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Rural Policy and Learning Commons (RPLC) Research & Exchanges Report:
The relationships between food sovereignty, cultural sustainability and rural tourism

This interdisciplinary research explored how rural tourism stakeholders understand and mobilize the interrelationships between cultural sustainability and food sovereignty and to what purpose. Wine and food tourism is one of the fastest growing rural tourism niches and intersects with critical cultural sustainability issues such as local food systems, food sovereignty and agricultural land use, therefore, it is particularly important to explore cultural sustainability in food and wine tourism contexts. By gaining a better understanding of the relationships between rural food tourism, food sovereignty, cultural sustainability, and the supporting policy conditions, the positive contributions of rural tourism can be maximized

Thanks to the Research & Exchanges grant provided by the RPLC, I was able to conduct comparative case studies in two Canadian wine regions, British Columbia's (BC) South Okanagan Valley and Nova Scotia's (NS) Annapolis Valley as part of my doctoral research.

The research and exchange mobility period involved in-person field work and virtual communication and research from Fall 2018 to Summer 2019. Two weeks were spent in the Annapolis Valley, NS in May 2019, along with several days in August 2019. In-person field research occurred in the South Okanagan Valley in BC between November 2018 and March 2019. The methodology included a total of 52 semi-structured interviews involving 60 participants. The mobility period also included a presentation on rural food sovereignty at the Canadian Rural Revitalization Federation (CRRF) conference in Saskatoon in October 2018 and a presentation of initial BC results at a BC Studies conference at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC in May 2019.

Findings from the semi-structured interviews will provide insights into how culturally sustainable food and wine tourism is conceptualized, recognized, developed, supported and promoted in different provincial contexts with a particular emphasis on the role of related planning, policy and governance. Final analysis and writing are still in progress, but central preliminary findings include:

- Philosophical/political approaches at the provincial levels in BC and NS influence how sustainability is considered in rural tourism policy.
- Provincial culture, such as shared history and values, influence rural tourism planning perspectives and processes.
- Early awareness of issues that have emerged in BC, the more developed wine tourism region, such as concerns about mono-culture and corporatization, may inform proactive NS planning and policy.

- Balancing cultural sustainability and cultural change is key to agricultural community resiliency. There are positive case examples in both provinces.
- The concept of 'local' resonated strongly in both cases, but was not without tensions and policy paradoxes.
- There are further opportunities to develop tourism inclusively and to better connect food and wine which have not yet been realized.

These preliminary findings will be presented at the CRRF conference and the Atlantic Planners Conference in St. John's Newfoundland this October thanks to additional RPLC Rural Governance conference funding and funding from the University of Guelph. Other dissemination activities anticipated include plain language executive summaries for participants, academic articles and future conferences.

This interdisciplinary research supports the RPLC's efforts to build rural capacity and strengthen relationships to inform rural research and policy related to both the governance and natural resources networks. These findings will contribute to knowledge in the *Natural Resources Development Network's* core areas of focus on food & food security, while findings related to the policy and governance conditions that support food sovereignty and cultural sustainability in rural tourism contexts will be particularly relevant to the RPLC Governance Network.

I am grateful for RPLCs support and the guidance of my advisor, Dr. Wayne Caldwell, and my committee in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph and the expertise of the exchange host, Dr. Kathleen Kevany, Professor and Director of Rural Research Collaborative in the Faculty of Agriculture at Dalhousie University's Truro campus, who shared her knowledge on issues related to rural food sovereignty and acted as a conduit to community introductions in Nova Scotia. This research exchange has facilitated comparative rural policy research, relationship building, collaboration, and mentoring that would have been impossible without the RPLC's support.

Danielle Robinson, August 2019



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