From staples theory to new regionalism: managing drinking water for regional resilience in rural British Columbia

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PhD Thesis Defense

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The Canadian infrastructure deficit presents challenges and opportunities, but also raises questions. Perhaps the most salient of these questions is not only how can we address these challenges, but how will what we do impact the future? Using a case study of drinking water systems in rural British Columbia, this research explores three unique aspects of the infrastructure deficit and the potential regionalism may hold for enhancing rural development.

First - the relationship between the infrastructure deficit and patterns of regional development is examined, paying particular attention to the legacy of staples dependent development. This research provides a historically and theoretically informed lens on the relationships between the two and how this influences the present day. The results present a more contextually-informed and regionally integrated perspective, and temper the presentism that often characterizes current discussions of the infrastructure deficit.

Second - infrastructure management approaches are examined to see if there has been a shift in approach to consider regional resilience. Current infrastructure conditions suggest renewal efforts must increase, making this investigation timely in order to better inform policy. While there is potential for drinking water systems to act as a catalyst to enhance regional resilience, this potential is largely untapped.

Third - the potential for new regionalism as a platform for an alternate infrastructure management approach is studied. The proposed new regionalism based approach recognizes and accounts for the myriad of influencing factors and uses different mechanisms to support and encourage drinking water systems in fulfilling their potential role in supporting regional resilience. While the need for an alternate approach to managing drinking water systems is recognized and elements of the proposed approach are increasingly applied, substantive barriers remain.

Collectively this research responds to a broader question of whether a new regionalist approach to infrastructure can positively impact future regional development and support rural regional resilience? Several important factors influence the ability of resilient regions to respond to change, of which drinking water systems are one. However, while it is possible that changes to the management of drinking water systems could have an
influence on regional resilience, this is unlikely to occur in isolation or separate from larger, systemic change.

Summary of Program of Study

PhD, Resource and Environmental Management. Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC. (2011-present)

MA Geography, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John’s NL. (2009)

BA (Honours), Geography. First Class Standing. Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON. (2006)

Select Publications


Select Conferences


**Statement of Interdisciplinarity**

As a fundamental aspect of life, water cuts across disciplines. The literature reviewed, as well as the individual papers, details the interdisciplinary nature of the topics contained within this research. The case study approach taken illustrates a detailed investigation of a complex socio-economic and ecological system.