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Thank you for the RPLC Rural Governance Network Conference Funding, which supported my participation in the International Comparative Rural Policy Studies (ICPRS) 2019 Summer Institute in Rovaniemi, Finland. The images included in this brief report represent highlights of my participation at the 2019 ICRPS Summer Institute (... and yes, we got to meet Santa!)



During the early stages of my program, I identified attending the 2019 ICRPS Summer Institute as a significant goal in my overall academic training journey.

The 2019 Summer Institute focused on smart specialization and place-based development and attending this intensive program provided some exceptional opportunities for me to learn about new areas of



research and practice related to my doctoral research into place-based rural innovation systems. Learning from leading researchers and working alongside fellow participants from across the world helped me build new relationships with senior researchers and leading experts from a variety of institutions that are focused on rural and regional development and public policy. After completing my doctorate, I intend to continue my work in comparative policy and rural development research by pursuing an academic career. Attending the 2019 Summer Institute helped me to build relationships with potential future colleagues at institutions where I might find a post-doctoral or academic appointment later in my career.

Notable highlights of the ICRPS 2019 Summer Institute included hearing from community leaders actively involved in Lapland's 'Arctic Smartness' initiatives, visiting several innovative post-secondary institutions that are promoting linkages between public institutions, entrepreneurs, and community outcomes, and learning about the opportunities and challenges facing Lapland as the region works within the framework of the European Union, under the pressures of global restructuring, and anticipates the implications of climate change. Working with fellow graduate students from Tuskegee University in Alabama and from the global MURCS program, I was part of a team project that began exploring a comparative analysis of influential actors in rural policy through a gender lens. Leaving the 2019 Summer Institute, I found myself with two planned collaborations for publications in the near future and several exciting opportunities to work with fellow emerging rural scholars on projects related to rural innovation policy and rural futurism.



The generous support from the RPLC Rural Governance Network was critical in facilitating my participation at the 2019 ICRP Summer Institute – an opportunity that I value greatly appreciated and which has provided tremendous value to my training as a doctoral student. Thank you!