

Rural Ontario and the Potential of a Rural and Remote Knowledge Network



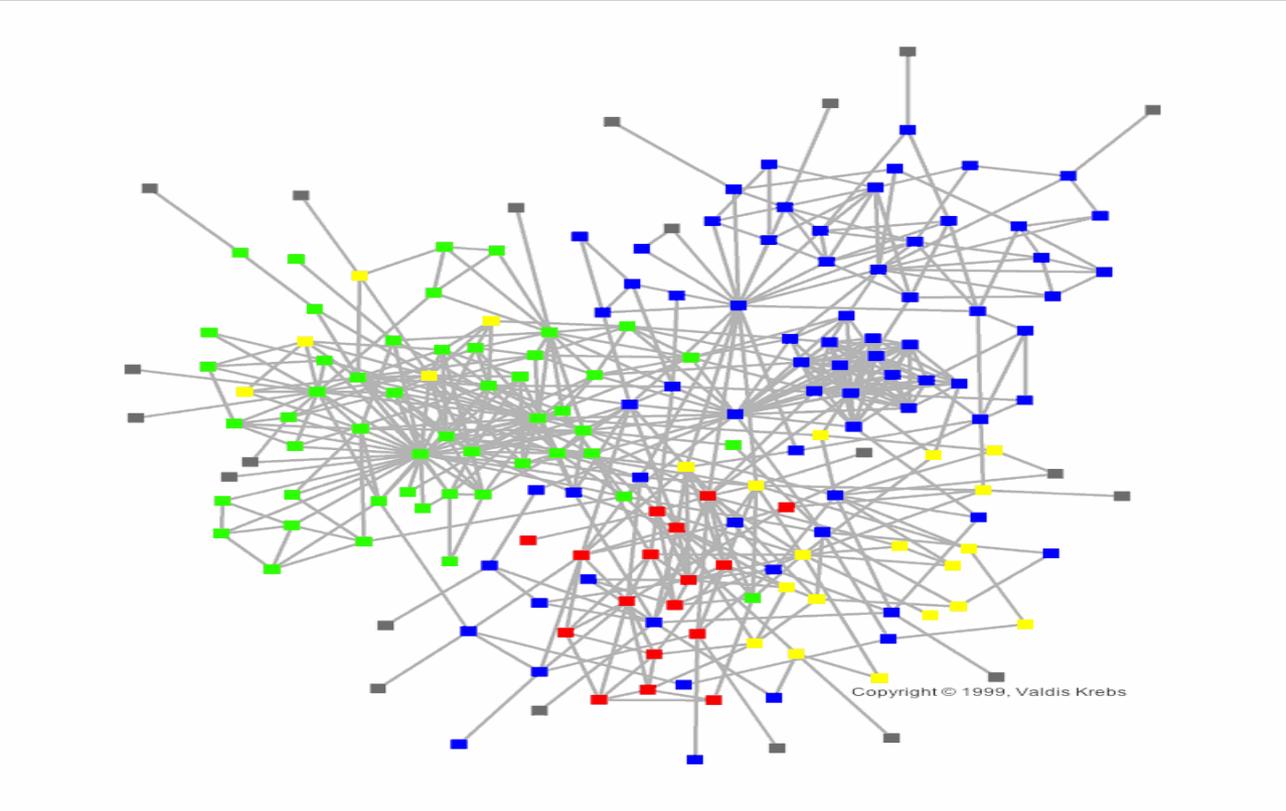
**A FIELD OF DREAMS STORY
BY AL LAUZON
SEDRD, UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH**

Points of Reflection



- The Rural Summit: How do we keep the dialog going?
- Monieson Centre 2014 Rural Economic Revitalization Conference: What now?
- The Perennial Question? Why should urban Canada support rural Canada (or Ontario)

The Dream for Rural and Remote Ontario



Background



- TORC
- University of Guelph
- Rural Ontario Institute
- OMAF/MRA
- September 2013 working group formed consisting of two members from ROI, one member from OMAF/MRA and one faculty member from the University of Guelph and a research assistant from the University of Guelph

The Dream: The Mission



The Ontario Centre for Rural/Remote and Regional Development will enhance the quality of life and well-being of Ontario's rural/remote areas, and their people through:

- building relationships
- stakeholder driven research
- knowledge translation, transfer and mobilization,
- outreach and education
- advocacy for rural and remote Ontario and its regions, communities and people
- influencing policy

The Dream: The Mandate



1. Network university based rural researchers and rural/remote research centres across the province of Ontario with one another;
2. Network rural and remote researchers with communities, municipalities, rural and remote NGOs, and government decision-makers and policy-makers
3. Network with rural and remote centres and institutes in other provinces, and where deemed desirable in other countries, to share lessons learned and best practices;
4. Create a knowledge network consisting of researchers, policy-makers, members from municipal and regional governments, and from rural/remote regional civil society organizations;
5. Facilitate, organize and coordinate demand driven applied research in response to the needs of rural/remote stakeholders to inform municipal, provincial and federal policy and to assist in meeting rural/remote communities/peoples challenges;
6. Identify and collect ground intelligence/tacit/local knowledge to complement scientific knowledge to inform policy-making and decisions, programs and interventions;
7. To mobilize knowledge in appropriate forms for utilization by stakeholders;
8. To convene learning and educational opportunities for stakeholder groups;
9. To mobilize action and resources in response to rural/remote community and regional needs and research opportunities.

The Changing Context



- From government to governance whereby governments move from providing services to enabling action by people who share a common goal (devolution).
- Given this we need:
- to find ways to leverage diverse ideas;
- to coordinate collective resources;
- to use new tools and techniques to inspire and steer decision making;
- to work together and collaboratively to solve problems and challenges, and take advantage of opportunities;
- policy that enables community-driven and municipally/regionally led innovation;
- As Jane Jenson wrote, “we need a meeting place where policy learning can take place, a place to foster dialogue, build trust, share lessons and mobilize leadership.”

What is a Knowledge Network?



...a knowledge network consists of nodes (connections among people) that serve as repositories of knowledge and agents that search for, adapt, transmit and create knowledge. Nodes are simultaneously sources and recipients of information and knowledge (Phelps, 2012)

Why Knowledge Networks?



- Economic performance and growth is dependent upon knowledge creation, translation, transfer and its application
- Development and deployment of knowledge is a source of competitive advantage
- Collaboration through networks can improve the quality of economic value of newly created knowledge
- Interaction with all stakeholders leads to more practical knowledge (yes university researchers need to get out of the Ivory Tower)

Why Knowledge Networks?



- Utilization of knowledge is dependent upon researcher/stakeholder context and relationships rather than the attributes of the knowledge; stakeholders need to make contact, interact and build relationships
- People prefer to get knowledge/information from other people rather than documents (and I would add websites)
- Relationships must be characterized by trust which means interacting over time
- Trust leads to greater knowledge exchange and reduces the transaction costs

Why Knowledge Networks?



- The greater the trust between creators and recipients of knowledge, the greater the interaction and the more likely knowledge will be relevant and acted upon
- Increasing strength of social relationships allows for more complex knowledge to be transferred and applied
- Relationships mean researchers are more likely to address the challenges/opportunities of stakeholders
- Interaction through networks means a greater understanding of various stakeholder perspectives is achieved and this leads to developing common goals among diverse stakeholders

What now?



- The working group will continue its work with the intent of learning more about knowledge networks and engaging Ontario's rural stakeholders to help us move forward.



Thank you for indulging me!