

From West to East Coast - seeking input into legalization impacts to rural cultures and economies.

This project is examining the impacts of recreational cannabis legalization to rural areas of B.C., focusing on the Kootenay region of southeastern B.C. as a case study. I am conducting key informant interviews within two stakeholder groups: cannabis participants and government.

My name is Tracey Harvey, I am a PhD candidate in the Rural Studies program at the University of Guelph, Ontario and I teach at Selkirk College in the Kootenay region of B.C.

This project is particularly important to legacy cannabis producing economies that in some instances provided a single source of income, while in others, a key source of income for rural communities in B.C.

In these rural areas, legalization brings cultural and economic restructuring to the hinterlands of B.C., adding more complexity to the ongoing long-term economic transition many of these areas continue to face, away from a primary natural resource economy.

For some of these communities, the production of cannabis and the accompanying supply chain, have functioned for generations, and in many of these cases, appear to be more highly tolerated and accepted than in other areas of the province and country.

To situate my research topic while building contextual knowledge, and forming new relationships outside of my focused study area, I engaged in four research and exchange periods over the past year, which were funded in part by the Rural Policy Learning Commons, Mitacs, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and Selkirk College's Applied Research and Innovation Centre. I also engaged in a 'virtual' trip to rural California to learn about experiences there.

I first traveled to Ontario in early May 2019 to present my project, along with what surfaced as local industry concerns, from a symposium held in Nelson, to Community Futures Ontario(CFO). CFO was a natural fit for information sharing and knowledge dissemination since I am locally partnered with Community Futures Central Kootenays.

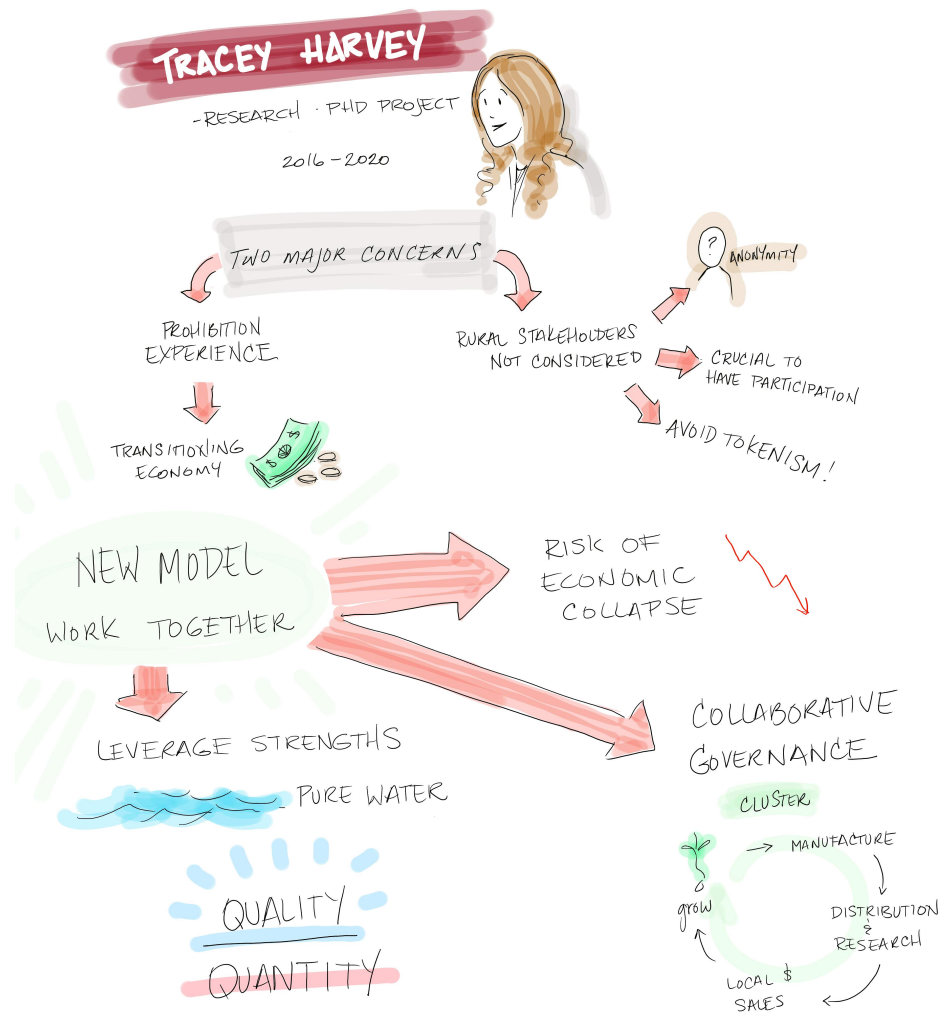


Figure 1 Kootenay Cannabis Symposium - my presentation as an animation, by Lisa Thiessen

In early summer, I made a second trip, this time to the Sunshine Coast, Southern Vancouver Island, and Northern and Gulf Islands of B.C. pragmatically following a B.C. proposed cannabis co-op's consultation route. I made industry and governmental connections and conducted interviews and a site visit for my project. I also met with Community Futures Campbell River during this time.



Figure 2 Proposed Provincial cannabis co-op meeting in Duncan, BC



Figure 3 On the ferry from the Sunshine coast, heading back to the mainland



Figure 4 A medically licensed cannabis facility on the Sunshine coast demonstrating use of natural predators



Figure 5 Meeting with Community Futures Campbell River at Comox Valley Chamber

For my third R&E trip, I again went to the coast, this time to attend the Union of B.C. Municipalities Convention in Vancouver in late September, and to meet with Dr. Sean Markey from Simon Fraser University.

Dr. Sean Markey is a leading researcher in rural, place based policy who has spent time examining transitioning economies, one of my theoretical frameworks. I conducted more interviews during this visit, and participated in a site visit of a large scale licensed cannabis facility.



Figure 6 Meeting with Dr. Sean Markey at SFU

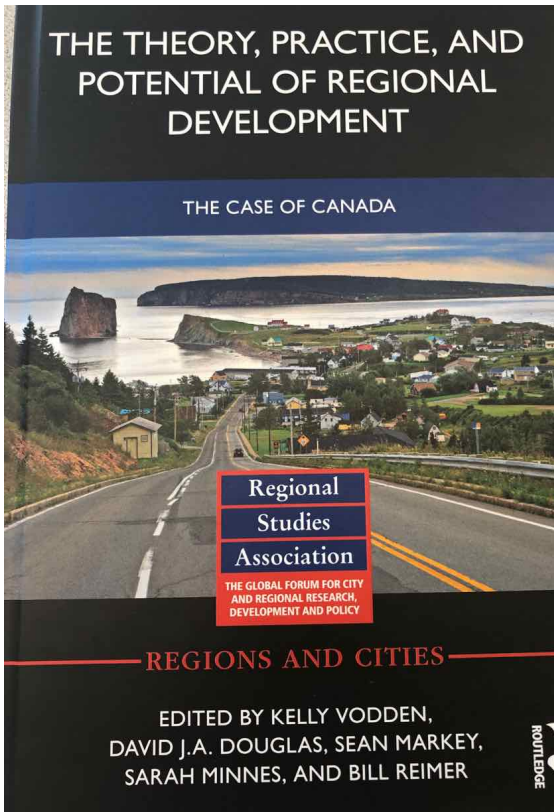


Figure 7 The Theory, Practice and Potential of Regional Development. (Vodden, Douglas, Markey, Minnes, Reimer, 2019)



Figure 8 Myself, Nelson city councilor, Brittney Anderson, RDCK Director, Aimee Watson, and Craft Cannabis Association of BC representative, Kelly Coulter at UBCM



Figure 9 Touring a large greenhouse licensed cannabis facility

My final and 4th research and exchange trip took me to St. John's Newfoundland in early October to share my research project, and emerging themes, and to engage in a rural field trip to micro breweries and distilleries as part of a discussion around how these operations are rural economic drivers.



Figure 10 Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Conference, October 2nd, 2019 in St. John's Newfoundland



Figure 11 At the Baccalieu Trail craft Brewery in rural Newfoundland



Figure 12 Newfoundland's only contemporary craft distillery

I have learned the Kootenays are not particularly unique as compared to other rural areas of BC and California, which were once reliant on natural resources, and over the last several decades quietly moved to illicit, small-scale cannabis production.

Industry participants, no matter where they are from, refer to cannabis cultivation as farming, or on a small scale, as gardening. I believe we therefore need to look at successes and failures of related policy to apply to this sector.

Many government and industry participants expressed frustration for their lack of meaningful inclusion into policy-making leading up to Bill C-45 or the *Cannabis Act*, and to some degree for provincial and local policy related to cannabis. However, it should be noted that several participants felt heard and were generally happy with today's cannabis policy.

Instead of 'wiping out' the illicit market, many project participants indicated a need to transition the legacy 'industry'. However, not all participants agreed with this belief, primarily due to the illegality of cannabis historically, and early movers into the legal regime felt undermined by the idea of supports to a once illicit sector.

While it is early to make conclusions, it seems clear to me that we would be smart to adopt lessons learned from the rural meat sector, so that graduated licensing is considered, and an appreciation for a non-centralized distribution system for perishable products.

Lessons from Community Supported Agriculture as well as Industrial Agriculture need to be applied so that we use progressive strategies and avoid making the same farming mistakes of the past.

With climate change on top of mind for many participants, we are reminded about the essentiality of keeping sustainable and regenerative environmental practices as top priority in both policy making and business planning.

And finally, rural regions of B.C., strategically moving into the legal regime, would be well served by applying proven rural economic development strategies to this sector. We need to focus on producing quality product (that we can learn a lot from rural cannabis experts about), value added and cluster development.

While the Kootenays are not entirely unique, there are few other places like rural BC that have such a rich history and interesting story to share.

Thank you for your support that has allowed me to dive deeper into research and exchange, foster capacity building and further my project!!