As with decisions made around who to approach for interviews, decisions made about which reports to consult were also informed by the definition of community based approaches to economic and social development, above.

Seeing the relationship between the broader political implications of what is happening in other places and in Powell River is crucial. Drawing from research that has been conducted in other places can give communities the tools and language to critically engage with the decisions being made on a local level. Importantly, discussions around local activity can also feed back out to a provincial and national level again too, as the implications of existing research for actual communities can better be realized.

Other secondary sources come from the international community, particularly from scholars and activists who have been exploring the theoretical and practical dimensions of economic and social change over time. Without considering the ideas that inform policies – existing and potential – we risk replicating unproductive patterns unwittingly.<sup>131</sup> Bringing the concrete

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<sup>125</sup> <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cccb/research/index.php>

<sup>126</sup> Hoskins & White, 2013.

<sup>127</sup> Denzin & Giardina, 2009.

<sup>128</sup> Including the Vital Signs report, the Groundswell Post-Conference Report, the Mayor's Task Force for Economic Revitalization Final Report, the Tla'amin Treaty Guide, and more.

<sup>129</sup> Particularly for organizations.

<sup>130</sup> Including those published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, those found through the new economics foundation, the GPI Atlantic and others accessed through such sources as <http://postgrowth.org/connect/post-growth-alliance/>

<sup>131</sup> See Blades, 1997.

practices of Powell River as it undergoes present-day transitions into contact with theoretical research and activist work<sup>132</sup> that is happening in other parts of the world can help us to better see the relationships between ideas and practice, and help us all to understand local activities as part of much larger, global trends.

### *Hybrid research collectives*<sup>133</sup>

As an engaged citizen in the community I am studying, I am not an impartial observer, but an active participant in this process of co-construction. I simultaneously wear the hats of citizen, practitioner, and researcher.

As a *citizen* I have personal relationships with many of the people implicated in my study. I am also interested in the formal political processes of this region and participate in public dialogue around issues that matter to me. In this sense, I understand that my biases are also part of the context into which I am inquiring and must be taken into account as part of the content of my study as well. As a *practitioner* I sit on boards and committees of many organizations that are directly implicated in my research. I also teach, give presentations, and facilitate workshops for intergenerational groups of participants. Finally, as a *researcher* I conduct interviews with many of the people who are involved in both my personal and professional life; I read reports and research conducted locally, provincially, and beyond; I read theoretical literature; and I write for and present to academic and popular audiences in order to integrate my learning. In all of these ways, I am inquiring into life as I live it. And I have come to recognize my involvement not as a barrier to overcome, but as an asset in my research.

Since I am not an outsider to the place or community into which I am inquiring, I am currently involved in many of the situations, relationships, dynamics, programs, discourses (and more) into which I am inquiring. Rather than only raising ethical concerns (which, of course are significant considerations in *all* research endeavours), this reality brings with it significant opportunities. It is, in fact, the case that the lines between researchers and their areas of study are less defined than representations most often imply. By bringing these overlapping relationships into light, rather than obscuring them, we can better see ourselves as part of the research itself and participate in it as such. This has been referred to as participating in ‘hybrid research collectives’<sup>134</sup> and they give light not only to the elements at play in a given community or situation, but also to the relationships among them.<sup>135</sup>

This is an ongoing process that involves engaging in and tracking many interactions. Some of the interactions a hybrid research collective method can include are:<sup>136</sup>

- 1) *Gathering* these various actants together. In my case this involves learning that comes from the many research interviews I am conducting, the academic and other literature I have access to, and the various organizations, committees, and other community-based experiences in which I participate.

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<sup>132</sup> Much of which comes from the Community Economies Collective, as well as the slow growth and degrowth movement. But it is also informed by human service practices such as Child and Youth Care and Social Work.

<sup>133</sup> This section is drawn largely from Newbury, in press.

<sup>134</sup> Cameron, Gibson, & Hill, under review.

<sup>135</sup> Clarke, 2005.

<sup>136</sup> Drawn from Cameron, Gibson, & Hill, under review.

2) *Reassembling* what emerges in a way that helps to make (different) sense of the world. This involves taking the many pieces gathered, contextualizing them amidst one another, and also inquiring into the relational dynamics that play out among them.

3) *Translating* what has taken place in multiple ways that may extend beyond the original intent. This is what might be typically understood as the interpretation and analysis stages of research. But in this case it does not only take place at the end, but in an ongoing way, informing new ways of interacting with the various other elements of the ‘hybrid research collectives’ of which I am a part as I move forward and do it all again.

Importantly, the many other people with whom I interact throughout this research *also* where multiple hats, and also are constantly engaged in these various levels of participation and analysis. In this sense, we are all co-participants in this research, just as we are all colleagues in the other commitments we are involved in. Hybrid research collectives are fluid entities and as such offer rich and surprising new opportunities for learning. This approach takes seriously the proposition “that ‘things’ do not act by themselves; rather, things act in arrangement with others - even that there are no ‘things’ by themselves, there are only relations.”<sup>137</sup>

This report is one product of this gathering-reassembling-translating process, which can be – and is being – done differently with different audiences and outcomes in mind.

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<sup>137</sup> Cameron, Gibson, & Hill, under review, p. 23.

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