

# The Neglect of the Rural: Understanding the Concepts of ‘Urban’ and ‘Rural’ by Assessing the Impact and Policy Implications of the Rural Transition<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Beginning with the rise of urban political machines during the late nineteenth century, the general trend in local government studies has been to focus on changes occurring in cities and the urban environment. Although the attention is not misplaced with decades of continuous urban growth, development, and sprawl this evolution in understanding the urban has occurred at the expense of understanding changes in the rural. This is especially evident in the North American context, where rural histories are not as ‘embedded’ in ‘traditional subsistence economies’ or ‘feudal societies’, as is the case in much of Europe, and therefore, allows for focus on cities and city life over that of the countryside.<sup>3</sup>

However, with the increase in global migration, technology and communication, as well as combination of number of trends,<sup>4</sup> the very nature of the ‘rural’ has transformed. This transformation is characterized as an evolution from the dominance of traditional agriculture production toward multifunctional uses, including corporate agriculture production and increase in investments in the agri-food industry, natural resource extraction, eco or organic farming, environmental sustainability, immigration, diversification, tourism and recreation.<sup>5</sup> These changes, which have accumulated over time and are collectively referred to as the “rural transition,” have impacted the way the rural is lived and governed, and have attributed to the blurring of boundaries between

<sup>3</sup> Troughton, Michael. “Chapter 2: The Countryside as the New Frontier: Threats and Opportunities” in Kenneth Beesley, Hugh Millward, Brian Ilbery, and Lisa Harrington (eds.) The New Countryside: Geographic Perspectives on Rural Change (Brandon: Rural Development Institute) 2003, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> A number of trends have been implicated as part of the rural transition, including but not limited to: counterurbanization, tourism, recreation, immigration, migration, demographic changes such as an increase in Aboriginal population and overall aging population, environmental movements and land protection, environmental sustainability and biodiversity farming etc. This paper will only be discussing the trends in relation to regional specific examples to the ‘agrarian’ West in Canada and is not meant to be inclusive to all changes in the rural transition since its impact differs in any given context.

<sup>5</sup> Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011.

urban and rural. As a result, not only have these changes uncovered the urban-rural divide as a myth,<sup>6</sup> but have also increased the complexity of governance decisions for localities within and around the “urban-rural fringe.” In addition, there are small town and rural communities across Canada experiencing positive spin off effects of immigration and changes in the global economy. Although policy responses to these changes may appear to be stagnant or minimal given the overall depopulation of rural areas since the 1950s, there are new and innovative ways communities in the rural are addressing and adapting to these changes.

A body of work has accumulated within the past decade on the rural transition in general, however, there still exists a lack of meaningful discussion on the continuous changes occurring in the rural. While local government scholars focus their attention on the ‘urban’ and city growth, more often than not, these important and varied changes occurring in the countryside are bypassed all together impacting the way we understand the complexities involved in studying growth and governance. Even as cities and the countryside merge vis-à-vis urban sprawl and development, our understanding of changes and conflicts that may arise within these areas are skewed, as the ‘rural’ often remains understudied and misunderstood when compared to its counterpart. Consequently, there exists a pressing need to broaden our understanding of the rural to include new economic, social, and political demands, which challenge the old conceptions current scholarship maintains. Furthermore, the policy and political discourses surrounding the rural are ‘laden with quantification’, ignoring important approaches needed for place-based policy to be successful.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See: Scott, Alister, Alana Gilbert and Ayele Gelan. “The Urban-Rural Divide: Myth or Reality” Socio-Economic Research Group (SERG): The MacCauly Institute, Policy Brief (no.2), 2007.

< <http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/economics/research/SERPpb2.pdf> >; Libin, Kevin. “The Myth of the Urban-Rural Divide” The National Post, November 4, 2010 < <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/04/10/kevin-libin-the-myth-of-the-urban-rural-divide/> >

<sup>7</sup> See :Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011.

This paper explores the ways ‘the rural’ has been understood with the intention to open a dialogue within local government studies regarding the consideration and inclusion of changes occurring in the rural, furthering the understanding of pressing urban-rural policy issues impacting provinces in a variety of policy areas. These areas can include housing, immigration, a growing Aboriginal population, economic development, resource extraction, environmental concerns and food security. This paper, therefore, has three primary goals: the first, is to make aware the many ways ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ have been and continue to be conceptualized, by exploring the interdisciplinary nature of rural studies and exposing inherent faults within the assumptions made by each approach.

The second goal is to explore the growing body of literature describing economic, political and social transformations of the rural transition. These changes in production, consumption, technology and communication have presented interesting challenges and opportunities for urban and rural communities alike to attract and retain residents, manage growth and capitalize off of economic development opportunities.<sup>8</sup> These changes have also increased the accessibility of areas in and around the ‘urban-rural fringe’, making the possibility of living away from urban centers more viable and attractive enhancing competition among communities.

In order to analyze the challenges and opportunities presented by the rural transition and to further enhance discussion with regard to assumptions made in theory, current examples will be used to assess how small towns and rural communities, as well as senior levels of government, are responding to these changes vis-à-vis recent policy. The examples used in this paper will come from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, two of the fastest growing provinces in Canada. By comparing how each theoretical approach frames the changes of the rural transition in conjunction with the practical policy responses of communities experiencing these changes, the third and final goal of connecting theory to policy will be met.

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<sup>8</sup> See Woods (2011) for more explanation on the transition from the ‘production’ stages of the rural to that of the ‘consumption’ stages of the rural.

## 1.0 Conceptualization of the “Urban” and the “Rural”

Within the current scholarship there exists an overwhelming consensus that the ‘countryside’ is evolving and transitioning from traditional “agrarian” system to a post-industrial, multifunctional system. It is also recognized that these changes are “ubiquitous in their impact,”<sup>9</sup> causing a variety of outcomes depending on the context of the community under analysis, making the overall conclusions and appropriate policy responses to social transformations difficult to generalize. To some, the context-specific nature and diverse rural landscape make Canada an interesting case study, as Parkins and Reed explain:

Scholars point to the unique character of Canadian society, closely linked to natural resource extraction, modes of production, remoteness, rurality and the North... the Canadian rural landscape offers a chance to examine the repeated rise and fall of communities, industries and cultural transitions over decades. Today is no different, with significant attention to numerous interactions among the globalized social and economic forces and the impacts of these forces on the Canadian countryside.<sup>10</sup>

Although scholars may agree that rural transformations are vast and varied across the country, an important debate is made apparent throughout the Canadian literature. While the scholars above see the value in studying rural transformation recognizing that various industry and goods-producing sectors of the rural still contribute extensively to the

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<sup>9</sup> Millward, Hugh, Lisa Harrington, Brian Ilbery, Kenneth Beesley, “Milieux, Viewpoints, and Processes of Change in the New Countryside” in Kenneth Beesley, Hugh Millward, Brian Ilbery, and Lisa Harrington (eds.) The New Countryside: Geographic Perspectives on Rural Change. Brandon: Rural Development Institute, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Parkins, John and Maureen Reed. “Toward a Transformative Understanding of Rural Social Change” in Parkins, John and Maureen Reed (eds.) Social Transformation in Rural Canada: Community, Cultures and Collective Action. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012: p.5.

Canadian economy,<sup>11</sup> others interpret these changes and the dominance of urban areas as signs that the rural has become irrelevant, lacking ‘explanatory power,’<sup>12</sup> with the view that by focusing on the rural we “starve our cities” of the attention they deserve, as they are the “drivers of our economy.”<sup>13</sup> What is often missing from either side of the debate is the fact that the urban and rural are interconnected and analysis of one requires forethought of the other. As two halves to one whole, the urban and the rural require aspects of each other in order to be understood. What the following theoretical discussion should make evident is that understanding the rural and the urban is more complex and diverse than what may be assumed, and to offer explanations of how these conceptualizations frame the understanding and management of transformations occurring in the rural.

The cumulative impacts of the rural transition have come to both challenge and reinforce the normative notion of the ‘rural.’ On one hand, challenges originate from the decline in the traditional ties to the land and to family farming, particularly in the ‘agrarian’ West, declining quite dramatically since the 1950s onward. No longer is the rural solely embedded in agriculture and mechanized labour, but instead on natural resource extraction, retail and trade, industry, immigration and tourism. On the other hand, while

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<sup>11</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities “Policy Statement: Rural Communities” FCM: Rural Forum, March 2013. <[http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/corporate-resources/policy-statements/Rural\\_Issues\\_Policy\\_Statement\\_EN.pdf](http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/corporate-resources/policy-statements/Rural_Issues_Policy_Statement_EN.pdf)>; Lefebvre, Mario “Breaking Myths About the Economic Contribution of Rural Communities” The Conference Board of Canada, June 9, 2009 <[http://www.conferenceboard.ca/economics/hot\\_eco\\_topics/default/09-06-09/breaking\\_myths\\_about\\_the\\_economic\\_contribution\\_of\\_rural\\_communities.aspx](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/economics/hot_eco_topics/default/09-06-09/breaking_myths_about_the_economic_contribution_of_rural_communities.aspx)> Globe and Mail article

<sup>12</sup> Diaz, Polo, Randy Widdis and David Gauthier. “Social Cohesion and the Rural Community” in Blake, Raymond and Andrew Nurse (eds.) The Trajectories of Rural Life: New Perspectives on Rural Canada. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2003: p.129; Hoggart, Keith, “Not a definition of rural” *Area*, 20:1 (Mar., 1988) 35-40.

<sup>13</sup> Gibbins, Roger. “The Rural Face of the New West” in Blake, Raymond and Andrew Nurse (eds.) The Trajectories of Rural Life: New Perspectives on Rural Canada. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2003: p.144

these historical notions of the rural have been challenged with global trends, the growth and expansion of urban centers have made the rural more appealing to exurbanites, or those looking for the *rural idyll*<sup>14</sup>; that is, a place of tranquility, safe from the dangers of crime and removed from the hectic lifestyles often accompanying city life. This rural idyll continues to attract a variety of individuals, diversifying and changing the face of rural areas.

These “push – pull factors” have both reinforced our normative notions while simultaneously changing the rural. In addition, technology and communication advancements have made it easier for those searching for the rural idyll to move away from urban centers while maintaining the “luxuries” associated with the urban. According to recent literature, these trends have blurred the lines of distinction between what can be constituted as “urban” and as “rural” in western societies.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to popular belief, these trends have not imposed urban values onto rural areas, or caused the ‘urbanization of rural lands’ but instead, have pushed for the convergence of the countryside and the city creating hybrid areas and in some instances, re-growth of rural areas.<sup>16</sup>

Michael Woods explains the dilemma often experienced when attempting to define the “rural,” stating: “[t]he rural is a messy and slippery idea that eludes easy definition and

<sup>14</sup> The term “idyll” is used within rural studies to refer to the rural idyllic, or notions of the rural, as Wood describe: “...imagines the rural to be a place of peace, tranquility and simple virtue, contrasted with the bustle and brashness of the city. Whilst the rural idyll has also become associated with an escape from modernity, idyllic representations of country life are as old as writing about the rural, and in each historical era people have embellished the rural idyll with antonyms of their own apprehensions...The rural idyll fed on discourses of anti-urbanism, agrarianism and nature that were used to differentiate between the urban present and a romanticized rural past...There are many rural idylls, with different cultural and moral emphasis and different pictorial representations.”(Woods, 2011: p. 21-22)

<sup>15</sup> see Cloke, Paul, Terry Marsden and Patrick Mooney (eds) *Handbook of rural studies* Thousand Oaks, Calif. : SAGE, 2006.; Hiller, Harry H. “Urban Canada” 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Don Mills: Oxford), 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Cloke, Paul, Terry Marsden and Patrick Mooney (eds) *Handbook of rural studies* Thousand Oaks, Calif. : SAGE, 2006.

demarcation.”<sup>17</sup> The rural is thought of based on personal experience leading to disagreements on the functions and meanings attached to rurality (or rural space). These disagreements transcend disciplines; whether it is in geography, sociology, economics or political science, rural is undoubtedly a contested concept. However, there are three broad approaches, or rather epistemological questions of how we have come to know the ‘rural’ within the literature and are briefly explored below: (1) descriptive approaches; (2) socio-cultural approaches and, (3) social construction or postmodern approaches.<sup>18</sup>

### *1.1 Descriptive Approach (Quantifying the Rural)*

Descriptive definitions are rooted in geography but have been overwhelmingly adopted within political science and policy discourse. Descriptive definitions concentrate on what can be observed or measured.<sup>19</sup> Paul Cloke’s “Index of Rurality” is often referred to as a prime example of descriptive methods of defining rural. Cloke used a number of census variables to empirically measure rurality; these variables included employment, population, land use, remoteness and migration, to name a few.<sup>20</sup> The same variables are widely used today;<sup>21</sup> for instance, Statistics Canada has developed a variety of geographical and functional forms to define ‘rural,’ using six different definitions of

<sup>17</sup> Woods, Michael. *Rural*. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011; See also: Cloke, Paul and Paul Milbourne “Deprivation and Lifestyles in Rural Wales. Rurality and the Cultural Dimension. *Journal of Rural Studies* (8:4), 1992: 359-271; See also Cloke, Paul J. “Wither Rural Studies?” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 1:1 (1995) 1-9.

<sup>18</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993) 23-37; Cloke, Paul, Terry Marsden and Patrick Mooney (eds) *Handbook of rural studies* Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993) 23-37.

<sup>20</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993) 23-37

<sup>21</sup> See: Bollman, Ray D. “Factors Driving Canada’s Rural Economy: 1914-2006” Statistics Canada Agricultural Division; Agircultural and Rural Working Paper Series, 2007. < <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/21-601-m/21-601-m2007083-eng.pdf> >

“rural” all referencing variables of geographical space or population density.<sup>22</sup> Although there is some overlap within the six definitions, each are used to highlight the various socio-economic differences between what is constituted as the rural population from that of the urban.<sup>23</sup>

Proponents of this approach recognize that descriptive criteria used to define the concept of rural cannot explain the entire social phenomenon being studied. Statistics Canada, for example, acknowledges how each definition is not mutually exclusive when it comes to explaining phenomenon or finding multiple policy solutions; therefore, it is suggested more than one of the definitions should be used to compensate for possible gaps in explanation.<sup>24</sup> Critics, however, argue that defining rural simply by geographical scale or population density does not capture the way individuals classify what is rural and urban. Halcrafee critiques the inability of a descriptive approach to measure rurality overall, as a cluster of these variables can only measure a specific area of study at a time. For example, “statistical definitions are geared towards socio-economic studies, administrative definitions toward political studies, area definitions toward land use studies, functional definitions towards economic studies, and population density toward service provision studies,”<sup>25</sup> all to which he warns should not be used as the *sole* definition of ‘what is rural’.

Furthermore, the originator of the rurality index recognizes the downfall of quantifying the rural and admits his use of the index was due to a “naïve interest in the question of

<sup>22</sup> du Plessis, Valarie, Roland Beshiri Ray D. Bollman and Heather Clemenson, “Definitions of “Rural”” Working Paper Series (no. 61), Agricultural Division: Statistics Canada, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> See: du Plessis, Valarie, Roland Beshiri Ray D. Bollman and Heather Clemenson, “Definitions of “Rural”” Working Paper Series (no. 61), Agricultural Division: Statistics Canada, 2002: p. 29, for the six definitions commonly used to describe rural and small town areas.

<sup>24</sup> du Plessis, Valarie, Roland Beshiri Ray D. Bollman and Heather Clemenson, “Definitions of “Rural”” Working Paper Series (no. 61), Agricultural Division: Statistics Canada, (2002) 33-34.

<sup>25</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993) p. 24.

what ‘rural’ was/is in the only way that at the time I had the academic and cultural competence so to do. I think I knew at the time that by selecting a number of variables to represent, collectively, the rural I was pre-determining the outcome...”<sup>26</sup> Although this may be the case, governments everywhere continue to use quantitative measures and data in order to study and create urban-rural policy: for example, “... there are over 50 different definitions of rural areas used by federal programmes in the United States, with considerable discrepancies in their spatial coverage.”<sup>27</sup> With this amount of variation, the confusion over what constitutes the urban and rural is perpetuated further.

During a 2012 webinar conducted by the Canadian Rural Research Network (CRRN) and the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University, Ray D. Bollman discussed how rural areas in Canada are growing, however, because of the simultaneous growth in urban areas statistics often portray a decrease in the rural, as urban areas grow at a much faster rate.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, in cases where rural development and regrowth are successful, reclassification is conducted, whereby population growth in a given rural area has been extensive enough for it to be reclassified as ‘urban,’ disregarding any actual structural, institutional or cultural changes.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, there exists an overemphasis on defining rural as solely tied to agriculture activity vis-à-vis the use of statistical changes in the agriculture industry or the number of family farms in a given area. It is suggested by rural statisticians that when looking at

<sup>26</sup> Cloke, Paul. Writing the Rural: Five Cultural Geographies London: Paul Chapman Pub. Ltd., 1994; p.156, as quoted in Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011: p.33.

<sup>27</sup> Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011: p.33

<sup>28</sup> Bollman, Ray D. “Manitoba Rural Demography in the Canadian Context” Webinar prepared for the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, November 20, 2012 <<http://www.brandou.ca/rdi/files/2011/02/Bollman-webinar-Manitoba-Rural-Demography-Nov20-2012-web-version-no-animati.pdf>>

<sup>29</sup> Bollman, Ray D. “Manitoba Rural Demography in the Canadian Context” Webinar prepared for the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, November 20, 2012 <<http://www.brandou.ca/rdi/files/2011/02/Bollman-webinar-Manitoba-Rural-Demography-Nov20-2012-web-version-no-animati.pdf>>

changes in rural areas, other industries which also reside in these areas, such as retail and wholesale trade, health care, manufacturing, and natural resource extraction, should also be taken into consideration to account the multifunctional uses of the area and the degree of change.<sup>30</sup> These descriptive definitions, although used widely throughout political science and in the creation of rural policy, often ignore important aspects to individuals living within the rural, which is what leads to the next approach.

### *1.2 Socio-cultural Approach*

In Louis Wirth's seminal work, "Urbanism as a Way of Life" he describes the various approaches of what can be seen as 'urban' based on physical structure, social organization, and sets of attitudes and beliefs. Wirth chooses to focus on social relations arguing that we do not need to know population sizes or the difference between various settlements, but instead how people associate with one another within these settlements, and how these relations change in various population densities.<sup>31</sup> Wirth's ideas were carried on in the work of Ray Pahl who emphasized the differences between urban and rural vis-à-vis the creation of an urban-rural continuum, juxtaposing the urban and rural on extreme ends of a spectrum.<sup>32</sup>

Although both Wirth and Pahl made a conceptual leap away from descriptive definitions of rurality, they were unable to avoid the trap of "principled dichotomies" often used to describe these urban-rural continuums. For example, these dichotomies classify the urban

<sup>30</sup> Bollman, Ray D. "Manitoba Rural Demography in the Canadian Context" Webinar prepared for the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, November 20, 2012 < <http://www.brandou.ca/rdi/files/2011/02/Bollman-webinar-Manitoba-Rural-Demography-Nov20-2012-web-version-no-animati.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Wirth, Louis. "Urbanism as a Way of Life" in Richard Sennett (ed.), Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities. Englewood Cuffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969: 143-164.

<sup>32</sup> Scott, Alister, Alana Gilbert and Ayele Gelan. "The Urban-Rural Divide: Myth or Reality" Socio-Economic Research Group (SERG): The MacCauly Institute, Policy Brief (no.2), 2007: p. 3

ideal as being ‘secular, rational and industrial’ and rural as ‘sacred, traditional and folk’.<sup>33</sup> Wirth described urban as having distinctly different social relations than those of rural areas, classifying each extreme. This is not unlike the early sociological classifications of *Geminschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in the work of Ferdinand Tönnies, and Emile Durkheim’s *organic* and *mechanic* solidarity. However, as Scott et al. aptly describe: “this conceptual approach that positions urban and rural at opposite ends of a spectrum actually hides more than it reveals about the nature and relationships between rural and urban areas.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, one of the primary issues with this approach is the fallacy that urban and rural are fundamentally different, and the adoption of this presumption has caused institutionalization of these divisions, which then frame policy prescriptions.<sup>35</sup> As will be discussed below, these fallacies are continuously challenged particularly with the advent of technology and communication.

In addition, another downfall of socio-cultural approach rests on the assumption that population density has a direct effect on human behaviour and attitude, when this may not be the case.<sup>36</sup> As well, critics claim that proponents of this approach also neglect possible reciprocal relationships within the continuum such as the existence of traditional rural aspects within urban society and urban aspects within rural society.<sup>37</sup> Woods discusses ‘urbanization’ of the rural and inverts this premise by suggesting that it would be just as simple to explain the popularization of urban farming, for instance, as being a form of

<sup>33</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. (9:1) 1993:23-37.

<sup>34</sup> Scott, Alister, Alana Gilbert and Ayele Gelan. “The Urban-Rural Divide: Myth or Reality” Socio-Economic Research Group (SERG): The MacCauly Institute, Policy Brief (no.2), 2007 p.3

<sup>35</sup> Scott, Alister, Alana Gilbert and Ayele Gelan. “The Urban-Rural Divide: Myth or Reality” Socio-Economic Research Group (SERG): The MacCauly Institute, Policy Brief (no.2), 2007p.3

<sup>36</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993), p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993), p. 25.

“ruralization” of the urban.<sup>38</sup> The idea that the rural impacts the urban just as the urban impacts the rural is not taken into consideration within socio-cultural approaches. The use of urban-rural continuums does not allow for the recognition that this urban-rural divide has been made based solely upon ‘functional and in political-economic terms,’ ignoring the indisputable interconnection between the two; and, recognizing that ‘networks and flows’ among urban and rural areas can assist in overcoming some of the perceived challenges between the two.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, critics argue that this view focuses solely on rural areas rather than on the people living in the rural areas.<sup>40</sup> The emphasis of environment or surroundings on human behaviour tends to isolate urban and rural at opposite ends of the spectrum, creating and reinforcing idyllic dichotomies regardless of the many categorizations along the continuum. The rejection of dichotomies found in emphasizing socio-cultural aspects of ‘rural’ evokes a third approach to defining the concept of rural, and that is the social construction or postmodern view.

### *1.3 Social Construction Approach (Postmodern view)*

According to this view, there are no ‘rural’ or ‘rural economies,’ these are simply analytical distinctions each individual constructs for him or herself.<sup>41</sup> This approach focuses on social representation or how rural space is described as a social construction. Proponents of this view believe ‘rural’ should be studied keeping perception, identity, power and symbols in mind viewing ‘urbanism’ and ‘ruralism’ as modes of life.<sup>42</sup> Hillier

<sup>38</sup> Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011 p. 43

<sup>39</sup> Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011 p. 43

<sup>40</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993), p. 25.

<sup>41</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993).

<sup>42</sup> Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993), p. 00

believes that those who are of this approach are arguing that a distinction between urban and rural has no theoretical value since they are interconnected. What is ‘rural’ and what is ‘urban’ should only be understood as social representations of people’s lived experiences, not as fixed but as fluid, subject to changing economic, political and social pressures.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, Renato Miguel do Carmo states: “This sense of uniqueness of the place... is in part produced by discourses and social representations carried out by the people who live in it. From this viewpoint, rurality might be conceived as a production and simultaneously as a product of social practices and representations that are attached to and bounded up with a specific sort of place (a particular village, a peculiar landscape, a small town, etc.).”<sup>44</sup> Overall, those who are of the social constructionist approach believe the urban and the rural are based solely on an individual’s lived experiences. It may be argued that an obvious downfall of accepting such a view is that it is difficult to make policy if the urban and rural are simply social constructs; however, as the literature review in the next section will uncover, an increased emphasis has been put on place-based policy to address issues concerning small town and rural communities, all to which rely on lived experiences of those within a given community.

This overview of approaches to conceptualizing the urban and rural is general, at best. There are theorists and scholars who attempt to take all three approaches into consideration. Keith Hoggart for example, believes the use of the concept of “rural” is highly debatable to begin with and that any empirical study of any locality needs to avoid an *a priori* notion or typology of ‘rural’ and ‘urban.’<sup>45</sup> For scholars akin to Hoggart’s

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<sup>43</sup> (Halfacree, K.H. “Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 9:1 (1993),

<sup>44</sup> Renato Miguel do Carmo. “‘Suburbanism as a Way of Staying Alive’: Reinventing the Rural” *Journal of Rural and Community Development* (5:3), 2010: p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> Hoggart, Keith, “Not a definition of rural” *Area*, 20:1 (Mar., 1988) 35-40; Hoggart, Keith, “Let’s Do Away with Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 6:3 (1990) 245-257.

position, rural places are not identical and in fact, may have many similarities with urban localities and dissimilarities with other rural localities. The concept of rural, no matter the definition will always be incomplete. If one is to study local communities, the pragmatic approaches to selecting cases to compare vis-à-vis descriptive notions of rural, should be avoided, as this approach groups together areas that may very well be different in how they operate.<sup>46</sup> This sentiment has found its way into recent literature on changes happening within the countryside emphasizing that in order to fully understand the changes occurring in small town and rural communities, we must take into consideration context or place based complexities.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.0 Understanding the Framing of the Rural Transition

A brief exploration of the rural studies literature reveals a common undercurrent of what is referred to as “the cultural turn” a term that, in part, explains the movement toward postmodern approaches of the rural but more specifically, is applied to the debates

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<sup>46</sup> Hoggart, Keith, “Not a definition of rural” *Area*, 20:1 (Mar., 1988) 35-40. ; Hoggart, Keith, “Let’s Do Away with Rural” *Journal of Rural Studies*. 6:3 (1990) 245-257.

<sup>47</sup> See: 1) Millward, Hugh, Lisa Harrington, Brian Ilbery, Kenneth Beesley, “Milieux, Viewpoints, and Processes of Change in the New Countryside” in Kenneth Beesley, Hugh Millward, Brian Ilbery, and Lisa Harrington (eds.) The New Countryside: Geographic Perspectives on Rural Change. Brandon: Rural Development Institute, 2003: 9-23.; 2) Neal, Sarah. Rural Identities: Ethnicity and Community in the Contemporary English Countryside. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009; 3) Parkins, Joahn and Maureen Reed (eds.) Social Transformation in Rural Canada: Community, Cultures and Collective Action. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012; 4) Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011; 5) Martin, John, Gary Paget and Brian Walisser “Rural Municipal Development and Reform in Canada: Policy Learning through Local-Provincial Collaboration” *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* (Issue 10; Dec. 2011-Jan 2012); 6) Dahms, Fredric A. “ ‘Dying Villages’, ‘Counterurbanization’ and the Urban Field – a Canadian Perspective” *Journal of Rural Studies* (11:1), 1995: 21-33; 7) Dahms, Fred and Janine McComb “‘Counterurbanization’, Interaction and Functional Change in a Rural Amenity Area – a Canadian Example” *Journal of Rural Studies* (15:2), 1999: 129-146.; 8) Mitchell, Clare J.A. “Counterurbanization and the Growth of Canada’s Rural and Small Town Municipalities: 1996-2001” Canadian Journal of Regional Science (XXX1: 1), Spring, 2008: 117-132.

regarding how rurality or rural space has become “heterogeneous, [u]nstable and uncertain[n]”<sup>48</sup> due to immense social, economic and political changes. These changes have brought about questions of rural identity, representation, and regulation;<sup>49</sup> moving from what Woods refers to as “rural politics to the politics of the rural.”<sup>50</sup> Sara Neal sees the onset of these crises as a result of the rural transition: “It is important not [to] see the cultural turn in rural studies as ‘ivory tower’ navel gazing. It has been driven by and is reflective of the same series of relational changes in the countryside.”<sup>51</sup> These changes can be seen through the movement from production to consumption, leading toward fundamental questions regarding the very conceptualization of the rural in not only academia, but as Neal states: “also populist and political agendas.”<sup>52</sup> These changes are, in part, echoed in Canadian literature, however the evidence as such is rather weak, highlighting mainly economic and demographic characteristics of urban and rural communities rather than discussions of how this transition has challenged the ways the rural is thought of, how individuals relate to the rural and how the rural is governed.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Neal, Sarah. Rural Identities: Ethnicity and Community in the Contemporary English Countryside. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009: p.12.

<sup>49</sup> Neal, Sarah. Rural Identities: Ethnicity and Community in the Contemporary English Countryside. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009; Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Woods, M and M Goodwin. “Applying the rural: governance and policy in rural areas” in Paul Cloke (ed) Country Visions: Knowing the rural world. Essex: Pearson Education, as quoted in Neal, Sarah. Rural Identities: Ethnicity and Community in the Contemporary English Countryside. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009: p. 11-12.

<sup>51</sup> Neal, Sarah. Rural Identities: Ethnicity and Community in the Contemporary English Countryside. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009: p.19.

<sup>52</sup> Neal, Sarah. Rural Identities: Ethnicity and Community in the Contemporary English Countryside. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009: p.19.; Parkins, John and Maureen Reed (eds.) Social Transformation in Rural Canada: Community, Cultures and Collective Action. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Parkins, John and Maureen Reed. “Toward a Transformative Understanding of Rural Social Change” in Parkins, John and Maureen Reed (eds.) Social Transformation in Rural Canada: Community, Cultures and Collective Action. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012: p.7.

Throughout the literature, there have been discussions inclusive to the resilience of a number of small town and rural communities. This resilience has also been characterized as a locality's ability to adapt to change. This adaptability requires dynamic and flexible approaches to understanding what the rural is in order to make sense of the complex and place-based issues within a variety of communities, as they transition.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the following section, a number of trends will briefly be discussed with an analysis of how these trends are commonly framed within the literature, looking at not only what is perceived as major challenges to small town and rural communities but also how these changes create opportunities for adaptation. Examples of communities within Saskatchewan and Manitoba will be used to assess the four trends mentioned below. The final section will then summarize practical policy responses to elements of these changes and areas in need of further analysis.

### *2.1 Migration and Urbanization*

The growth and development of cities and the increase in urban sprawl are associated with rural-to-urban migration along with an increasing immigration population and economic development. Looking at urbanization from a land use perspective, the process is commonly described or thought of as “the expansion of non-agricultural economic activities...urbanization is also identified as the permeation of urban cultural practices, attitudes and consumption patterns.”<sup>55</sup> Although there are many other trends that have attributed to the adoption of “urban” activities into rural areas, such as the expansion of consumerism, technology and communication advancements all to which enhance rural-urban connections, the very process of ‘urbanization’ has a number of “myths” attached to it. “Urbanization may appear to create populations who are cut off from the land, from rural areas, but this is appearance only. Urban economies in Canada are intimately dependent on rural industries and commodities; urban people remain connected, through relatives but also through culture and history, to rural roots. In this sense, the contrast

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<sup>54</sup> Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Woods, Michael. Rural. Oxon and New York; Routledge, 2011: p. 44.

between urban and rural is little more than an arbitrary line drawn on a map.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Miguel do Carmo explains that the “[p]rocess of urbanization and the reaction to urbanization are varied. It is therefore important to consider each place as a living space and not as a mere receptacle that frames a differentiated collection of social relationships.”<sup>57</sup> Since it is commonly assumed that urbanization is a homogeneous process, its impact on the rural is often framed negatively, describing the “destruction” of rural lands and the isolation of rural individuals from the urban and urban from the rural. It is through these assumptions that the practical and varied experiences of small communities can be overlooked.

The underpinning of common assumptions attached to the process of urbanization is a reflection of the institutionalization of the urban-rural divide, and does not show how dynamic of a process urbanization is, nor does it reveal how rural communities are responding to these changes.<sup>58</sup> What is not frequently discussed, even by those who favor the use of descriptive approaches to studying the urban and rural, is the regrowth of the rural in Canada, which has been occurring for almost two decades,<sup>59</sup> as Clare J.A. Mitchell explains: “...more than 40 per cent of [Canada’s] smallest settlements grew during the 1996-2001 census period. Some of this growth may be attributed to higher levels of natural increase, particularly in municipalities with a large population of

<sup>56</sup> Fairbairn, Brett “Preliminary History of Rural Development in Canada” Working Paper: March 1998 p.3 <<http://nre.concordia.ca/ftprootFull/rhistory.pdf>>

<sup>57</sup> Renato Miguel do Carmo. “‘Suburbanism as a Way of Staying Alive’: Reinventing the Rural” *Journal of Rural and Community Development* (5:3), 2010:p.81; with reference to Agnew, J. “Space: place” in Cloke, Paul J and R. Johnston (eds) Spaces of geographical thought London: Sage, 2005: 81-96; Cresswell, T. “Knowledge ruralities? In Cloke, P. Country Visions: Knowing the rural world Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Scott, Alister, Alana Gilbert and Ayele Gelan. “The Urban-Rural Divide: Myth or Reality” Socio-Economic Research Group (SERG): The MacCauly Institute, Policy Brief (no.2), 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Bollman, Ray D. “Manitoba Rural Demography in the Canadian Context” Webinar prepared for the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, November 20, 2012 <<http://www.brandonu.ca/rdi/files/2011/02/Bollman-webinar-Manitoba-Rural-Demography-Nov20-2012-web-version-no-animate.pdf>>

Aboriginal residents [and] in other cases, ... immigration from larger Canadian municipalities.<sup>60</sup> This has certainly been the case for Manitoba, as it holds the record for being one of the provinces in Canada that has been experiencing growth the longest, (since 1971).<sup>61</sup> As far as statistics are concerned, Manitoba holds 5.3 per cent of Canada's rural population, while Saskatchewan holds 5.4 per cent.<sup>62</sup> According to the 2011 census, Manitoba ranked fifth in population growth reaching 1,208,268, a reported increase of 5.2 per cent from 2006.<sup>63</sup> In addition, this growth is also occurring in small town and rural communities with the numbers being reported as "5.2 per cent growth in cities, 6.4 per cent in towns, 4.1 per cent in villages, 4.1 per cent in rural municipalities and 11.6 per cent in First Nation communities."<sup>64</sup> Although these increases may not be comparable to that of large urban centers, for individuals living in these towns, villages and rural municipalities, this growth within a five-year period can have a noticeable impact.

In addition, population growth statistics for Saskatchewan being the third fastest growing province are significant given its history of decline: "Saskatchewan grew by 65,224 between 2006 and 2011. That is by far the largest population growth in any census period since Statistics Canada started doing the Census every five years in 1956. The population growth also marks a complete reversal from the previous two census periods...which saw

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<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, Clare J.A. "Counterurbanization and the Growth of Canada's Rural and Small Town Municipalities: 1996-2001" *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* (XXX1: 1), Spring, 2008, p.117.

<sup>61</sup> "Bollman, Ray D. "Manitoba Rural Demography in the Canadian Context" Webinar prepared for the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, November 20, 2012 <

<http://www.brandou.ca/rdi/files/2011/02/Bollman-webinar-Manitoba-Rural-Demography-Nov20-2012-web-version-no-animati.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Bollman, Ray D. "Manitoba Rural Demography in the Canadian Context" Webinar prepared for the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, November 20, 2012 <

<http://www.brandou.ca/rdi/files/2011/02/Bollman-webinar-Manitoba-Rural-Demography-Nov20-2012-web-version-no-animati.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Government of Manitoba "Latest Canadian Census Shows Strong Manitoba Population Growth" Press release. February 8, 2012: < <http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/?item=13169> >

<sup>64</sup> Government of Manitoba. "Latest Canadian Census Shows Strong Manitoba Population Growth" Press release. February 8, 2012: < <http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/?item=13169> >

Saskatchewan's population drop by about 11,000 people during each five-year period.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, "cities grew by 8.4 per cent ... towns grew by 8.0 per cent [while v]illages [grew] by 4.7 per cent, First Nations [b]y 15.7 per cent and northern communities grew by 3.2 per cent."<sup>66</sup>

Although some communities, particularly on the fringe seem to be handling growth well, this should not be generalized, as the process of urbanization and more specifically, urban sprawl, have created challenges and conflict among municipalities, particularly for those vying for economic development opportunities. While some authors believe there will be continuously 'waves of urbanization' overwhelming rural areas and slowly converting them into urban suburbs, there are others who believe that the "resilience" of rural areas is not necessarily about resistance to change but about adaptability to the changes this transition causes.<sup>67</sup>

Saskatchewan has undergone rapid economic development and population growth, primarily due to natural resource development in potash reserves with spin off effects of increased employment and immigration. With this growth, the City of Regina has continued to expand through additional residential subdivisions and commercial business development in three of four directions. At the same time, surrounding small towns, villages and rural municipalities (RM's) have also been experiencing growth on their own. Due to the increase in growth and strain on infrastructure and services, the City

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<sup>65</sup> Government of Saskatchewan. "Highlights from Saskatchewan growth after the release of the 2011 Census" Press Release, February 8, 2012 <<http://www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=10f3edfa-c08b-4a62-a9d3-b33fb4991ab2>

<sup>66</sup> Government of Saskatchewan. "Highlights from Saskatchewan growth after the release of the 2011 Census" Press Release, February 8, 2012 <<http://www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=10f3edfa-c08b-4a62-a9d3-b33fb4991ab2>

<sup>67</sup> See: Renato Miguel do Carmo. "'Suburbanism as a Way of Staying Alive': Reinventing the Rural" *Journal of Rural and Community Development* (5:3), 2010: 79-93; and, Parkins, John and Maureen Reed (eds.) *Social Transformation in Rural Canada: Community, Cultures and Collective Action*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012.

recently announced its involvement in the White Butte Regional Planning Committee consisting of small communities located east of the City.<sup>68</sup> The intention to collaborate is focused on partnering in services and infrastructure such as “water, wastewater, fire services, recreation and shared-service delivery opportunities.”<sup>69</sup> While cooperative inter-municipal planning has gone relatively smoothly east of Regina, the RM of Sherwood, which encircles the City, has not been as positive or productive.

The City of Regina and RM of Sherwood, which at one point in time had a joint planning district, have what has been characterized as a strained relationship. Recently, the City had been developing its Official Community Plan (OCP), with intentions to expand residential and commercial development into the RM. At the same time, however, the RM of Sherwood was propositioned by the business Kal Tire to invest in a tire plant just southwest of the City. The City opposed the location immediately as it conflicted with their residential subdivisions and tensions rose. As a result of what is described as “better business investment,” Kal Tire decided to invest elsewhere causing the Province to lose the potential \$25 million dollar development.<sup>70</sup> As a result of the RM and the City’s inability to cooperate on economic development initiatives, the Province introduced Bill 90, The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 2013, which allows the province to

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<sup>68</sup> White Butte Regional Planning Committee Website <<http://whitebutte.wpmu.gp-inc.ca/joint-programs/white-butte-planning-committee/>>; The members consist of: City of Regina, White City, the RM of Edenwold, Pilot Butte, Balgonie and the Village of Edenwold.

<sup>69</sup> City of Regina Council Decision item no. CR13-66: April 29, 2010 (accessed from the City of Regina website – author has a hard copy) p.3. <<http://regina.siretechnologies.com/sirepub/mtgviewer.aspx?meetid=330&doctype=AGENDA>>

<sup>70</sup> Leader-Post Staff. “Regina City unveils ambitious annexation plan: Regina to annex land from Sherwood RM” The Leader-Post News, May 24, 2013. <<http://www.canada.com/business/Regina+City+unveils+ambitious+annexation+plan/8431268/story.html#ixzz2UQRJcXMA>>; Brown, Vanessa, “Kal Tire falls flat” The Leader-Post News, April, 26, 2013. <<http://www.leaderpost.com/Tire+falls+flat/8298154/story.html#ixzz2UQQpitXU>>

establish a Regional Planning Area (RPA).<sup>71</sup> It should be of note that Saskatchewan has experimented with provincially set Regional Economic Development Areas (REDA's), which were dissolved in 2012 after resistance from municipalities. In addition, the province has allowed for District Planning Commissions (DPC's) to be formed voluntarily by interested municipalities for a number of years; however, there has not been much success in the creation of DPC's. The White Butte Regional Planning Committee and the new RPA's signal a movement toward more provincially led regional approaches to dealing with urban-rural fringe issues and conflict arising from an increase in economic and population growth pressures.<sup>72</sup>

The framing of rural areas as ‘victims’ being swallowed by urban development, all the while attracting rural residents to abandon the countryside for the luxuries and amenities situated in the urban is common rhetoric. As is demonstrated in the example above, there can be positive and negative results from economic and population growth in communities on the fringe. The way in which these issues of development arise are often framed through the urban-rural divide, when in reality, both have similar interests in development. In addition, the examples above reveal the diversity and variation of communities and the impact of urban sprawl: while a group of municipalities are willing to collaborate on mutually beneficial projects, the other municipalities located a short distance away show little means of cooperation or collaboration.

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<sup>71</sup> City of Regina Council Decision item no. CR13-66: Appendix 2, April 29, 2010 (accessed from the City of Regina website – author has a hard copy (appendix 2).  
<<http://regina.siretechnologies.com/sirepub/mtgviewer.aspx?meetid=330&doctype=AGENDA>>

<sup>72</sup> Note: Although the White Butte Regional Planning Committee was created on the initiative of the involved municipalities, the province offered funding incentives for regional cooperation.

## *2.2 Market-Based Amenity<sup>73</sup> Attractions – Tourism and Recreation:*

When looking at the large rural decline overtime, it is not hard to see where assumptions of ‘urban takeover’ come from. However, while the combination of urbanization and decline in rural population are seen as a primary challenge for the sustainability of rural communities, research indicates that a trend of ‘counterurbanization’ or more appropriately, “urban-rural turnaround”<sup>74</sup> and the movement toward activities focusing on consumption of the rural through market based amenities, have somewhat challenged the overarching ‘doom and gloom’ scenario urbanization is commonly associated with. As Miguel do Carmo describes:

There are areas that have undergone large-scale processes of urbanization and, perhaps because of them, they have been simultaneously capable of demonstrating an endogenous capacity to revitalize their local economies, namely by means of developing new sectors like tourism, the environment and small-scale cultural and leisure undertakings, etc. (Ferrão & Lopes, 2004; Jollivet, 1997; Perrier-Cornet & Hervieu, 2002; Reis & Lima, 1998).... urbanization of rural zones cannot be defined just as a linear and devastating process that distorts and dismantles rural communities to such an extent that they lose any capacity to reinvent themselves. As there is a whole range of contradictory dynamics affecting certain territories.<sup>75</sup>

Overall, urbanization is varied and complex, and the assumptions made by looking purely at statistics and viewing this process through the lens of the urban-rural divide only furthers unawareness of positive changes occurring in the rural.

<sup>73</sup> Holmes, John Impulses towards a multifunctional transition in rural Australia: Gaps in the research agenda” *Journal of Rural Studies* (22: 2, April 2006, Pages 142–160

<sup>74</sup> Scott, Alister, Alana Gilbert and Ayele Gelan. “The Urban-Rural Divide: Myth or Reality” Socio-Economic Research Group (SERG): The MacCauly Institute, Policy Brief (no.2), 2007: p.7-8.

< <http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/economics/research/SERPpb2.pdf> >;

<sup>75</sup> See: Renato Miguel do Carmo. “‘Suburbanism as a Way of Staying Alive’: Reinventing the Rural” *Journal of Rural and Community Development* (5:3), 2010: p. 80-1.

The trend of counterurbanization has been defined a number of ways, however, in its simplest form it “includes the redistribution of population from urban to rural and population movement from larger to smaller places.”<sup>76</sup> Discussions of counterurbanization are more prevalent in the European literature, and have been referenced as the ‘rural renaissance’ and ‘urban-rural turnaround,’ all used to “explain the resurgence of ‘dying villages’.”<sup>77</sup> Dahms and McComb summarize literature taken from Australia, Britain and Canada and conclude that there exists six explanations of counterurbanization and its subset phenomenon of the urban-rural ‘turnaround,’ all to which are highly interrelated and can be seen in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

One explanation of the turnaround is successful advertising the rural. Advertising the countryside as an appealing lifestyle can target individuals who seek the rural idyll and see the benefits of a rural lifestyle outweighing the costs of commuting to urban centers for work, or other lifestyle amenities. The success of this initiative is closely linked to ensuring comprehensive planning policies. These policies are the second explanation of the turnaround and can “stimulate or discourage growth in rural, urban or metropolitan areas.”<sup>78</sup> These planning policies highlight types of services offered within the community, availability and prices of housing, transportation, and economic development opportunities. This is occurring in many small towns and rural communities within Saskatchewan, as issues of housing affordability and availability of units within the rental market become worrisome in the larger cities. In addition, communities experiencing rapid growth due primarily to the increase investments in resource extraction have started to adopt more comprehensive and strategic planning policies to accommodate for growth

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<sup>76</sup> Dahms, Fred and Janine McComb “‘Counterurbanization’, Interaction and Functional Change in a Rural Amenity Area – a Canadian Example” *Journal of Rural Studies* (15:2), 1999: p. 129.

<sup>77</sup> Dahms, Fredric A. “‘Dying Villages’, ‘Counterurbanization’ and the Urban Field – a Canadian Perspective” *Journal of Rural Studies* (11:1), 1995: 21-33.

<sup>78</sup> Dahms, Fred and Janine McComb “‘Counterurbanization’, Interaction and Functional Change in a Rural Amenity Area – a Canadian Example” *Journal of Rural Studies* (15:2), 1999: p.134.

and to advertise their cities as appealing places to settle, away from the largest of urban centers.<sup>79</sup>

The third explanation is to make peripheral areas within a region more attractive for businesses to invest, along with the advents in transportation and communication, whereby the distance factor may no longer be an issue.<sup>80</sup> This is certainly the case for developments such as the “Global Transportation Hub” (GTH) situated on the outskirts of Regina, along with interests from large businesses such as Kal Tire.<sup>81</sup> Related to this regional restructuring are the various economic and demographic trends in a given area at a given time. This can occur along with the expansion of a city’s functions beyond its borders, “modernizing” rural areas around the city decreasing the differentiation between urban and rural living.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Note: Communities transitioning from town to village and experiencing growth due to natural resource extraction (potash, oil and gas), such as Humboldt and Estevan, are beginning to develop more comprehensive strategic plans and housing strategies as a result of new and anticipated growth. As per information found through a survey conducted 2012 for: “Workforce Housing in an Economically Booming Semi-Rural Province.” Working paper, Dr. Greg Argue and Jacklyn Demerse. Urban Affairs Association Conference, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States. (April 17th-20th, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Dahms, Fred and Janine McComb “‘Counterurbanization’, Interaction and Functional Change in a Rural Amenity Area – a Canadian Example” *Journal of Rural Studies* (15:2), 1999: p.134.

<sup>81</sup> See: The Global Transportation Hub: <<http://www.thegth.com/>>; Schick, Lisa “Kal Tire announces construction signaling Regina, R.M. of Sherwood issue resolved” Newstalk 650 online, Nov 22, 2012 <<http://www.newstalk650.com/story/kal-tire-announces-construction-signaling-regina-rm-sherwood-issue-resolved/84630>>; Brown, Vanessa, “Kal Tire falls flat” The Leader-Post News, April, 26, 2013. <<http://www.leaderpost.com/Tire+falls+flat/8298154/story.html#ixzz2UQQpitXU>>; Leader-Post Staff.. “Regina City unveils ambitious annexation plan: Regina to annex land from Sherwood RM” The Leader-Post News, May 24, 2013. <<http://www.canada.com/business/Regina+City+unveils+ambitious+annexation+plan/8431268/story.html#ixzz2UQRJcXMA>>

<sup>82</sup> Dahms, Fred and Janine McComb “‘Counterurbanization’, Interaction and Functional Change in a Rural Amenity Area – a Canadian Example” *Journal of Rural Studies* (15:2), 1999: p.132-4.

The last explanation of the turnaround comes from “individual decision-making,” which encompass any of the previous five explanations that help drive individuals toward settling within or outside of urban centers. Much of the literature goes further in explaining how environmental and lifestyle amenities are primary indicators for individuals migrating to the rural.<sup>83</sup> For instance, Clare J.A. Mitchell found that common explanations for migration in Canada from urban to rural were due to economic and environmental amenities.<sup>84</sup> According to Dahms and McComb, there are a number of qualities within small town and rural communities that attract people to settle, including affordability, safer environments, and basic lifestyle changes.<sup>85</sup>

Regardless of the various reasons listed, amenity-based development is context or place-specific. Dahms illustrates in his 1995 study, that with “[r]ural sentiment, entrepreneurial effort, heritage architecture, access to metropolitan populations and an amenity location [helped to facilitate small town] rejuvenation.”<sup>86</sup> Dahms demonstrates that in order to fully understand the growth of small town and rural communities, each has to be studied individually in order to understand the complexity and context specific nature of growth. Popular literature can generalize rural growth to be a result of urban spill over, however, individual studies have shown otherwise. Location matters and amenities including the built environment, housing, entrepreneurial opportunities and recreation are all important to individuals migrating to the rural. This, however, requires local leadership and investment, presenting opportunities for small town and rural communities to capitalize

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<sup>83</sup> Dahms, Fred and Janine McComb “‘Counterurbanization’, Interaction and Functional Change in a Rural Amenity Area – a Canadian Example” *Journal of Rural Studies* (15:2), 1999: p.132-4.

<sup>84</sup> Mitchell, Clare J.A. “Counterurbanization and the Growth of Canada’s Rural and Small Town Municipalities: 1996-2001” *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* (XXX1: 1), Spring, 2008: 117-132

<sup>85</sup> Dahms, Fred and Janine McComb “‘Counterurbanization’, Interaction and Functional Change in a Rural Amenity Area – a Canadian Example” *Journal of Rural Studies* (15:2), 1999: p.132-4.

<sup>86</sup> Dahms, Fredric A. “‘Dying Villages’, ‘Counterurbanization’ and the Urban Field – a Canadian Perspective” *Journal of Rural Studies* (11:1), 1995: 21.

off of urban sprawl.<sup>87</sup> Majority of the current Canadian literature points to major success in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia for the above, but those situated in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are also looking for ways to do the same, and is an area for further research.

### 2.3 *Immigration*

In addition to the opportunities presented with the commodification of the rural and the appeal of lifestyle change, comes challenges and opportunities with increasing immigration. Immigration trends in urban centers are discussed at great length, with numerous publications on growth in three of the largest urban centers in Canada, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Federal and provincial government policies have fallen in line with ensuring continued increases in immigration, as it has now been touted as one of *the primary* driving factors in securing the nation's economic growth.<sup>88</sup> Statistics reveal an overwhelming amount of newcomers immigrating to Canada's largest urban centers, looking for job opportunities and a sense of community within various Ethnocultural pockets within these cities.<sup>89</sup> However, immigration is also occurring in smaller cities, towns and rural municipalities, as research is finding these communities can offer better employment opportunities and affordable living.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Yoshida, Yoko and Howard Ramos "Destination Rural Canada: An Overview of Recent Immigrants to Rural Small Towns" in Parkins, John and Maureen Reed (eds.) Social Transformation in Rural Canada: Community, Cultures and Collective Action. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012: 65-90

<sup>88</sup> Friesen, Joe. "How immigrants affect the economy: Weighing the benefits and costs" The Globe and Mail, May 9, 2012.

<sup>89</sup> Friesen, Joe. "How immigrants affect the economy: Weighing the benefits and costs" The Globe and Mail, May 9, 2012.

<sup>90</sup> Yoshida, Yoko and Howard Ramos "Destination Rural Canada: An Overview of Recent Immigrants to Rural Small Towns" in Parkins, John and Maureen Reed (eds.) Social Transformation in Rural Canada: Community, Cultures and Collective Action. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012: 65-90.

As Bill Ashton states: “[new comer] research is contributing to new knowledge about rural immigration, which helps to offset the preponderance of policies and research defining immigration as a big city phenomenon.”<sup>91</sup> Immigration statistics for Saskatchewan reveal: “In 2011, 171 Saskatchewan communities saw the arrival of immigrants who were migrating from 215 different countries... Immigration was the greatest contributing factor [to the province’s record growth], accounting for approximately 65 per cent of [total] growth.”<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile, Manitoba welcomed a total of 15,962 immigrants in 2011, while Winnipeg ranked fourth out of the top ten cities of settlement in Canada.<sup>93</sup>

For examples of immigration growth and strategy, we can look to Manitoba, which has had much success through the provincial immigration nominee program. With the growth statistics explained above, small cities and towns are beginning to adopt immigration and diversity strategies to accommodate newcomers. The City of Steinbach and the Town of Winkler, along with surrounding municipalities, have seen increases in immigration and positive economic spin offs. Between 2009-2011, Steinbach has welcomed 1,037 residents contributing to a total population of 13,524 while Winkler has welcomed 1,400 contributing to a total population of 10,670.<sup>94</sup> Growing by almost 60 percent in a decade, Steinbach has been touted as a model for immigration, as part of one of the fastest growing regions in the country.<sup>95</sup> Part of Steinbach’s success is due to the

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<sup>91</sup> Ashton, Wm. (Bill) “Observations on Rural Policy And Applied Research: Brandon University’s Rural Development Institute” *Journal of Rural and Community Development* (Vol. 7 No.3; editorial) p.28.

<sup>92</sup> Government of Saskatchewan “Saskatchewan Statistical Immigration Report 2009 to 2011”

Ministry of the Economy, <<http://www.economy.gov.sk.ca/sk-immigration-statistical-report-2011>>

<sup>93</sup> Government of Manitoba “Manitoba Immigration Facts Statistical Report “ Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Summer 2012: p. 2 and 7 < <http://www.gov.mb.ca/immigration/pdf/mpnp-manitoba-immigration-statistics-facts-2011.pdf>

<sup>94</sup> Government of Manitoba “Manitoba Immigration Facts Statistical Report “ Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Summer 2012: p.13< <http://www.gov.mb.ca/immigration/pdf/mpnp-manitoba-immigration-statistics-facts-2011.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> The Globe and Mail “The Immigration Answer: Is this Manitoba town a model for immigration?” Video, Tuesday, May. 01 2012,

immigration services offered within the community, assisting newcomers in settling into their new life in Canada. In addition, another booming city, Brandon, has developed an overall strategy of “welcoming community” in all of its development and immigration initiatives. This is a trend that may be adopted elsewhere throughout the province with specific strategies on how to manage newcomers and new growth.<sup>96</sup>

In addition to Manitoba’s success, small communities within Saskatchewan have recently experienced an influx of immigrants. For instance, in the Southwest part of the province, around the Town of Ogema, Saskatchewan, (population as of 2011: 368) and the nearby Hamlet of Kayville (population as of 2006: 5), a recent surge of Chinese immigrants have been investing in large acres of land. The opportunity to invest in land is appealing and flexible, as most immigrants are purchasing and renting out or “flipping” the land, while others have chosen to settle on the land, purchasing local businesses at the same time.<sup>97</sup> Although a town will less than 400 in population is not hard-pressed to adopt an immigration strategy, these changes are helping to shape the ‘new countryside’ in this area of the province, with little indication of slowing down.

These cases offer a glimpse into the impact of immigration and the opportunities this trend presents to small town and rural communities. Although the adoption of immigration and diversity strategies as part of a rural economic development plan are positive steps toward managing rural transition changes, there still remain many challenges for rural communities. These include: attracting immigrants to small communities, providing resources for diverse needs culturally and linguistically,

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< <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/time-to-lead/video-is-this-manitoba-town-a-model-for-canadian-immigration/article4107250/> >

<sup>96</sup> Silvius, Ray and Robert C. Annis. “Issues in Rural Immigration: Lessons, Challenges and Responses” Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies: RDI Working Paper #2005-9: The Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, (April 2005). < <http://www.brandou.ca/rdi/files/2011/08/Lessons-Final.pdf> >.

<sup>97</sup> Waldie, Paul. “Seed capital: How immigrants are reshaping Saskatchewan’s farmland” The Globe and Mail, October 12, 2012 .

including the wider community in welcoming newcomers, ensuring proper resources, employment opportunities, and other community supports in order to retain newcomers.<sup>98</sup> Primary concerns for immigrants moving to smaller communities are finding similar Ethnocultural groups and cultural supports that are more readily available in urban centers, dealing with generation gaps and issues for immigrant youth, as well as language gaps and feelings of disempowerment vis-à-vis alienation and feelings of incapability.<sup>99</sup>

There have not been many studies on immigration in rural Canada, therefore, one of the primary challenges for smaller communities is to be able to attract and retain new residents with little examples to emulate. However, as was referenced above, there are opportunities these communities have in incorporating immigration and diversification strategies within larger rural economic development policies, in addition to securing immigration service centers not just in urban areas, but also rural, as well as offering opportunities for full time employment not found in urban areas.

When looking at the “small victories” for what most would deem as ‘insignificant growth in numbers’, these are important trends, particularly in the West, as small towns and rural communities slowly diversify their populations and offer higher standards of living for newcomers. This is, as Ashton and others point out, an area in need of further study to understand the implications of trends, but nevertheless has become an important aspect of growth and sustainability for the rural. According to Varam, “...immigration is a viable strategy for supporting the survival and growth of rural areas. Understanding immigration

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<sup>98</sup> Silvius, Ray and Robert C. Annis. “Issues in Rural Immigration: Lessons, Challenges and Responses” Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies: RDI Working Paper #2005-9: The Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, (April 2005). <<http://www.brandoun.ca/rdi/files/2011/08/Lessons-Final.pdf>>

<sup>99</sup> Varma, Manju. “Including Immigration in the Rural First Aid Kit” in Blake, Raymond and Andrew Nurse (eds.) The Trajectories of Rural Life: New Perspectives on Rural Canada. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2003: p. 94-96.

and diversity in a rural context is essential if rural areas... are to attract, maintain and disperse immigrants throughout the area.”<sup>100</sup>

#### *2.4 Environmental Sustainability*

An analysis of transitions occurring in the rural would not be complete without discussing the rise of environment awareness and sustainability. Although not extensively discussed throughout the Canadian literature, there is evidence of communities becoming increasingly aware of the environment, as well as food security and sustainability. Answers to these issues have come in the increase and adoption of organic, eco and biodiversity farming practices. These trends are beginning to offer opportunities for communities to get involved with environmental sustainability businesses. An example of this occurring is in the Town of Craik, Saskatchewan located 117 kilometers away from Regina and 140 kilometers away from Saskatoon. Based primarily in agriculture, Craik began a drastic transformation from a town on the decline to one internationally recognized for its commitment to sustainable living. Initiatives that have developed include community wide compost programs, offering a certificate in permaculture design, which specializes in organic gardening, natural building, and renewable energy. These initiatives have allowed the town to build new partnerships and projects with a variety of smart technology and biodiversity companies.<sup>101</sup> As Parkins and Reed explain:

[Craik exemplifies the] efforts [needed] to transform [a] town from a service-based agricultural community to an internationally recognized leader in sustainable living and business development. The challenges for Craik in this period of transition involve material concerns such as the development of new facilities and infrastructure for the

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<sup>100</sup> Varma, Manju. “Including Immigration in the Rural First Aid Kit” in Blake, Raymond and Andrew Nurse (eds.) The Trajectories of Rural Life: New Perspectives on Rural Canada. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2003: p.96

<sup>101</sup> Craik Eco-Village Website

<<http://www.craikecovillage.com/>> in partnership with Biophilic Holistic Health Center <<http://biophiliaholistichealth.com/>>

sustainable living project. But these challenges are also symbolic and ideological in terms of remaining what can actually work as the basis for local livelihoods on the Saskatchewan prairie and how these livelihoods can be sustained over the long term.<sup>102</sup>

The positive spin off effects of Craik's initiatives have come largely in the form of an increase in tourism, investments in renewable biomass energy, eco-construction and a slight increase in population. Although not considered "significant" in comparison to the massive growth experienced in larger towns and cities within the province, the way in which the community lives and operates has significantly changed since the adoption of the sustainable living project. Craik is not the only small community in Canada adopting environmental sustainability initiatives, but serves as an example of the new countryside developing in Canada.

### **3.0 Conclusion**

This paper began by setting out the theoretical frames that have been used to understand "the urban" and "the rural." Overtime, the theory has developed to incorporate the "cultural turn" whereby the inclusion of economic, social and political changes have challenged rural identity, representation and regulation. As a result, the scholarship pushes for a more meaningful understanding of the rural through individuals lived experiences, while at the same time, fundamentally challenging and exposing the urban – rural divide as a myth revealing how descriptive definitions of the rural can not explain the complexity and diversity happening in the rural. Although descriptive statistics are useful in exploring macro trends, they frame the changes in the rural as being both general and insignificant when compared to the urban.

The examples given speak to current challenges of small town and rural communities as they go through the rural transition. Migration and urbanization can cause havoc,

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<sup>102</sup> Parkins, John and Maureen Reed. "Toward a Transformative Understanding of Rural Social Change" in Parkins, John and Maureen Reed (eds.) Social Transformation in Rural Canada: Community, Cultures and Collective Action. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012: p.4.

specifically when neighbouring municipalities in the urban-rural fringe have different economic growth initiatives. However, as these conflicts arise, opportunities present themselves for new policy responses, including regional or inter-municipal collaboration, emphasis on market-based amenity attraction, immigration and demographic diversification, as well as renewed focus on environmental sustainability. The way the challenges and opportunities resulting from the rural transition are framed, both in the literature and in policy, is a result of deeply embedded conceptualizations of what the rural and urban are. These frames tend to result in one-size-fits-all policy responses, from senior levels of government, or no policy response at all. In order to properly assess and analyze the changes occurring in the rural, at least in the agrarian west, these changes need to be understood apart from preconceived notions of what the rural has been or should be, and to see the rural and urban, as they are, interconnected and diverse.

The analysis throughout this paper could not be entirely comprehensive and there is much more research to be done. The policy responses discussed throughout the examples given reveal an overarching trend of the inclusion and consideration of unique needs in the various types of local government. This trend has already begun and can be continued through regional and bottom up approaches. As Martin et al. explain: “[t]he diversity of a federated country like Canada challenges universal provincial policy prescriptions for local governments. The success of its provincial governments depends on how well they balance the need to act comprehensively and systematically while dealing thoughtfully with the unique situation of individual local governments.”<sup>103</sup> In addition, responding to the new unique challenges of the ‘rural’ requires new policy responses from all levels of government, not only local and provincial. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Rural Forum recognizes this challenge and more importantly, recognizes the need for new and innovative ways for rural communities to stay relevant, as they play an

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<sup>103</sup> Martin, John, Gary Paget and Brian Walisser “Rural Municipal Development and Reform in Canada: Policy Learning through Local-Provincial Collaboration” Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance (Issue 10; Dec. 2011-Jan 2012) p.46.

important role in sustaining and growing the national economy.<sup>104</sup> “Rural municipal governments recognize that strategies to eliminate barriers to economic development must be accompanied by new and innovative approaches that will attract people to rural communities. They need infrastructure that connects them, not just to the rest of Canada, but also to each other and to their own residents. To attract the talent and skills necessary to sustain vibrant local economies, these communities must become attractive to young people, immigrants and Aboriginal people.”<sup>105</sup> It is through both scholarship and policy that changes in the countryside can be fully understood and addressed.

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<sup>104</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities “Policy Statement: Rural Communities” March 2013, FCM: Rural Forum <[http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/corporate-resources/policy-statements/Rural\\_Issues\\_Policy\\_Statement\\_EN.pdf](http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/corporate-resources/policy-statements/Rural_Issues_Policy_Statement_EN.pdf)>;

<sup>105</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities “Policy Statement: Rural Communities” March 2013, FCM: Rural Forum. p.3 <[http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/corporate-resources/policy-statements/Rural\\_Issues\\_Policy\\_Statement\\_EN.pdf](http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/corporate-resources/policy-statements/Rural_Issues_Policy_Statement_EN.pdf)>;

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