

## Research project summary

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018, recreational cannabis was legalized in Canada under Bill C-45, the *Cannabis Act*. While British Columbia (B.C.) was recognized for illicit cannabis production in the prohibition era, detailed and accurate information remained unknown, persisting a lack of consideration during federal and provincial policy formulation. Now historically producing rural regions in B.C., like the Kootenays, are forced to transition to the legal regime, treading on uncharted territory. Prohibition-era participants are key stakeholders of cannabis legalization but they remain underrepresented and largely hidden partly because of continued repercussions with speaking out. Theorizing the pre-legalization cannabis industry employed a substantial component of the workforce in many parts of rural B.C., this transition is important and complex, and has the potential to yield grave consequences for many small communities if left unaddressed.

In order to identify socioeconomic risks that historically producing rural regions in B.C. are likely to face during the transition to legalization, as well as to formulate strategies that can be used to adapt to this policy change that appropriately addresses hidden populations, literature around transitioning economies and stakeholder participation was examined and applied as a framework. These foundations offer a theoretical lens from which to reliably examine legalization in rural parts of B.C., using the Kootenay region as the case study, in order to illuminate challenges and opportunities.

This project engages both government and cannabis participant stakeholder groups in semi-structured interviews. Cannabis participant stakeholders may include cannabis farmers, hobbyists, processors and retailers, ranging from illicit to licit, while government stakeholders may include federal, provincial and local elected officials as well as administration at all three levels.

To date, I have conducted 55 interviews, 23 are within the government stakeholder group, and 32 relate to the cannabis ‘industry’ or as cannabis participants. Of the interviews conducted to date, nine come from outside my study area, allowing me to build local context.

This project requires engaging a particularly underrepresented and hidden group, in one case. And in the other case, the group sometimes held deeply rooted stigmatization around cannabis due to 95 years of prohibitionist fear. This was not always the case, however.

In some areas, it may be expected that cannabis participants and government representatives diverge in opinion and positionality. And in many cases, this was true while legacy cannabis participants did not necessarily engage with people in governmental roles, particularly with respect to the more ‘remote’ or senior governments.

But in several rural areas in BC, these two groups appear to converge, or overlap. In some small rural areas where it was not uncommon to be a part of the cannabis sector, both government and cannabis participants were part of the same integrated tight knit community, decreasing stigma or shame associated with engaging with either group. Interestingly, in some instances, a project participant related to both stakeholder groups.

While the focus of this project is on understanding how the Kootenays, and other rural legacy producing areas can effectively transition to the new legal regime, in order to contextualize the Kootenays within other legacy regions of the province, and to a lesser extent the country, I conducted four Research and Exchange trips, funded in part by the Rural Policy Learning Commons.

I am additionally situating the rural Kootenay experiences internationally by speaking to participants within both stakeholder groups from rural California, specifically Mendocino and Humboldt Counties. Thank you kindly for your support!