CITY-REGION STUDIES CENTRE

Partnerships:
Responding to the Changing Dynamics of Urban-Rural Interdependency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the findings of a research project on the increasing presence of urban-rural interdependency in Alberta and the response of communities to the challenges it poses. Interdependency can be understood as the interactions between municipalities, communities and/or businesses which are essential to mutual well-being. Interdependencies may be characterized by flows of goods, services and people; networks of transportation and infrastructure; and urban sprawl and environmental spillovers (Stabler and Olfert, 2002). Partnership activities are focal points in which local government, business and community are able to make sense of, and respond to, policy drivers that overlap the traditional boundaries between town and country.[1]

The lines of analysis pursued in this report investigate the connections between partnership and social, economic and environmental considerations. The literature review places this analysis in a broader context of trends in policy and practice by drawing on a variety of secondary research, which does not, however, include existing materials related to intermunicipal collaboration and partnerships that currently exist in the province of Alberta. Furthermore, key areas of enquiry address the conditions under which partnerships arise, factors that affect the success or failure of collaboration, and future trends in the development of urban-rural partnerships.

Situated in three contrasting regions of the province (Alberta Southwest Regional Alliance, Northeast Alberta Information HUB Ltd. and Calgary Regional Partnership), the research project involved a multi-method study using both qualitative and quantitative elements. Through interviews and an online survey involving municipal officials and employees, community organizations and businesses, in-depth information was collected about how partnerships can be used to meet local and regional challenges and opportunities.

In summary, the project reported on here addressed three primary aims:

  1 To shed light on the nature of partnering and urban-rural interdependency as they are currently evolving in three regions of Alberta;

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1 The definition of "partnership" is uncertain and contested, both colloquially and in the literature. Different individuals, sources, and sectors have very different understandings of what is involved in a partnership, and also of what differentiates a partnership from a collaboration or alliance. For the purposes of our research, "partnership" was defined as "any agreement, alliance, arrangement, or shared service, ranging from informal (handshake) agreements to formal (legal) contracts". Despite providing this definition at the beginning of our interviews, it became increasingly clear to us that participants' conceptions of partnership were contingent. As a result, the word "partnership" appears in this report as a somewhat unstable and changing concept, depending upon the context in which it is discussed.

2   To explore the ways in which social, economic and environmental factors support or hinder the development of partnership amongst local government, communities and businesses; and

3   To expand upon research results and offering principles which aspire to assist in the development of collaborative strategies through an engaged and contextually informed research process.

The findings of the research project pose three primary challenges for urban and rural communities as they develop collaboration and come to understand interdependency:

Challenge One

The research discussed in this report uncovered widespread enthusiasm for partnering and an increasingly wide range of experience in partnership activities. Yet challenges do exist, and are often realised in the process of translating enthusiasm and in-principle agreement into on-the-ground action. The challenge for communities in developing effective partnerships is to develop non-traditional problem-solving skills, bridging different scales, communities and interests. Managing conflicts between urban and rural needs, identities and resources is essential to developing effective collaboration.

Challenge Two

Due to differences in scales and interests, governance relations are extended across geographical areas, contributing to the creation of new regions. Partnerships necessarily involve novel configurations of space and time, and raise issues about identities and futures. Indeed, concerns about the loss of community identity, are common sources of uncertainty and conflict in partnerships. Similarly, the complex issues around which partnerships form, including urban growth, watershed management and regional economic development, pose substantial challenges for the communities involved. Thus, regionalism is not simply the outcome of new ways of thinking about planning and governance, but a response to the changing circumstances and relations shaping life in Alberta today, and in the future.

Challenge Three

The challenge for communities is to recognise the value of practice as a means of learning and capacity building. Learning should be a clearly defined goal of any partnership relationship. This may involve reflecting on the successes and failures of the process, but also include focussed attention on the processes and social relations contributing to these outcomes. Communities face a difficult challenge in ensuring that they are able to develop the capacities and skills needed to respond to regional challenges. Capturing the experience of practice is an essential component of this process.

Partnerships are not a panacea for contending with pressing social, economic and environmental challenges. However, through shared experience, the development of collaborative skills, and the recognition of those spaces and contexts where new cultures and practices of governance can be fostered, partnerships can provide potential benefits for Albertan communities, showing each partner that they are not alone in facing the challenges of planning and sustainability.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1   Urban-rural interactions and interdependencies are becoming increasingly prevalent as growth pressures and population increases drive urban expansion farther into rural areas. The growth of regional economic clusters, environmental stewardship and infrastructure development all blur the traditional political boundaries separating rural communities and urban centres. Interdependency thus poses difficult challenges for communities and governments, requiring innovative responses and the growth of collaborative cultures and practices. One of the research participants involved in this study captured the importance of interdependency in the following terms:

> *"I think we all need to shed greater light on urban-rural interdependency. We, in this country, generally tend to have a level of independence that sometimes makes us too proud. We [need to] say to our neighbour, 'we need you, we're nothing without you'. I know that [some] may not like the word interdependency; they may prefer the word cooperation. But, this is what it is, it's interdependency."*

2   This report provides the account of an explorative research project, situated in three regions of Alberta (see Section 2.1, Study Regions), and aimed at addressing the nature of urban-rural relations and the development of new social and institutional relations. In particular, the research findings presented here focus on the functioning and evolution of partnerships. Using surveys and questionnaires, researchers gathered information about how partnerships contribute to community well-being, and how they can be used to meet local and regional challenges and opportunities. This study investigates how partnerships may foster economic development, social infrastructure and environmental sustainability (including, for example, land use planning). Further themes explored include, the drivers inducing partnership, the conditions under which these associations arise and are of greatest benefit, and future trends in the development of collaboration.

3   Partnerships, as a focal point and central theme of this project, emerged early in the process of data collection and analysis. Initial observations of the research setting revealed a wide range of different types of relationships and agreements, from informal (handshake) agreements to formal (legal) contracts between municipalities, businesses and/or community agencies. The characteristics and dynamics of these relations, including the personal dynamics of those involved, provide insight into the evolving nature of interdependency.

4   Therefore, the aim of this report is to build a better understanding of:

- rationales and reasons given for how and why communities, businesses, and governments work together;
- perceived benefits and drawbacks of partnering; and
- factors which support, or hinder, the success of partnerships.

5   This report does not review all of the partnerships observed over the course of the project. Instead, the findings presented here are context bound to those instances which evolved into the empirical focus of this project. Caution should be taken in reading this report as a conclusive account of partnering, or as a step by step toolkit for developing best-practice. Instead, the intention of this report is to distinguish common themes and insights with the aim of better understanding the core challenges facing cross-boundary and collaborative governance. The reported research findings provide a lens through which communities can be challenged to develop new perspectives and to innovate novel solutions to current regional challenges. It is hoped that the research presented below may hold lessons and offer insights to inform and enhance the ongoing development of partnership policies and practices in Alberta.

2.0 THE RESEARCH PROJECT

6   This report has been informed by a comparative study of urban-rural interdependencies in Alberta, drawing on mixed methods of data collection and analysis.

2.1 Study Regions

7   The study was situated in three regions of the province. These were delineated according to pre-existing boundaries drawn by the Regional Economic Development Alliance (REDA) initiative[2]. These regions are:

- Alberta Southwest Regional Alliance (ABSW)
- Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP)
- Northeast Alberta Information HUB Ltd. (HUB)

8   A further region, Flagstaff Community (including Flagstaff County and the municipalities within its boundaries), was selected as the site of an initial pilot study. Although the pilot informed the development of the overall study (see below), the data presented in this report relates solely to the three principle research regions of ABSW, CRP and HUB. The Flagstaff project was funded and undertaken independently, prior to this study[3].

9   ABSW encompasses a breathtaking landscape of mountains and prairies and remains predominantly rural, maintaining the presence of a western cowboy culture. It is sparsely populated with only limited growth and immigration into the area. Historically the region had only limited economic development, although there are indications that efforts towards economic revitalization are under way.

Box 1: Study Regions

Map: http://www.alberta-canada.com/regionaldev/1220.html

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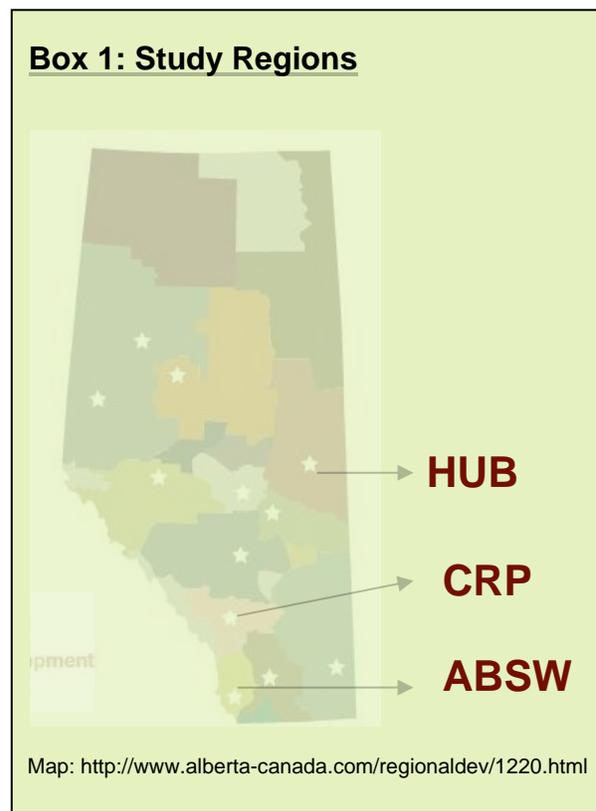
[2] http://www.alberta-canada.com/about-alberta/regional-economic-development-alliances-initiative.html (accessed June, 2010)

[3] The results of this study are available online at: http://www.crsc.ualberta.ca/urbanrural.cfm .

10   Less rural than ABSW, HUB is a mix of rural and urban municipalities, with a larger growing population, supported by increased immigration. Growth in the energy, defence, transportation, agriculture and tourism sectors has led to widely spread economic development. Recently, efforts to strengthen the relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities have been made to further encourage business growth in the region.

11   The City of Calgary dominates the CRP with a growing urban population. At the forefront of robust economic growth in the province for the last fifteen years, the CRP boasts a wide range of developing business areas. Alongside rapid growth, concerns have developed over urban sprawl, placing issues such as regional land use planning and utility provision and servicing to the forefront of local policy initiatives.

12   As these brief vignettes suggest, each of the three regions is unique and characterised by distinctive regional configurations. It goes without saying that each community within the regions also has an identity of its own which, as we will discuss, is negotiated in the context of the region. As a result, each region has an individual experience of urban-rural relations. Thus, one benefit of the inclusion of the three areas is that many economic, demographic and geographic experiences are encompassed in the research. Furthermore, contrasts between urban-rural demographics, population growth, economic development and cultural characteristics enable a comparative focus to the research. This aids in addressing the varying cultures and spaces in which urban-rural partnerships and interdependencies exist, and the contexts in which they can develop successfully.

13   Further information about the regions, and the process by which they were selected to take place in this project, can be found in Appendix 1.

2.2 Research Activities

14   The empirical findings of this report are supported by multiple methods of data collection and analysis. Initial stages of the project involved an extensive review of academic and policy literatures (refer to Section 3.0 Literature Review). Socio-economic profiling was also conducted on each of the three case study regions. These profiles were intended as contextual background information for researchers, to help them understand the demographic and economic climates of each region, and which could potentially affect interdependencies. The knowledge gained though these activities was employed to develop a further programme of research combining qualitative and quantitative research elements.

15   A total of 78 interviewees participated in this project from across the three case study regions. Participants were made up of elected officials, municipal employees and

members of local community and business organisations. Core themes discussed in these interviews included:

- The benefits of partnership
- The challenges and drawbacks of partnering
- Favourable conditions for developing and maintaining partnerships
- Sustainability and interdependence (economic, social and environmental)
- The potential of, and future opportunities for, partnerships
- The role of planning in addressing challenges and opportunities

16   Interviews were semi-structured, meaning researchers asked predetermined, but open-ended questions.

17   Interviews were recorded, with consent from the participants, and then transcribed into text. The data was subjected to a thematic analysis whereby recurring topics, attitudes and experiences could be identified, compared and contrasted. Examples of emergent themes included power dynamics, organizational structure, the role of government and regulation, motivations to partner, resources, and local attitudes, or mindsets. This process was aided by the use of the *NVivo* qualitative software package which allowed rough thematic impressions to be assembled, and more nuanced sub-themes and comparisons to be developed.

> **Box 2: Research Stages**
>
> 1. Site selection
> 2. Primary data collection:
>   i. Background information (literature review and socio-economic profiling)
>   ii. Interviews
>   iii. Online survey
> 3. Analysis and draft report writing
> 4. Consultation with regional focus groups
> 5. Dissemination of analysis and guidance

18   To complement this analysis, an online survey was conducted, to which there were 109 respondents. Participants again included elected officials, municipal employees and members of community and business organisations. The questions posed to the survey respondents were developed out of initial analysis of the background information and interviews.

19   Analysis of the survey data had three primary benefits. Firstly, it allowed us to gain a general sense of participant attitudes towards collaboration. Secondly, it identified, or provided further insight, into responses which were either absent, or less prevalent in the interview data. For example, one survey question asked participants to rank the contribution of factors, such as leadership, communication, and trust, to the development of effective partnerships. Thirdly, this process was used as a means of triangulating the data, testing the consistency of the findings and holding the themes imposed on the data up to further scrutiny.

2.3 Consultation and Collaboration in the Research Process

20   Consultation and collaboration are not only important themes in the empirical focus of this report, but have also guided our research practice. Our approach seeks to transgress traditional boundaries between research and practice so as to engage participants as knowledgeable contributors (Fox, 2003). As such, this research project has sought to mobilize knowledge: drawing scholarship from, and to, our research partners. It is an interactive process recognizing that knowledge can be contextual and experiential, as well as based on traditional forms of academic expertise (Irwin and Wynne, 1996).

21   Engagement and consultation with participants and the wider research community have persisted throughout the research process through a series of consultations with interview participants and wider members of the community. These consultations were held to discuss, clarify and debate the veracity of the findings presented in draft reports. Moreover, the focus groups provided an opportunity for participants to devise solutions to potential hurdles in the partnership process and to identify further partnership opportunities. Those participants who did not attend were invited to provide feedback by telephone or e-mail.

22   It is the aspiration of the researchers to continue this process of engagement, beyond the publication of this report. Working with communities can provide a basis for directing future practice, or identifying 'next steps'. Researchers from CRSC will endeavour to continue to work with local practitioners to build capacity and translate the research experience into meaningful outcomes. In support of this engagement the CRSC is launching a web-site for practitioners to accompany the publication of this report. Through this site municipal employees and the communities they work with will be provided with principles and tools of good practice, rooted in research case studies. The site will be interactive, offering communities the opportunities to share their experiences with others, and to address questions to members of the CRSC research team[4].

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[4] To find this website please visit us at: http://www.crsc.ualberta.ca/partnership.cfm

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

23   This literature review has informed our investigation of partnerships around urban-rural interdependencies by placing it into a broader context of trends in policy and practice. The review addresses the key themes of the study, including drivers leading to urban-rural interdependencies, conditions facilitating and impeding partnerships, and perceived benefits and drawbacks of partnership, through secondary research. The research upon which this review draws does not make reference to existing materials related to intermunicipal collaboration and partnerships that currently exist in the province of Alberta. As yet, there appears to be no cohesive body of literature that unpacks the nature of urban-rural interrelations (Caffyn & Dahlstrom, 2005; Infrastructure Canada, 2005; Snoxell, 2005, cited in Dabson, 2007). This review, therefore, draws on literature from a variety of fields, including economics, rural development theory, new rural economy, community economic development, sustainable development and regional economic development.

3.1 The Increasing Significance of Interdependencies

24   Recent theoretical and policy-oriented discussions show a growing interest in urban-rural interdependencies (Adell, 1999; Partridge et al., 2005; Tacoli, 1998) and the partnerships that develop around them. Most observers note increasing levels of urban-rural interaction, especially between areas close to large urban and metropolitan centres (Bollman et al., 2004, cited in Infrastructure Canada, 2005; Olfert & Partridge, 2005). Within the literature a number of overlapping representations of these relations are made, giving shape to the contexts and spaces where interdependency has evolved and continues to develop.

25   Tacoli (1998), informed by studies of rural development in the global South, suggests a four-fold conceptual typology of interdependency. Rural and urban areas are interdependent in terms of the following: i) flows of *people* signified by commuting, leisure, and migration patterns (also see Core Cities, 2003); ii) flows of *goods* signified by market interactions; iii) flows of *waste*; and iv) *sector specific interactions* such as urban farming and rural manufacturing.

26   Greenwood (2007) outlines five further aspects of interdependency linking urban and rural communities: i) trade and commerce, including resources, services, people, finance and information; ii) functional integration, including environmental stewardship or leisure activities (see also Reimer, 2005); iii) institutional integration in areas such as health and education; iv) the prevalence of shared environmental concerns (also,

mutual interests in risk remediation; see Stabler & Olfert, 2002); and v) the development of common perceptions, values, and identities (see also Reimer & Nagata, 2008).

27   Two further factors cited in the literature for the increased prevalence of urban-rural interdependency include: i) growing networks of infrastructure and transportation (Stabler & Olfert, 2002), and ii) regional clustering of similar industries, alongside the development of economic flows and trade corridors (Bertolini & Djyust, 2003, cited in Infrastructure Canada, 2005).

28   The literature suggests that shifts in rural economic characteristics have helped propel the types of interactions noted above. One of these key shifts involves increasing rural economic diversification. This change has been influenced by trade liberalization; globalisation; and advances in technology, communications and transportation (Lowe & Ward, 2007; Moseley, 2002; Webb, 1999). Labour-shedding technologies in agriculture and natural resource extraction have reduced employment opportunities in these sectors, while transportation efficiencies have resulted in goods, capital and labour moving through larger regional centres, thereby diminishing the role of small towns and villages (Bollman, 2007; Moseley, 2002; Reimer, 2004; Reimer, 2005; Webb, 1999). Counter-urbanization is also changing the structure of rural economy, with increasing use of rural areas for 'urban' styles of living and leisure and the relocation of firms to rural areas to take advantage of lower land and labour costs (Bollman, 2007; Lowe & Ward, 2007). The rapid and often sprawling growth of many urban areas also fuels urban-rural interdependencies; research by Partridge (2005) suggests that adjacent rural areas gain about one-third of urban growth. However, issues such as land use and annexation also come into play with urban sprawl, requiring communication and coordination across urban-rural lines.

29   These changes in urban-rural relationships are recognized in recent policy developments. There is widespread agreement that traditional policy perspectives, premised on an urban-rural dichotomy, cannot adequately address interdependencies (Azmier & Lozanski, 2004; Caffyn & Dahlstrom, 2005; Manitoba Research Alliance, undated; Webb, 1999; Whitener and Parker, 2007). Urban and rural areas cannot be thought of as uncomplicated polar opposites (Arévalo et al., 2003; Masuda & Garvin, 2008; Turok, 2009), nor can they be lumped in together under one-size-fits-all policy umbrellas (Wheeler, 2009). Rather, desirable policy approaches are holistic, addressing a broad range of issues and honouring the complexities of urban-rural interaction. They offer a full range of policy instruments that develop local assets and facilitate innovative ways of generating rural employment and income (Cameron, 2008; Dabson, 2007; Goldenberg, 2008; Whitener & Parker, 2007).

3.2 Costs and Benefits of Urban-Rural Interdependencies

30   Increasing relationships between urban and rural areas carry both positive and negative consequences for those areas. Examining what the literature has to say about those consequences will help flesh out our understanding of interdependencies, as well as identifying potential considerations for partnerships around these relationships. Most work on the costs and benefits of urban-rural interdependencies pertains to relationships between urban centres and metro-adjacent rural areas (Core Cities, 2003; Dabson, 2007; Slack, Bourne, & Gertler, 2003). Rural areas in close proximity to urban centres are perceived to benefit from:

- access to diverse employment opportunities;
- specialized services (for instance in health care);
- concentrations of leisure, sport and cultural facilities;
- access to resources for public and private investment in rural enterprise;
- vibrant environments for knowledge creation and transfer;
- transportation hubs;
- the national and international profiles of metropolitan areas; and
- easy access to end markets for rural products.

31   Urban growth is similarly seen to benefit rural economic development through:

- the relocation of urban firms to rural areas, capitalising on lower land and labour costs;
- increased urban consumption of less expensive rural raw materials;
- expanding markets for rural goods and services (e.g., leisure and recreation); and
- counter-urbanization, wherein urbanites migrate to nearby rural areas for relief from congestion and the high cost of living (Parkinson, 2004; Partridge et al., 2005).

32   In turn, rural neighbours may provide cities and urban municipalities with the following (Core Cities, 2003; Dabson, 2007):

- food;
- energy;
- environmental stewardship;
- waste management;
- congestion relief;
- greater housing options;
- niche retail experiences;

- specialty agriculture;
- countryside leisure;
- space for major economic and infrastructure projects;
- the outsourcing of services; and
- the alleviation of urban labour shortages.

33   Potential costs, or 'backwash' effects, of increasing interdependence may include (Partridge et al., 2005):

- diminishing rural landscapes;
- environmental degradation;
- rural out-migration (for jobs and amenities offered by metropolitan areas); and
- the loss of rural employment opportunities as firms locate in urban areas to take advantage of agglomeration benefits.

3.3 Partnerships: Navigating Interdependencies

34   Increasingly, urban-rural interdependencies, and intra-regional relationships more generally (Douglass, 1998; McKinney, Fitch, & Harmon, 2002), take the form of cross-sector partnerships (Selsky & Parker, 2005). This is especially the case when considering interdependencies formed through shared ambitions of sustainable development (Biermann et al., 2007). Accordingly, this review draws from literature on cross-sectoral and sustainable development partnerships. It addresses the potential functions of urban-rural partnering, as well as factors contributing to, or impeding, its formation and success.

Addressing Shared Concerns

35   Partnerships are sites of political struggle and power inequalities will inevitably come into play (Derkzen et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the literature suggests that purposeful urban-rural partnerships can address shared problems by providing a means for advocacy, and by mediating between competing interests and viewpoints (Brinkerhoff, 2007; Olfert & Partridge, 2005; Partridge et al., 2005; Stabler & Olfert, 2002). This could be particularly true for partners who share the peri-urban interface (areas bordering urban centres, which may not be straightforwardly urban or rural; Dabson, 2007; Libby & Nalukenge, 2001; McKinney et al., 2002). By promoting mutual understanding of the characteristics of rural, urban and peri-urban areas, partnerships can, for example, mediate between conflicting viewpoints on land conversion and environmental degradation, or provide mechanisms for addressing uncontrolled development (Azmier & Dobson, 2003; Olfert & Partridge, 2005; Parkinson, 2004; Partridge et al., 2005). Intermunicipal cooperation may also help municipalities meet citizens' increasingly high standards for service provision (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007).

36   There is some concern that because urban policy is increasingly impacting rural areas (Balamou & Psaltopoulos, 2006), the growth of urban areas may be overshadowing rural priorities (Azmier & Lozanski, 2004). However, others suggest that alliances with urban neighbours can strengthen rural stakeholders' political influence (Azmier & Dobson, 2003; Olfert & Partridge, 2005; Partridge et al., 2005). Some claim that urban-rural alliances can ensure that rural perspectives are considered on policy issues that are not exclusively rural, such as immigration, trade, environmental protection and water management — all of which have an impact on rural development (Azmier & Lozanski, 2004; Scott, 2006; Whitener & Parker, 2007).

Economic Development

37   In the prevailing context of a knowledge-based economy, several sources identify the potential of partnerships to enhance rural economic participation and development. With the traditional economic basis of rural areas in decline, innovative collaborations between urban and rural actors could help rural areas develop new areas of economic activity. For instance, involvement with urban knowledge-generating institutions can promote information sharing and enable rural actors to gain entrepreneurial and business skills (Deaton, 2002; McKinney et al., 2002; Stabler & Olfert, 2002). Furthermore, urban-rural partnerships may offer benefits for widening the scale and scope of rural economic ventures. Communities banding together can generate critical mass, increasing competitiveness in the global economy (Dabson, 2007; Moseley, 2002; Parkinson, 2004) and enabling the development of a marketable regional identity (Gordon, 2007; Scott, 2006). Partnerships could also produce economies of scale, increasing the effectiveness of service delivery and infrastructure building, particularly at the urban fringe (Azmier & Dobson, 2003; Libby & Nalukenge, 2001; Olfert & Partridge, 2005; Partridge et al., 2005; Regional Economic Development Alliances, 2006; Slack, Bourne, & Gertler, 2003; Stabler & Olfert, 2000). Partnerships can help rural and urban communities locate and capitalize on complementary strengths, offset weaknesses, pool resources and share expertise (Gordon, 2007). Partnerships also build capacity to take on longer-term economic development projects, a potentially crucial function in light of uncertainty about the viability of rural economic futures (Regional Economic Development Alliances, 2006).

Environmental Sustainability

38   Environment and sustainability are prominent in discussions of the potential benefits of urban-rural partnering. This reflects the increasing awareness that social, environmental and economic concerns are intricately linked.   Moreover, the environment is a critical factor in social and economic development; without resources (food, water and material resources) and ecological services (clean air, clean water etc.), neither can survive. The vision statement of Alberta's Land Use Framework

acknowledges this dependency on "the land as the foundation of our economic, environmental and social well-being" (Government of Alberta, 2008). Thus, rural and urban interactions frequently intersect on the strategic area of the environment, as noted by Reimer and Nagata (2008):

> "In Canada, the importance of rural areas for natural resources remains as in the past, but the functions of rural places as sources of urban food, water, and recreational opportunities have become a source of conflict as a result of growing concerns with food quality and environmental sustainability. These types of interdependences require careful reflection, for while rural and urban economies may remain significantly different they can establish new forms of integration."

39   Within the literature it is often asserted that partnerships provide a means of developing effective and holistic approaches to environmental sustainability. As environmental issues are inherently multisectoral, Biermann et al. (2007, p.289) note the potential for a "skyrocketing of partnerships" as a route to sustainable development (2007, p. 289). Provided that the state, society, and business recognize their joint implication in environmental issues, working together in partnerships may provide a "socially responsible alternative" to fragmented efforts (Glasbergen, 2007). Furthermore, some authors suggest that partnering could lay the groundwork for the development of innovative social science and deliberative democracy (Biermann et al., 2007).

40   However, while interpreting these potential benefits, a note of caution should be sounded. Within some of the literature, partnership is treated as a potential panacea for contending with sustainable development issues. Biermann et al. (2007) thus warn against treating partnership as a universal, or matter of fact, solution to complex and persistent social, economic and environmental issues. Instead, the successes of partnering must be interpreted in the outcomes. As Glasbergen (2007) aptly notes, it is incumbent in assessing the benefits of collaboration to reflect upon what has been gained through collaboration that could not have been achieved alone.

3.4 Conditions Influencing Urban-Rural Partnerships

41   This section examines a number of factors that, according to the literature, shape urban-rural partnerships. These include governance; changes in policy perspectives; place, perception and identity; leadership; competing interests; and attitudinal and procedural factors. These considerations figure prominently throughout our discussion of partnerships, and the following insights from the literature provide context for our analysis of the ways in which these factors are (or are not) at play in ABSW, CRP, and HUB.

Governance: Dependence and Interdependencies

42   Difficulties arise in defining a role for the public sector in collaborative partnerships (Moseley, 2002). In particular, it is widely agreed in the literature that governments have a role to play in cultivating successful partnerships, although the literature reveals no clear consensus on what precisely this role should be. Further, municipal, provincial, and federal government roles could differ widely due to their varying mandates, scales and relationships to business and community groups. Some possible roles for governments in partnerships that have been discussed in general terms in the literature include:

- providing frameworks, goals and a vision in developing urban-rural alliances (Deaton, 2002; McKinney & Essington, 2006; Roberts, 2007);
- cultivating intergovernmental collaboration (McKinney & Essington, 2006);
- funding roundtables and steering committees (Torjman, 2004), or providing other venues for collaboration (Reimer & Nagata, 2008);
- providing technical assistance, or coaching, especially to communities that lack capacity (Torjman, 2004);
- providing information on exemplary collaborative practices (Torjman, 2004);
- involving key stakeholders in discussions of possible policy approaches and solutions (Torjman, 2004); and
- providing incentives to partner (Gunningham, 2007).

43   Though many sources call for governments to take an increased role in partnerships, Glasbergen (2007), writing on sustainable development policy, cautions that the state should not be relied upon exclusively to take charge; neither, on the other hand, should the 'free' market (Ostrom, 2008). Rather, these authors suggest, public and private interests exist on a continuum, and society and business are both encouraged to be involved in regional decision-making. The state can play an active role in facilitating cooperation across these sectors, but it should not be counted on alone.

44   Alberta's political climate has also influenced urban-rural interdependencies. There have been significant changes to local governance in Alberta and Canada in recent years, including the 'new' Municipal Government Act (MGA) introduced by the provincial government in 1994. Without drawing an overall conclusion about the MGA and its effects, one can observe that the overhaul of the MGA greatly increased the power of municipal governments (LeSage & McMillan, 2008). Changes to the MGA included increased jurisdictional autonomy and operating freedom for municipalities. Although municipalities gained power and responsibility, the province also eliminated almost all regional planning commissions and revamped the system of regional services commissions (LeSage & Garcea, 2005), effecting significant changes in regional planning capacity.

45   Such changes in government structure and the distribution of responsibilities may necessitate collaboration among civil society, private interests, and various levels of government to discover innovative ways to meet the challenges produced by those changes (Glasbergen, 2007; Hulst & van Montfort, 2007; Mol, 2007). This reflects a broader notion of the shift from "government," or formal institutions of the state, to "governance," or ways of addressing issues that involve a breadth of stakeholders from differing spheres (de Loë et al., 2009). The term "governance" is applied to many different examples in the literature (de Loë et al., 2009; Saito, 2008). For the purpose of this review, "governance" is understood to mean regional decision-making and networking processes, covering a potentially broad range of policy spheres (economic, social, environmental, etc.), that extend beyond formalized government structures to include public and private stakeholders (de Loë et al., 2009; Institute on Governance as cited in Bruce, 2008; Leuprecht & Lazar, 2007; Saito, 2008). Partnerships may spring from reduced government involvement at the same time as they may depend on certain forms of governmental support for their existence (Glasbergen, 2007). Mixed opinions exist on the results of partnerships around governance. Authors such as Brinkerhoff (2007) suggest there is little empirical evidence proving that governance is necessarily cultivated through collaboration. Others, such as Meadowcroft (2007), project that partnering activities are essential to developing practices of deliberative democracy.

Changing Policy Perspectives

46   As mentioned above, prevailing policy wisdom increasingly views urban and rural areas in a holistic and integrated light, rather than as entirely separate spheres. A growing body of literature suggests that policy-related support and the acknowledgement of interdependencies are key factors in developing partnerships. Along these lines, policy directions that reflect these changing perspectives include:

- building and expanding critical social and economic infrastructure (Moseley, 2002; Reimer, 2005; Whitener & Parker, 2007);
- enhancing financial assistance for development projects and enabling greater access to venture capital (Azmier and Lozanski, 2004; Goldenberg, 2008);
- supporting investments in knowledge-based sectors, e.g., enhancing human capital through increased educational opportunities (Azmier & Lozanski, 2004; Manitoba Research Alliance, undated; Moseley, 2002; Reimer, 2005; Whitener & Parker, 2007); and
- capitalizing on natural amenities (Whitener and Parker, 2007) and innovating new applications for natural resources (Azmier & Lozanski, 2004; Goldenberg, 2008; Whitener & Parker, 2007).

47   These new directions in both rural economic and socio-economic development strategy are conducive to, and dependent upon, the cultivation of alliances (Azmier & Lozanski, 2004; Epstein & Jezeph, 2001; Libby & Nalukenge, 2001; Reimer, 2005).

Such alliances may enable, for example, pooling of resources and knowledge, leveraging of public resources, activity coordination, and strengthened policy influence as municipalities band together to identify needs and key concerns (Azmier & Lozanski, 2004; Goldenberg, 2008; Webb, 1999; Whitener & Parker, 2007).

Place, Perception and Identity

48   Policy approaches increasingly reflect the fact that social practices, people's differing perceptions of place, and variations in local culture complicate the classification of urban versus rural areas. Thus, there is a need for nuanced responses (Arévalo, Perez, & Overbeek, 2003; Masuda & Garvin, 2008). Ostrom (2008) suggests that the individual characteristics of communities and local expertise require multi-level approaches to complex issues. It is necessary, she argues, to capitalise on the diversity and unique strengths of urban and rural communities, recognizing the diverse nature of the latter in particular (Arévalo, Perez, & Overbeek, 2003; Moseley, 2002). Partnerships may function as part of multilevel governance systems, drawing on local expertise and social capital to solve collective action problems, which "occur when it takes the inputs and efforts of multiple individuals in order to achieve joint outcomes" (Ostrom, 2008, p. 1).

49   Collaboration between urban and rural stakeholders is not necessarily as simple as recognizing common ground and moving forward from there. Each individual, or organization, will bring with them a set of perceptions and an identity whose influence must be recognized and incorporated into discussions. With respect to rural development, there are often conflicting opinions regarding development versus preservation of rural landscapes. Urban stakeholders may view rural areas largely in terms of their contributions to food production and rural residents largely as environmental stewards, resulting in the overshadowing of rural economic development in favour of rural preservation (Esparcia & Buciega, undated; Lowe & Ward, 2007; Scott, 2006).

Leadership

50   There is consensus in the literature of the importance of effective governance and leadership for regional collaboration and, by extension, urban-rural alliances. One potential barrier to effective leadership, as suggested by Libby and Nalukenge (2001), is that no local legislator has a credible base for becoming a "champion" of strategic regional partnerships. This fact often leads to significant tensions between local and regional perspectives and priorities (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007). Existing governance structures may be uncooperative, uninterested, or overwhelmed (McKinney, Fitch, & Harmon, 2002). Fragmented decision structures (Parkinson, 2004), ineffective information flows (Moseley, 2002), and the exclusive use of urban-derived governance methods (Caffyn & Dahlstrom, 2005) may further complicate matters.

51   Effective leadership comes in many forms, but several sources identify some particularly important characteristics: facilitating power-sharing and the movement of people, ideas and resources; providing integrity and credibility; emphasizing dialogue; and building trusting relationships by respecting a diversity of ideas and viewpoints (Deaton, 2002; McKinney, et al., 2004; Parkinson, 2004). Leadership can be brought to partnerships through the cultivation of "local champions" (McKinney & Essington, 2006; McKinney et al., 2004; Regional Economic Development Alliances, 2006). Along these lines, there is a growing literature on the formation of local councils, or forums, developed to facilitate collaboration among multiple stakeholders, demonstrating leadership on a local scale (e.g., McKinney & Field, 2008; Roberts et al., 2004). However, even if such leadership is cultivated it will have to contend with dual obligations in a partnership situation—fulfilling the mandate of the partnership as a whole while not neglecting its local or individual mandates.

Competing Interests

52   As might be expected, achieving smooth and effective cooperation among partners from different municipalities, or sectors, can be hampered by opposing interests. For instance, one of the challenges in public-private partnerships is ensuring that private sector interests, such as access to capital, lower production costs and increased revenues, do not compromise the objectives of the public sector (Webb, 1999). Partners can also become preoccupied with defending local interests and may be unprepared to make sacrifices for the greater good of the alliance (Moseley, 2002; Roberts, 2007). Similarly, inequities in property tax assessment bases and cost- and revenue-sharing between urban and rural areas have been longstanding points of contention both in Alberta (Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, 2009) and elsewhere.

53   Balancing competing interests can be particularly challenging when partners have varying levels of community capacity (Freshwater, in Canadian Urban Institute, 2007). Rural communities, for example, often lack capacity in terms of resources and power, including information and knowledge (Gordon, 2007; McKinney & Essington, 2006). However, despite the challenges partners may face in fulfilling the wishes of their respective interests, the literature provides convincing evidence that partnerships can be effective mechanisms for representing and including diverse interests. They may also help alleviate tension among partners by highlighting potential collective benefits (Loizides, 1994) and areas of common ground, demonstrating that many rural concerns are also urban concerns, and vice versa (Roberts, Denard, & Scott, 2004).

Attitudinal Factors

54   Most sources articulate the view that purposeful partnerships require rural and urban stakeholders to replace competitive attitudes (e.g., the success of one community

16

dilutes the success of another) with collaborative attitudes (e.g., the success of one community contributes to the success of another; Dabson, 2007; Regional Economic Development Alliances, 2006). Competitive attitudes are perceived to be strengthened by distrust and a lack of familiarity among partners (Caffyn & Dahlstrom, 2005). Joint ventures may also be impeded by rural and urban planning bureaus that promote rivalry over collaboration and administrative divisions that separate rural and urban spaces (Douglass, 1998). A less dichotomous understanding of urban and rural spaces may allow common ground to be identified and acted upon (Masuda & Garvin, 2008). Rural stakeholders, wary of losing local autonomy and independence, may perceive partnerships as an attempt on the part of urban stakeholders to gain unfair or disproportionate influence over rural actions (Freshwater, in Canadian Urban Institute, 2007; Gordon, 2007; Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, 2001; McKinney & Essington, 2006; Parkinson, 2004). The literature does not strongly suggest that urbanites feel a comparable threat from rural areas.

55   The literature identifies the importance of recognizing interdependencies and joint interests for building collaborative attitudes (Cameron, in Canadian Urban Institute, 2007; Deaton, 2002; Gordon, 2007; McKinney & Essington, 2006; Parkinson, 2004), and the importance of fostering shared understanding and knowledge of rural, urban, and regional areas (Cameron, 2008; McKinney et al., 2004). It is also suggested that dedication to strategic alliances may be enhanced when stakeholders are able to focus on a clear and compelling purpose for their partnerships (McKinney & Essington, 2006; McKinney et al., 2004).

Administrative Factors

56   In the initial stages of partnerships, those involved may lack experience in collaborative processes and the skills to act and negotiate in multiparty settings (Caffyn & Dahlstrom, 2005; McKinney & Essington, 2006). Stakeholders may be uncertain as to choosing participants and leaders, sharing responsibilities and costs, enforcing decisions and providing incentives for compliance (McKinney & Essington, 2006). Partners may disagree about whether to introduce formal or informal arrangements, and during the initial setup phase, they may also disagree about the scope of issues the collaboration will address (Gordon, 2007).

57   In terms of facilitating effective partnerships on the procedural level, the literature recommends having clearly defined goals and agendas (Parkinson, 2004; Regional Economic Development Alliances, 2006) and mechanisms for measuring outcomes (Regional Economic Development Alliances, 2006). McKinney et al. (2002) suggest educating partners on designing regional initiatives, managing regional organizations, and developing collaborative problem-solving strategies. Other key procedural elements include flexibility and adaptability (Deaton, 2002; McKinney & Essington, 2006), dispute

resolution capacity and making certain that the agendas of more powerful partners do not consistently prevail (Core Cities, 2003; Roberts, 2007).

58   Partnerships addressing urban-rural interdependencies are facilitated by regional policy perspectives, appropriate governance structures, effective leadership, mechanisms for balancing competing interests, collaborative rather than competitive attitudes, and effective procedural mechanisms. However, differing perspectives and perceptions among partners, tension between regional/partnership-related and local/individual priorities, and inadequate preparation or government support may hinder the development of successful partnerships.

3.5 Factors Explaining Variation in Economic Development

59   Factors explaining variation in economic development that were identified in the literature include the distance of a rural community to an urban centre, the unique identities and characteristics of rural communities, and the degree of economic diversification in rural communities.

Urban Proximity

60   The greatest rural economic advantages accrue to rural communities within an urban periphery (e.g., within a 90-minute commute, or up to 200 km; Dabson, 2007; Partridge et al., 2007; Wensley & Stabler, 1998). While negative urban population growth effects increase as proximity to those urban areas decreases (Partridge et al., 2007), rural communities adjacent to metro areas benefit from urban growth. The number of urbanites relocating to those areas increases (due to lower housing costs and rural amenities), urban residents and firms purchase more rural goods and services, and rural residents increasingly take advantage of "commutable" urban employment opportunities (Moss et al., 2004, cited in Olfert & Partridge, 2008; Partridge, 2005; Partridge & Nolan, 2005, cited in Olfert & Partridge, 2008).

Rural Economic and Socio-Economic Characteristics

61   Rural economic development also depends on the characteristics of rural communities themselves, and accordingly much attention is paid in the literature to honouring communities' identities, including local particularities and citizens' expertise regarding their own communities. While rural communities near cities may grow by virtue of their urban proximity, other rural communities capitalize on strong natural areas and associated leisure and tourism opportunities, and yet others may have a strong natural resource base (Partridge et al., 2007). In short, economic development is a function of each community's ability to capitalize on its unique strategic advantages (see also Partridge et al., 2006; Dabson 2007).

62   Until recently, it has been a largely accepted fact that population density influences economic and socio-economic development. Some sources claim that communities with low population density have a smaller tax base and thus less revenue for investment in facilities and the types of infrastructure that makes an area attractive (Azmier & Dobson, 2003; Azmier & Lozanski, 2004). Areas with low population density also have lower demand for goods and services, thus rendering the provision of some services unprofitable and compromising the financial viability of rural businesses (Azmier & Lozanski, 2004).

63   Recently, however, an emerging body of research suggests that population density is becoming less influential in economic development. Quigley (2002), for example, argues that with advances in telecommunications, the high population density once required for marketing specialty products is no longer as salient as consumers can purchase specialty goods online (though this requires internet services to households). With respect to production, lower land costs, improvements in transportation and the declining importance of raw materials in manufacturing give rural areas a competitive advantage despite their low population density. Low-density rural areas are also becoming more competitive in service and entrepreneurial activities, as many businesses are increasingly attracted to rural areas' lower land and labour costs and attractive quality of life.

64   The degree of income inequality within a rural community further influences economic growth. Fallah & Partridge (2006) examined the inequality-growth relationship in U.S. counties and found that unlike urban areas, where income inequality stimulates economic growth, income inequality in rural areas weakens social cohesion and in turn compromises economic growth.

65   Finally, variation in economic development across communities is also suggested to be a function of the extent to which individual communities have sufficient human resources for economic development activities (Falcone et al., 1996).

Economic Diversification

66   Research suggests that economic diversification may reduce economic instability across metropolitan areas by providing a shield from market fluctuations. Using data from 125 Local Government Areas in Australia, Trendle (2006) found that industrial diversification also reduces economic instability within functional economic (regional) areas and in sparsely settled rural regions heavily dependent on agriculture and mining. However, Thilmany et al. (2005) note that the recruitment of firms to regions is dependent on the number and type of existing firms in the community, as well as whether the community meets the population threshold required by a particular industry. Rising energy costs also influence industrial development (and hence diversification),

with potentially negative implications for rural economies which are often involved in developing energy-intensive industries, such as agriculture, or other primary industries (Partridge, 2005).

3.6 Key Themes

67   A number of key themes emerged from this review of the literature on urban-rural interdependencies and purposeful urban-rural partnerships. The most recent policy and theoretical perspectives take a regional view of crucial issues, rather rigidly dividing urban versus rural areas. Little empirical research has examined the nature of (and changes in) urban-rural interdependencies, but despite this limitation, the literature, particularly in the fields of economics and geography, identifies some of the advantages and disadvantages of increased interdependence.

68   There is widespread recognition of the importance of cultivating purposeful urban-rural, or regional, alliances to minimize the costs and maximize the benefits of interdependencies among areas characterized by power and resource disparities. To this end, intermunicipal and intersectoral partnerships have emerged in recent years as an increasingly common way of acting upon interdependencies. Uncertainties remain, however, regarding the role of government and the public sector in supporting these partnerships, and potential tensions between local and regional priorities. It was discovered that the literatures on regionalism and, to some extent, on community economic development are mostly concerned with identifying the conditions necessary for the cultivation of purposeful partnerships, and that this knowledge may be extrapolated to better understand the conditions necessary for successful urban-rural partnerships.

69   Finally, this review sought to identify some of the factors other than urban-rural interdependencies which help explain variation in economic and socio-economic prosperity. While a thorough examination of such factors was beyond the scope of the review, such factors as urban proximity, the ability to recognize and capitalize on community identity, population density, income inequality, availability of resources for economic development, and economic diversification are all relevant.

70   As interest in regionalism grows, it is expected that urban-rural partnerships will gain greater attention in the literature. Our understanding would benefit from research that explores the nature of specific partnerships between stakeholders in rural and urban communities, including challenges and successes, as well as the implications of urban-rural partnerships for economic prosperity. Research on the interdependencies and partnership potential of remote rural communities and urban centres may also be required.

Key Lessons and Challenges

71   The conclusions of this literature review yield some important considerations for the present study. First, it will be important to note how our participants handle tensions between their duties and obligations to their individual organizations/local municipalities, and their intermunicipal/regional obligations in terms of the partnerships in which they participate.

72   The literature review also identifies the importance of partners' mindsets and collaborative attitudes, in addition to structural factors to manage disputes that could result from incompatible desires, or attitudes, in a partnership.

73   The literature suggests that the existence of partnerships across not only municipal boundaries, but also sectoral boundaries (e.g., businesses, community groups and municipalities), could present additional and potentially challenging dimensions to our research. These considerations are explored in detail in the following sections of this document, as well as in each of the regional reports.

74   Finally, it is clear that urban and rural perceptions of place and identity can have significant effects on the establishment and operation of successful partnerships. As this study is concerned with the conditions in which partnerships arise and markers of their success, and as it focuses on intermunicipal partnerships in three regions with very different compositions of rural versus urban areas, the literature review findings suggest it will be crucial to note differences in partners' perceptions based on place and identity. Comparing those areas of difference to perceived common ground and concerns underlying the partnerships we encounter could also reveal useful insights into tensions at play in partnership dynamics within our study regions.

4.0 UNDERSTANDING PARTNERSHIP

4.1 Benefits of Partnership

75   On the whole, participants of the study supported the idea of partnerships and were eager to collaborate, as captured by the comments of one of our participants:

> *" …we are fortunate now that we have a culture in our region that is [characterised by] the belief in partnerships. Even though we are partners, in lots of ways we are still in competition with one another. But we have some basic understanding."*

76   Many respondents also identified an increase in collaborative activity, echoing the general consensus in the literature that partnerships are on the rise.

77   The benefits of partnerships as identified in interviews and surveys across all three regions included financial benefits (survey respondents in all three regions ranked this as their top benefit); shared resources and knowledge exchange; and adding more value to activities, products, programs, and services, as depicted in Table 1 (p. 23). The following quote from one respondent illustrates the sharing of resources between urban and rural municipalities:

> *"We've got the land, you've got the people, you've got the water, we've got the land. Let's do something together."*

78   Other benefits mentioned included reaching critical mass for clout and justification for services, building capacity, financial savings through economies of scale, sharing resources and knowledge, decreasing duplication of services, implementing large projects, attracting businesses and citizens, and overall community well-being. Some also suggested that partnership assists in helping communities understand what they have to offer the region, helping to flesh out their individual identity. As the following statement concisely states, there are wide reaching benefits of partnering between municipalities:

> *"Community doesn't stop at … town boundaries ... any time that we can cooperate there are first of all social benefits to that, but also economic benefits. You know, for cost-savings, for building a stronger, sustainable community."*

Table 1. Factors involved in deciding to partner with others

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Importance of factors involved in partnership with others (source: CRSC survey)	Financial reasons		
	Shared resources		
	Added value to activities, products, programs, services etc.		
	Community well-being	Collective problem-solving	

4.2 Challenges and Drawbacks

79   In general, the challenges participants identified around partnering included a lack of resources (human and financial) to cover the extra responsibilities that partnerships create; protectionism due to lack of a holistic mindset, or fear of having local concerns overshadowed by regional or urban matters (see Azmier & Lozanski, 2004); conflict; and inequalities in power or cost-benefit distribution. Fears about the future, funding, failures and forced partnerships were also frequently raised. As exemplified in this participant's comment, many were concerned about the integrity of community identity given this uncertainty about the future:

> *"So the future is definitely something that is a little bit frightening and disconcerting, especially for the older more traditional people here … many of our older villagers feel that [the municipality] will just be wiped off the map."*

80   Participants also repeatedly stressed that voluntary partnerships are likely to be most successful:

> *"I believe it is critical that the adjoining municipalities cooperate in whatever partnerships make sense for the communities. Like I said, every community is unique, and so it is not a one-size fits all for municipalities."*

81   This statement reinforces the importance of tailoring partnership solutions to the individual municipalities and organizations involved (Ostrom, 2008), honouring community identity and expertise.

82   It is interesting to note that in ABSW and CRP participants tended to distinguish between barriers to partnerships that were 'actual' outcomes, versus fears about

perceived outcomes. The latter were deemed by some participants to be unjustified, particularly the fear of losing identity, or autonomy, when entering into a partnership.

> *"So they worry about communities losing their autonomy to make their own decisions. And a lot of them see it at the political level ... I see it as: Oh, thank goodness, there's somebody regionally who's gonna look after [these] services in our region [at the administrative level] … ."*

83   Nonetheless, debates around identity and autonomy significantly affect partnerships in all three regions. Despite the overall eagerness to partner, many participants communicated to us that on-the-ground difficulties in partnerships are exacerbated by fear of others' agendas, which are often couched along urban-rural lines.

84   As depicted in Table 2 (Challenges to partnerships, p. 25), when survey respondents were asked to rank challenges to partnerships, unequal power in decision-making was a dominant concern shared by all three case study regions. The less populous and more rural areas, ABSW and HUB, indicated administrative challenges, which CRP did not, as expressed in the following quote:

> *"So the big centers are able to capture those because they have the resources and a small community … very difficult for those groups to access those large or larger grants or to tackle larger projects period."*

85   While partnership is viewed in much of the literature as a way to mediate between competing interests, our research suggests that unequal power relations may be brought into the open, or further aggravated, by partnership activities (Derkzen, Franklin, & Bock, 2008). Partnerships may act in different ways depending on the specific context and communities involved, helping to resolve, or further entrench, inequalities among partners.

86   In the CRP region it may be easier to attract administrative professionals due to the ready availability of training and amenities in urban areas. Interviewees in HUB and ABSW also expressed more concerns with administrative capacity in general than did interviewees in CRP, as demonstrated in the words of this participant*:*

> *" … we need to make decisions about x, y, z, but we don't have enough information to make a good decision so we need somebody, or some process, to collect this information."*

87   In ABSW a unique challenge is financial risk, which may result as a consequence of low economic development, as compared to more stable growth in HUB and CRP. It is not surprising that one of the top challenges for CRP is conflict. The CRP was perceived to be functioning effectively before the advent of land use discussions in the region. More recently, several partners have left the process due to conflicts over details of the Calgary Metropolitan Plan. A challenge facing the participants from HUB who were involved in the HUB REDA proper was the extent of the workload, and in some instances the participants felt that the partnership required further support. As was noted in the literature review, access to leadership and managerial expertise are essential for successful collaboration. Adequate training and resources are most often prerequisites for the success of partnerships.

Table 2. Challenges to partnerships

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Challenges to partnerships (source: CRSC survey)	Administrative challenges		Administrative challenges
	Unequal power in decision making		
		Unfair division of costs and benefits	
	Financial risk	Conflict	Individuals feel overwhelmed by degree of responsibility

88   Although the benefits of urban-rural interdependencies are recognized in all three regions, there are also challenges with regards to urban-rural divisions. A general challenge in urban-rural relations is the influence of growing cities on rural areas, and how to reconcile differences in priorities. As the following statement demonstrates, tensions exist between the potential benefits of urban-rural interactions, and the ability of rural partners to maintain the 'value' of rural communities' identities:

> *"But I don't think either side has come up with the wisdom yet about how you deal with a [large] city. And, how does it adequately respect and preserve what's important, valuable about the rural side. I don't think we have the answer."*

89   Participants displayed a general acknowledgement of the need for intermunicipal cooperation, but a dichotomous understanding of urban-rural divisions may be hampering attempts to establish smooth intermunicipal efforts in the study regions.

90   Specific challenges of urban-rural divisions, as articulated by participants, include the following: inequalities in power and population base; perceived favouritism and the

power of some urban municipalities; perceived unwillingness to agree to controlled growth; different expectations for services and facilities; and inadequate understanding of what each partner might offer as well as what each partner needs.

4.3 Favourable Conditions for Partnerships

91   The most common elements of successful partnerships, mentioned across all three regions and across both surveys and interviews, were trust and informal relationships, common needs and goals and effective leadership (see Table 3: Supports for effective partnerships, p. 27). The latter two were well represented in our literature review (see for instance McKinney & Essington, 2006 and McKinney & Field, 2008 respectively). While the literature also identified the importance of collaborative attitudes (e.g., Dabson, 2007), we found our participants' emphasis on interpersonal relationships particularly significant. It was clear from survey and interviewee responses that the foundations of partnerships are based on trusting relationships of this kind. *"If you can't build and nurture that relationship, the formal contracts don't mean anything,"* as one participant stated.

92   Shared needs and goals amongst partners were found to help overcome challenges, as was a regional mindset. Effective leadership was described in various ways, including a clear vision and active participation from the provincial government – a call also reflected in the literature, although neither the literature nor our data reveal a clear consensus as to what this participation should entail. High value was also placed on both administrative and political leadership, and managerial skills and conflict resolution.

93   Other conditions found to contribute to successful partnerships included interpersonal aspects, such as openness and communication. Synergies are created through the complementary interaction of resources and timelines. Joining forces with another organization or municipality may enable each individual partner to achieve more than would have been possible on its own. Proximity to potential partners and sufficient resources also create conducive conditions. Existing partnerships with a successful history build trust and motivation for future partnerships and also provide a platform to expand the partnerships.

94   Whether a partnership is formal or informal, was not seen as necessarily dictating its success. Rather, as suggested in our literature review, partnerships should recognize the nuances of context and unique identity of communities and partners involved, and should be tailored to best suit the situation and partners involved. In general, businesses tended to favour informal relationships whereas municipalities and community organizations tended to favour formal relationships. Networking or communication-based relationships were perceived to be looser and more informal,

while relationships around planning, service provision, or joint ventures tend to be more formalized. Those in support of formal relationships felt that it was important to maintain informal aspects of partnerships, such as relationship building and trust, while formal aspects were felt to lend valuable clarity and certainty to alliances. In all cases, however, healthy informal relationships were perceived to be critical for successful partnerships.

Table 3. Supports for effective partnerships

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Supports for effective partnerships (source: CRSC survey)	Trust		
	Common needs and goals		
	Effective leadership		

95   Survey respondents from all three regions identified the provision of incentives and simplifying grant application process as elements that might further facilitate partnerships (see Table 4. Elements that facilitate partnerships, below). It was mentioned by many participants that due to lack of administrative support, grant applications can be a challenge to complete. Many participants also felt the process to be so time-consuming that it is not feasible to apply. HUB and ABSW respondents also listed guaranteeing long-term funding as a factor conducive to partnerships. The options in this survey question were drawn from research and discussions with municipalities during the pilot project, and do not represent a comprehensive range of possible elements that could facilitate partnerships, especially on the part of municipalities themselves. Other sections of this document contain discussions which touch on other potential elements that facilitate partnerships (e.g. 4.3 Favourable Conditions for Partnerships, p. 26 and 5.1.3 Capturing Expertise: Learning from Experience, p. 41).

Table 4. Elements that facilitate partnerships

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Importance of selected elements that facilitate partnerships (source: CRSC survey)	Simplify grant application processes		
	Providing incentives		
	Guarantees of long-term funding		Guarantees of long-term funding
		Rewarding communities that have invested in partnerships	

4.4 Sustainability

96   The concept of sustainable development is often used to mean "balance" or "viability." Today, various definitions acknowledge the interconnectedness of social, economic, cultural and environmental resources. Moreover, concerns about sustainability have become commonplace in recent years (Tesh, 2000), and are increasingly on the agenda for governments at all levels. As such, it is not surprising that the interconnectedness of economic, social and environmental sustainability, and the need for balance among these components, was a strong theme raised by participants:

> *" ... what we need to be looking at and that's the balance between the social, social impacts and social interaction, the environment, and, and the economic growth and activity. If you can balance that, then I think you're making, probably, a huge step towards a well-community or a well-region."*

97   Such comments overlap with the vision of the Alberta Land-Use Framework which emphasizes the need for citizens to collaborate in caring for the land as a "*foundation of our economic, environmental and social well-being*" (Government of Alberta, 2008). The overlap between sustainability, environment and well-being was a common way for participants to define and justify the importance of collaboration between rural communities and larger municipalities. Boundaries, drawn between the town and the country, as the following participant suggests, do not adequately reflect the wider footprint and governmental challenges of environmental sustainability.

> *"The cumulative effect of degradation of the environment again doesn't recognize corporate boundaries; the environment basically is an entity unto its own system, its own ecosystem. And with cooperation amongst various municipalities that is a necessity for ensuring economic sustainability."*

98   The concept of the environment as a laboratory for partnerships is further expanded upon in Section 5.1.3 (Capturing Expertise: Learning from Experience, p. 41). Many participants are well aware of the Alberta Land Use Framework and the crucial role of urban-rural interdependencies in its application, as captured by this comment:

> *"The government needs to be considering urban-rural interdependencies when they decide on land use issues. Any time a decision is made about land use or land*

> *management in the [rural municipality], we're affected. Anytime we decide as a town to do something, they're affected, and, and that, that will play, or better play into the Land Use Framework decisions that are made."*

99   Another major theme that arose is the importance of planning to achieve sustainability, including increasing long-term and regional planning capacity. One reason long-term planning was seen to be important is that it provides direction for municipalities on economic growth and corresponding land-use plans, as exemplified in the following quote:

> *"[N]ew businesses, new farms, new oil companies, more oil companies, more tourism, more campgrounds, more buildings, how can that happen without knowing what the land use plans are going to be, and what the goals are ten years from now?"*

100   Planning was perceived to be of particular concern because of the imperative to protect environmentally sensitive land; reduce urban sprawl, especially on prime agricultural land; and to determine an appropriate level of development. These proactive measures could potentially prevent future conflict, as expressed by a participant:

> *" … once we have that defined then it then allows the county to say this is how we're gonna grow and where we know that we are not gonna be tripping over one or another ... And then we won't be, we won't be fighting over assessments and development that we have … try to avoid any conflict as far as putting industrial up against residential, for example."*

101   As challenges around environment, social infrastructure and economy grow in scale, and opportunities to meet those challenges are realized at the regional scale, the capacity to plan at a regional level becomes increasingly crucial. In the following statement, one of our research participants describes this as the necessity of developing a "regional perspective". The participant also suggests that doing so does not come at the expense of individual community identity, but could in fact help each community further understand its identity:

> *" ... we need to get regional perspective and determine where the opportunities for the region might best be, and sometimes those aren't always specific to a community, but a community can find its way within that bigger regional picture."*

102   To increase planning capacity, participants from ABSW and HUB, the two least urbanised regions participating in this study, highlighted access to information and

training as well as incentives for future community planning as key priorities (see Table 5, p. 30). In the more metropolitan area of CRP, respondents' top priorities for developing long-term regional plans were flexible provincial funding, sharing of best practices and recognition of community planning already in place. This makes sense, given that the CRP region already has extensive long-term and broad-ranging plans in place for the region and has the expertise to create and implement these plans. Although respondents agreed at a conceptual level that regional well-being must be addressed through holistic thinking and planning for sustainability, agreeing on the details of the mechanisms for translating this into policy and practice has been a challenge, especially in the CRP over the Calgary Metropolitan Plan. It is difficult to get widespread agreement on detailed implementation plans that provide "on-the-ground" mechanisms for those high-level ideas, as illustrated in the following quote:

> *"They've done some amazing stuff with their ecological planning and things like that. But when it comes down to it, the details, like you said ... the boundary lines and stuff like that, that's gonna get difficult. But I think that more of these smaller relationships, I think, would be very helpful to try to create that grassroots initiative again."*

Table 5. Developing long-term regional plans

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Items rated as most effective in helping to develop long term regional plans (source: CRSC survey)	Access to information and training	Flexible provincial funding	Access to information and training
	Incentives for future community planning		Incentives for future community planning
	Sharing of best practices		
		Recognition for community planning already in place	

103   A major challenge to planning is that municipal plans are often reactive, short-term and narrow in scope whereas regional level plans are, or have the potential to be, proactive, long-term and broad in scope, creating framework incompatibilities. The incompatibilities could result in lack of strategic foresight and difficulties in aligning plans with varying scopes. Other challenges include cost of planning, coordination with other municipalities, and differing priorities for urban and rural municipalities.

4.5 Economic Viability

104   The three regions are diverse in terms of strength of economic development, as well as type of economic activities each has been engaged in:

105   In ABSW, there are indications that efforts towards economic revitalization are under way. For instance, the ABSW Regional Alliance is part of the Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership (SAAEP), which also includes SouthGrow and involves a wind energy program, and solar and biofuel energy projects. Waterton Lakes are also part of a cross-border (with BC and Montana) partnership for geo-tourism[5] which is facilitated by National Geographic's mapping of "Crown of the Continent." Partnerships, as noted in our literature review, can prove to be key tools for identifying new areas of economic activity and achieving global recognition of a regional identity or "brand" (Gordon, 2007; Scott, 2006), especially in areas such as tourism.

106   HUB is actively pursuing growth in the energy, defence, transportation, agriculture and tourism sectors. The Rural-Metro Strategic Accord with Edmonton focuses on three areas in which Edmonton and HUB can work together to advance their economies: Cluster Strategies; Cultural and Artistic Life; and Competitiveness. Alberta HUB is also strengthening the relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities in an attempt to promote business growth within the region.

107   CRP is pursuing a number of projects within the context of its four pillars (communities, infrastructure, environment, and economy). Two such projects include a regional land use plan and a regional water and waste water servicing master plan. In addition, a sustainable investment attraction strategy is being developed. Once complete, this strategy will provide a framework for future economic development and investment. A detailed economic base analysis is already complete and has identified as investment targets agri-food processing, advanced wood products manufacturing, building products manufacturing, professional and technical services, warehousing, distribution and logistics, and tourism investment.

108   Despite the variations in the three regions, there are similarities in approaches to economic development and diversification, as shown in Table 6 (below). To diversify their economies, all three regions prioritized encouraging value-added industries, and developing community resources, which can include financial, human, equipment, electronic and other resources. All three REDA's frequently discussed the need for

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[5] Geotourism is the phrase coined to describe tourism which not only brings travelers into a region, but also preserves the area's unique aspects and recognizes the true character of a location, while giving travelers an authentic local experience.

financial and human resources, especially in smaller communities, to capitalize on economic and other opportunities, increase collaboration through networking and knowledge sharing, and staff to attend meetings, etc. ABSW is promoting tourism, as well as agriculture, as their brand. CRP has recently released the Calgary Metropolitan Plan addressing land use plans. HUB is actively pursuing growth in primary industries.

Table 6. Priorities for rural economic diversification

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Priorities for rural economic diversification (source: CRSC survey)	Encouraging value-added industries		
	Developing community resources		
	Promoting tourism	Coordinating land use planning	Promoting primary industries

109   When asked to identify the most effective ways to foster economic development, participants in all three regions highlighted the promotion of their areas to attract or retain businesses and to capitalize on regional assets, especially through regional cooperation, as shown in Table 7. As one participant stated: *"[Economic cooperation] helps in making sure we're cohesive and coordinated in our marketing messages and our [regional] brand."*

110   Fostering local aspects such as community spirit and innovation were also important to all three regions.

Table 7. Effective ways to foster economic development

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Most effective ways to foster economic development (source: CRSC survey)	Promoting areas to attract or retain businesses		
	Capitalizing on regional assets		
	Fostering grassroots innovation		
	Fostering community spirit		Fostering community spirit

4.6 Social Infrastructure

111   When asked to define community well-being, respondents listed qualities that fit into the three categories of economics, environment and social aspects, and often expressed the interconnectedness of those categories:

> *"They want access to good housing, clean water, safe schools, safe ...   environment and safety and health, education, all those things packaged together" (Participant).*

112   More specifically, participants listed having a demographic mix of old and young people; full school systems; citizens feeling safe, healthy and happy; and citizens being actively involved in community and municipal governance. The value of citizen involvement in improving a community is expressed by this interviewee:

> *" ... with the volunteer organizations it's the same thing: you make the community a better place to be and more enjoyable for ... the whole infrastructure becomes better as the economy in the town improves."*

113   Respondents also expressed community well-being in terms of economic and employment stability, diversity of job opportunities and access to services and training. A diversity of housing, including for seniors and employees, was also mentioned. It was important to participants that communities were clean and well-kept. A common remark was that the sense of community is different between rural and urban areas, with rural areas having a stronger connection. This was found to be especially the case in agricultural areas, where community identity is connected to farmers and ranchers often helping one another*:*

> *"The ability to be a community and to work reasonably well with each other is because most of us come from farm, ranching, rural experiences ... when you get out and you're working together with your neighbour you're accountable to people and to decisions."*

114   The three regions listed senior services, schools and recreational facilities/ programs as the main activities in partnerships addressing social infrastructure, as shown in Table 8. Recreational activities and facilities were especially popular topics as they are viewed as contributing to community well-being by providing opportunities to create and maintain social relationships, attracting and retaining citizens and keep citizens healthy and active. They were also "hot button" issues as infrastructure is aging

and challenges around the division of costs for recreational facilities between urban and rural communities need to be addressed. In ABSW, recreation was also a "hot button" issue because of the concern of off-highway vehicles threatening sensitive natural areas and riparian habitats. The population of Canada is aging and there will be a need for an increasing number of seniors' services. Schools may be involved in partnerships for various reasons. In ABSW, this was as a consequence of a decreasing population and the accompanying decline in school enrolment. For HUB, schools were an important theme in discussing social services and improving educational outcomes.

Table 8. Areas in which partnerships support social infrastructure

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Areas in which partnerships develop/ support social infrastructure (source: CRSC survey)	Seniors services		
	Recreational facilities		
	Schools	Recreation programs and leagues	Schools

4.7 Environment

115   As environmental challenges go beyond municipal boundaries, issues around land use (land, water, waste, etc.) have become another major source of conflict, leading to the collapse of established partnerships (see also Glasbergen, Biermann & Mol, 2007). Participants discussed the need to balance economic, environmental and social aspects to achieve sustainability, and recognized that decisions and actions result in long-term and intermunicipal impacts. These are what one participant referred to as a "ripple effect":

> " ... we recognize that whatever we do here, not just in terms
> of the river but in terms of the land uses, our neighbours are
> going to feel a ripple effect."

116   All the three regions listed water and waste management/recycling as primary activities addressing environmental sustainability in the survey, while agriculture was particularly important in ABSW (see Table 9, p. 35). These findings are also reflected in the interviews. In addition, the interviews highlighted the importance of preserving agricultural land in CRP in the face of increasing urban sprawl.

Water
- Critical area due to imbalance of scarcity and demand.
- Some conflict in ABSW and CRP due to water shortages and density targets.
- Improve collaborations and planning for water management.

- Provincial government needs to ensure a fair, timely and supported structure for working with municipalities on water projects.

Waste/ Recycling
- Numerous initiatives for waste management exist and partnerships are successful.
- Potential for intermunicipal collaborations for waste reduction, not just managing existing waste.

Agriculture
- Need to preserve agricultural land.
- Good ranching practices help to enhance or maintain the environment.
- Need to reduce urban sprawl, especially on prime agricultural land (CRP).

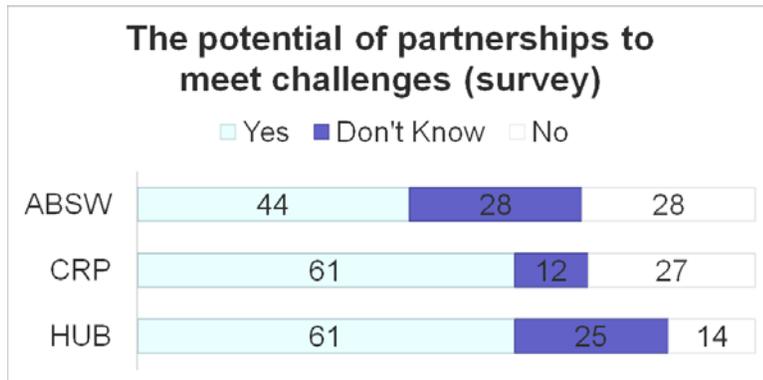Table 9. Areas in which partnerships support environmental sustainability

	ABSW	CRP	HUB
Areas addressing environmental sustainability (source: CRSC survey)	Water		
	Waste/Recycling		
	Agriculture		

117   While all three regions listed water, waste/recycling and agriculture as the key *areas* in addressing environmental sustainability in the survey, agriculture was not amongst the top current partnership *activities* for CRP and HUB. This may be because agriculture plays a smaller role in CRP and HUB than in ABSW. Also, farms and ranches are privately owned whereas water, waste and recycling tend to be public services, limiting roles for government. Thus, increasing partnerships between the public and private sectors in agriculture is an area for further exploration, especially since much land is privately owned and the stewardship of those lands has implications for the public in terms of water quality, air quality, food production and other ecological services.

4.8 Potential of Partnerships to Meet Shared Challenges

118   Our findings reflect claims in the literature that partnership activities are increasing as a way of meeting intermunicipal challenges. When asked about the potential of partnerships to meet shared challenges, the three regions varied in their responses. The majority of survey respondents (61%) from the larger and more economically developed REDAs - HUB and CRP - felt that partnerships with other

communities would help them meet future challenges. It is interesting to note that a quarter, or more, of participants from both ABSW and HUB (28% and 25% respectively) were uncertain, indicating that there is room for exploration. The success of partnerships may be enhanced through the realization of the benefits of partnerships, availability of tools to overcome the challenges and keeping in mind the Principles outlined in Section 5.0 (Conclusion).

The potential of partnerships to meet challenges (survey)

☐ Yes ■ Don't Know ☐ No

	Yes	Don't Know	No
ABSW	44	28	28
CRP	61	12	27
HUB	61	25	14

5.0 CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

119   The results of this study point towards three thematic areas which inform the experience and development of partnership in Alberta. Each theme reveals both the challenges, as well as the opportunities of collaborative practice. Not intended as a definitive checklist, or quick guide to success, a series of principles are provided below which identify potential hurdles for municipalities and regional actors to overcome. In addition, each theme is illustrated with an exemplary story taken from one of the case study regions.

5.1 From Enthusiasm to Practice: Managing Conflict and Complexity

120   Our research revealed a wave of enthusiasm for partnering. Collaboration was strongly supported as an ideal, and participants could confidently cite the many potential benefits they foresaw as outcomes of working together around mutually acknowledged interdependencies. Moreover, in all three regions collaborative activities were being undertaken to accompany positive attitudes, and a range of experience and expertise was being developed.

121   Participants also spoke of the difficulties of translating enthusiasm about partnering into effective practice and achieving initially desired outcomes. It is in collaborative practice where the complexity of the policy areas being addressed often emerges, or becomes tangible.   Contradictions between the enthusiastic ways in which participants spoke about partnership and their experiences on the ground may well then be expected. Each of the regions we worked with are involved in breaking new ground, innovating practice and developing capacity. Their experiences underline the need not to perceive partnerships as a panacea for contending with shared problems, but as a difficult and contentious process of bringing communities together and working through complex and contested regional issues. Partnerships are valuable in part because they challenge the status-quo and encourage adaptation and reflection.

122   Different regions faced different challenges and different hurdles along the way, reflecting the varied contexts and issues around which collaborations are forming. In speaking of the challenges, participants pointed towards a variety of factors which strain partnerships as they occur in practice. These included concerns about organisational capacity and knowledge, conflicts around identity and conflicts over access and distribution of financial resources. For instance, in HUB, the city of Cold Lake has requested a municipal dissolution study that is under provincial review, centred on the split in oil revenues between urban and rural municipalities. In CRP, already in the advanced stages of having a regional plan, tensions arose during the process of translating in-principle agreement into details that satisfied all parties. Participants in

ABSW spoke of inequities between property tax revenues and service provision between urban and rural areas.

123   Partnerships are challenging because they respond to shared needs, but do not take place at a single scale, or between identical partners. They can create or aggravate inequalities between partners, potentially producing rifts in the process which require moderators and resolution. Partnerships call for non-traditional problem-solving skills on the part of elected officials, as well as adequate administrative, human, and financial resources. Institutionalized mechanisms for managing conflict may not be well-established for partnerships which bridge different scales, communities and interests. This makes the politics of partnerships a more fraught option despite their promise and even, in some cases, necessity.

Challenge One

124   The research discussed in this report uncovered widespread enthusiasm for partnering and an increasingly wide range of experience in partnership activities. Yet, challenges do exist, and are often realised in the process of translating enthusiasm and in-principle agreement into on-the-ground action. The challenge for communities in developing effective partnerships is to develop non-traditional problem-solving skills, bridging different scales, communities and interests. Managing conflicts between urban and rural needs, identities and resources is essential to developing effective collaboration.

Key Messages:

1. Conflict is an expected aspect of innovating collaborative relations across traditional boundaries, and not necessarily a sign of failure. Managing conflict is an essential aspect of developing successful partnerships.

2. The process of managing conflict can be aided from the outset by establishing clear guidelines for how relations are managed within partnerships. This process can be supported through the provision of training in dispute resolution, including the development of informal problem solving skills. Addressing conflicts as an expected part of the process may help partners to address disputes early on and before they must be dealt with at a formal level.

3. When disputes over details seem irresolvable, prospective partners may wish to return to common ground—for example, agreements on principles such as shared growth and benefits—to help them gain perspective. These principles should be clearly established and agreed upon at the onset of the process.

5.1.2 Place and Region: Identity versus Autonomy

125   Part of the challenge—and potential payoff—of partnerships derives from their occurrence among partners at different scales (e.g., local versus regional), and with diverse interests and identities. Even at their simplest, partnerships tend to create new networks. These extend governance relations across geographical areas, contributing to the creation of new regions.

126   Regionalism suggests a future mosaic of regions in Alberta in addition to the predominant identities of towns and cities. Our research in the three study areas indicates the rise of a regional mindset, where participants are considering a broad range of issues, including tourism, regional branding and marketing, health and social services and environmental sustainability on increasingly broad geographical scales. With this change comes an uncertainty about regional, as opposed to local, identities. While participants mostly agreed that identifying a regional identity was helpful, especially for economic development, many were concerned that acknowledging, and partnering around, regional interdependencies would entail abandoning local community character to regional character. However, our research also suggested that thinking on a regional scale can help individual communities and municipalities find their niche within a region. Giving up some local autonomy is a way to foster and to preserve a distinctive local identity. This presents a way in which local and regional identities could strike a balance and be mutually supportive.

127   In addition to this change in social space, land-use planning and other planning efforts prompt a projection of future issues. Environmental debates, particularly around water and uncontrolled growth at the fringes of urban centres, have raised some undesirable scenarios. Taking into account issues such as these, present and planned policies and land-use practices are revised to achieve desired futures anywhere from three to 100 years away. This 'back-casting' planning practice breaks with incremental trend-based projection methods.

128   As a hypothesis which may be explored in future studies, the above observations indicate a long-term historical change in how rural Alberta is understood spatially and temporally, with pragmatic and policy implications determining the actions of both public and private actors. However, current planning and risk management methodologies offer weak tools for cost-benefit analysis of future scenarios which are not based on the projection of historical and present economic and environmental states. In addition, participants identified a general lack of accessible templates for managing partnerships, and a lack of resources for integrating incompatible municipal plans of different partners. Responding to this wider spatial and temporal scope will require adequate administrative and planning expertise. Some participants mentioned that their municipality or organization had difficulty undertaking effective long-term and regional planning. Specifically, it is a challenge to change their planning activities to match the broadened spatial and temporal scope of issues at hand—due to lack of staff, expertise, administrative ability, or training. Changes in spatial and temporal considerations of

regions necessitate adequate tools, resources and training to realize the alternative futures they inspire.

Challenge Two

129   Due to differences in scales and interests, governance relations are extended across geographical areas, contributing to the creation of new regions. Partnerships necessarily involve novel planning scales and time horizons, and raise issues about identity and autonomy.   Indeed, concerns about the loss of community identity, are common sources of uncertainty and conflict in partnerships.   Similarly, the complex issues around which partnerships form, including urban growth, watershed management and regional economic development, pose substantial challenges for the communities involved.   Thus, regionalism is not simply the outcome of new ways of thinking about planning and governance, but a response to the changing circumstances and relations shaping life in Alberta today, and in the future.

Key Messages:

1. Communities may be encouraged to engage in discussions about the ways in which identity and autonomy are impacted by new regional relations.   Caution needs to be taken in assuming that new regional identities override traditional conceptions of communities, or necessarily propose challenges to local autonomy.

2. An essential aspect of adaptation to regional scenarios involves reflecting the composition of partnerships, and the nature of the actors involved.   Communities may find it useful to broaden their search for support to multiple levels of government and other local and regional public and private actors.

3. A pressing need exists for the development of innovative tools, resources and training for partners in community, municipal and business areas to realize alternative, or ideal, futures inspired by a broadened spatial and temporal scope. Current planning and risk management methodologies offer weak tools for cost-benefit analysis of future scenarios which are not based on the projection of historical and present economic and environmental states.

5.1.3. Capturing Expertise: Learning from Experience

130   The collaborative efforts observed in this project are important both for the specific outcomes achieved within communities, and in developing a repository of experience and expertise in the province. We use the term "crucibles of partnership" to describe those arrangements or areas which are feeding the formation of innovative and effective partnerships.   Current activity may act as a "laboratory" for developing best practice, including innovation in partnership dynamics and forms.

131   One area which may serve as such a resource involves issues of environmental sustainability, itself a relatively new and visible area of partnership. In all three regions we observed that these issues were widely recognized as being inherently intersectoral and intermunicipal.   Often coupled with discussions of economic development participants, sustainability evoked an awareness of the need for holistic, integrated and regional solutions. As such, planning and projects for environmental sustainability may be a central area where collaborative experience and innovative practices are being developed.

132   Relating to the practices of partnering itself, a recurring area of importance identified by participants involved the identification of informal cultures and organizational practices as essential elements of successful collaboration. Trust was deemed a crucial element of collaboration. Often, activities that help to accomplish this take place outside formal meeting times, when partners chat at breaks, take meals together, or meet recreationally outside of office hours. These informal relationships are viewed as the first step towards successful partnerships. From there, partners may decide to establish more formal relationships, especially if they are municipalities working on a project to completion (as found in HUB and ABSW) or a specific service arrangement (as found in CRP). Community groups and smaller municipalities (HUB), businesses (ABSW), or informal networking arrangements among employees in social services or sustainable development (CRP), may choose to remain relatively informal. The development of informal relations is thus one way in which we observed participants redefining the boundaries of partnering, generating trust and building social foundations for effective practice.

Challenge Three

133   The challenge for communities is to recognise the value of practice and experience as means of learning and capacity building. Learning should be a clearly defined goal of any partnership relationship.   This may involve reflecting on the successes and failures of the process, but also include focussed attention on the processes and social relations contributing to these outcomes. Communities face a difficult challenge in ensuring that they are able to develop the capacities and skills needed to respond to regional challenges. Capturing the experience of practice is an essential component of this process.

Key Messages:

1. Communities may find it useful to consciously reflect upon and seek to benefit from the expertise developed through practice.

2. In order to identify potential partnership models and best practices which may apply in other policy areas, emerging and established partnerships around environmental sustainability could be monitored as they develop.

3. Best practice models and already available toolkits can be of great help, provided that they allow for flexible application depending on the partnership context. As the factors influencing the success of partnerships are often locally contingent, it is essential to develop the skills and confidence needed to adapt methods and principles to individual contexts and experience[6].

4. A range of social interactions and activities (e.g., regional cultural or sporting events) around partnerships may help nurture a supporting fabric of trust and community. Informal social relationships are a key aspect of many successful partnerships.

5.2 Conclusion

134   Our research has revealed a wave of enthusiasm for partnering, which was strongly supported as an ideal. Despite these attitudes and the availability of models, our findings revealed challenges in actual partnerships related to limited resources and differences in scales and interests. As urban-rural partnership dynamics change, so does the concept of regions. With this change arise new governance relations as well as concerns about place and identity, changes in land use, and shortages of natural resources. To deal with these, current planning approaches and capacity need to be augmented. Environmental planning and projects can be a leading basis of partnering since intersectoral and intermunicipal environmental issues act as a "laboratory" for best practices, including innovation in partnership dynamics and forms. Regarding partnership forms, although aspects of formal and informal partnerships are advantageous in different ways, informal social relationships and trust must be cultivated to build a solid foundation for partnerships.

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[6] Please visit the CRSC 'Partnership' website for links to partnering resources and the Centre's own partnering principles: http://www.crsc.ualberta.ca/partnership.cfm

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. Urban – Rural Interdependency: The Benefits and Costs of Urban-Rural Cooperation in Alberta Site Selection Report (November 25, 2008)

Urban—Rural Interdependencies Site Selection Report

The three sites ultimately chosen for the Urban-Rural Interdependencies Project resulted from a lengthy engagement process with provincial government departments and other organizations, as well as a thorough examination of the current data available for regions in Alberta. The methodological nature of this Project required that several individual sites throughout the province be chosen as case studies to represent the varying degrees of productivity and development present. Although the province is divided regionally in a number of ways (municipalities, municipal districts, watersheds, etc.), it was decided that the Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) would best represent the diversity needed in the case study.

Once it was determined that the already established REDAs would provide the boundaries of the urban-rural regions, a brief economic profile was created based on several dimensions identified by the stakeholders. These dimensions included: the changing role of summer villages, First Nations/Métis settlements, a large urban centre, geographic diversity, economic diversity, as well as other factors. The Economic Indicator Profiles compiled by Alberta Employment, Immigration, and Industry provided much of the data required in determining appropriate sites. Almost immediately, ACRA (Alberta Capital Region Association which includes Edmonton, St. Albert, Beaumont, etc), CAEP (Central Alberta Economic Partnership which includes Red Deer and Wetaskiwin) and RMWB (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which includes Fort McMurray) were eliminated. The decision to eliminate ACRA, CAEP, and RMWB stemmed from the realization that their economic conditions were anomalous, their geographic location was unfavourable for the project, or the degree of urban versus rural municipalities was disproportioned. Although the stakeholders' preferences were considered, the methodological rigour of the study and the ability to generalize the findings to other regions both inside and outside the province greatly influenced the site selection process.

To facilitate the site selection process, the REDAs were assessed based on their level of economic development, geographic location, major industries, population density and growth, level of immigration, number of summer villages or aboriginal/Métis Settlements, level of rurality and a number of other factors. Ultimately, the nature of this Project required that the selected regions represent diversity in the level of economic development and level of rurality/urbanity. From this point, the list of potential REDAs was narrowed to eight. PREDA (Peace River Economic Development Association) was eliminated because of the stakeholders' desire to include the CRP (Calgary Regional Partnership) which satisfied the need for a region with high economic development. During the development of the Project it was determined that Flagstaff County would serve as a pilot study. Because of the County's geographic location, BRAED

(Battle River Alliance for Economic Development) was eliminated from the larger study. Lastly, LSLEA (Lesser Slave Lake Economic Alliance) was not given greater consideration because of its relatively recent formation and therefore potential lack of agreements and alliances that would include a regional perspective.

In order to acquire a true representation of the current situation across the province, the remaining regions were compared and ultimately determined through a process of elimination. The three sites selected for the Project were the Alberta Southwest Regional Alliance, the Northeast Alberta Information HUB, and the Calgary Regional Partnership. The Site Selection Table (below) outlines the characteristics of these regions including their wide range of economic, population, geographic, and regional configurations. As well as fulfilling our methodological requirements, these regions as incorporate many of our stakeholders' interests such as: having a region in the southern part of the province with low economic growth, as well as the inclusion of summer villages, Community Futures offices, and transportation corridors. Other factors that increased interest in these areas included the disproportionately high level of immigration in two regions, and the prevalence of Aboriginal/Métis settlements, and national parks.

Sources used during the site selection process include the Regional Economic Indicator Profiles compiled by Alberta Employment, Immigration, and Industry, MIZ Zones as designed by McNiven et al. (2000) and used by Statistics Canada, as well as data from www.albertafirst.com and Statistics Canada websites.

Definitions:

In this study, the Statistics Canada definition of Rural and Small Town (RST) is used to differentiate between urban and rural communities where RST regions have a population of less than 10,000 and less than half of the population travels to a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) or Census Agglomeration (CA) for work.

In order to differentiate between different levels of rurality, Census Metropolitan Area and Census Agglomeration Influenced Zones (MIZ) were used. This system measures rural interrelations with urban areas using commuter flows. An RST with a strong MIZ has between 30-49% of the workforce commuting to the urban core of any large urban centre. An RST with a moderate MIZ has between 5-30% of the workforce commuting to the urban core. In an RST with a weak MIZ between 0-5% travel for employment to the urban core and in an area that is uninfluenced by the urban economy where no one commutes to an urban core for employment with be categorized as having no MIZ.

Site Selection Table			
	Alberta Southwest	**Alberta HUB**	**Calgary Regional Partnership**
Geographic Location	SOUTHWEST	NORTHEAST	SOUTH
Economic Development	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Population Size	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Population Growth (1996 to 2006)	LOW (-2.0%)	MEDIUM (8.4%)	HIGH (32.3%)
Immigration			
Number of Immigrants arriving in 2006	50	121	12,099
Annualized growth over 10 years (Alberta = 4.0%)	LOW (3.6%)	HIGH (8.2%)	HIGH (5.3%)
Urban/Rural Ratio	0/100	60/40	86/14
Level of Rurality	HIGH	MEDIUM	VERY LOW
Community Futures Offices	2	5	4
Major Transportation Corridors	2	1	3
Summer Villages	0	2	2
Parks	1	0	1
Aboriginal/ Métis Settlements	0	7	2
Number of Municipalities			
CMA (Census Metropolitan Areas)	0	0	1
CA (Census Agglomerations)	0	6	6
Strong MIZ	0	1	6
Moderate MIZ	3	8	4
Weak MIZ	8	8	2
No MIZ	4	5	1
Total # of Municipalities	**15**	**28**	**19**