

The study of rural communities in Quebec: from the “folk society” monographic approach to the recent revival of community as place-based rural development¹

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The intellectual history of social sciences in Quebec reflects an in-depth community-focused monographic approach. This research model created a conception of rural Quebec as a collection of communities best described as *folk societies*. It also reinforced a social and scientific representation of rural Quebec as traditional, backwards and conservative. This intellectual history culminated in the work of Horace Miner, a student of the well known American anthropologist Robert Redfield. In Miner’s 1939 thesis *Saint-Denis : A French-Canadian Parish*, the community of Saint-Denis is presented as a prime example of a folk society. A few years later, Everett C. Hugues, also from the Chicago school of thought, came to Quebec to study French Canada in transition. He completed an influential community study of the small booming town of Drummondville in the Eastern Townships.

In the 1950s, an indigenous social science took the lead in community studies, and created a conceptual model that portrayed rural communities as an expression of tradition. Since the Chicago school’s evolutionary paradigm conceived each society as moving from a traditional to a modern stage, rural societies would have no place within modern societies. This theoretical and conceptual incapacity to accept rurality in the modern or post-modern era is questionable, demonstrating the limits of this scientific paradigm to foster a greater understanding of rural social realities. Nonetheless, more optimistically, a new generation of Quebec rural historians are currently refashioning a different representation of the same rural Quebec. Instead of presenting these communities as conservative and static, they are now being portrayed as more open, adaptive, and creative, with a high level of individual migration. Communities are also shown to be proactive as they attempt to establish innovative institutional arrangements in the face of their specific economic and ecological opportunities and constraints.

The first section of this paper recalls the history of community studies in Quebec, illustrating how the social construction of rural Quebec was originally conceived as the compilation of numerous independent small folk societies. Through this illustration, various questions arise regarding the monographic approach to the

¹ This paper was first presented in a workshop entitled “Rural Studies in Canada: Critique and New Directions” held at University of Guelph on March 2002. I thank Tony Winson and Ellen Wall for their comments as part of this workshop.

study of rurality. For instance, the question of the relevance of the concept of 'small rural community' as a permanent or dynamic social form of living is raised. We also consider the relevance of community studies for understanding contemporary rural changes. This leads us to raise some other questions regarding the reemergence of scientific interest on topics such as; the rediscovery of small rural communities as locations for place-based community capacity building and rural development; the emergence of new research trends which challenge our understanding of rurality within late modernity; and our appreciation of the social structure of local communities and the new rural governance.

The construction of rural Quebec as a folk society: the monographic approach

The very first sociological work in Quebec was undertaken by Charles-Henri-Philippe Gauldrée-Boilleau, French consul in New York. Every summer during the 1860s he came to the Charlevoix region to take advantage of the fresh air with his family. As a follower of Frédéric Le Play in France, he had been trained in the methodology of family monograph as a way to understand social life. Gauldrée-Boilleau is well-known in French sociology as the founding father of this monographic approach. For Le Play as well as his students, the family was considered the cornerstone of any society. Consequently, understanding how families organize their material and relational life was assumed to shed light on the operation of the whole society.

The work of Gauldrée-Boilleau, entitled *Paysan de Saint-Irénée*, was first published in France². It is a detailed description of the way of life of a peasant family: the Gauthiers. Gauldrée-Boilleau's own cultural distance from this region and the Gauthier family gave him some sense of the differences between this particular family and the European peasant family. For example, he was struck by the fact that all the members of this large family seemed to be regarded as full persons. Also, he was struck by the communitarism inside the family as it related to the organization and allocation of duties to be done on the farm. He was also surprised by the individualism regarding the relationship to other families and to the local community itself. This sense of independence, or what perhaps could be regarded as family pride, Gauldrée-Boilleau attributed to the fact that the Gauthier family owned the land on which they worked. This created a patrimonial attitude to the land and the family farm at a time when no dissociation existed between the social group (the family) and the economic activity (the farm).

A few decades later Léon Gérin produced the first sociological work by a Canadian researcher. Léon Gérin is also recognized as a founding father of the social sciences in Quebec. Gérin was trained in law and received a position at the Federal Parliament. His job permitted him considerable free time, since his position only required his presence when Parliament was in session. He therefore had the opportunity to study in France at the same social science school as Le Play.

² In a serial called *Les ouvriers de deux mondes* published by the "Société d'Économie sociale" in 1875, at Paris, Monograph no. 39. This original work was reprint in Quebec by Les Presses de l'Université Laval in 1968 in a book prepared by Rémi Savard, under the title, *Paysans et ouvriers québécois d'autrefois*, Québec, PUL, 1968

When he came back, he conducted field work to understand not only the family way of life but also that of the local community.

Léon Gérin undertook three different local studies which he compiled in a famous book³ entitled *Le type économique et social des Canadiens-Français*. The most well-known of these local community studies is *L'habitant de Saint-Justin*⁴. In this study, he confirmed various assumptions held by Gaudrée-Boilleau. Nonetheless, he also went further by constructing a representation of rural Quebec as composed of various independent local communities where life is organized solely around tradition. He studied the family of Casaubon in the small village of St. Dominique near St. Hyacinthe in the rich rural part of Quebec. For him, this family was exemplary of thousands of other rural families not interested in global political life. He felt that they (like thousands of other rural families) were close-minded, and contributed to the maintenance of Quebec as a 'backward' society somewhat disjointed from the course of history.

We now know that regardless of the ways in which Quebec rural communities were portrayed, these local societies were in fact more adaptive and socially and institutionally innovative. Even, Léon Gérin, in this study of Clifton in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, documented the innovation of the new farming systems he found on the frontier. In this system, part-time farmers and lumbermen joined together to create volunteer organizations and cooperative enterprises in order to improve their social and economic conditions. In 1920, Gérin also returned to St. Irénée, some sixty years after Gaudrée-Boilleau had been there. He encountered the same traditional rural society, yet noted that there was some agitation for change with regard to land tenure and cultural values. The work of Gérin and his portrayal of rural Quebec as being little-more than a traditional society created a well-established and little questioned interpretation regarding the evolution of rural communities in Quebec.

As a result of this intellectual background, the mood was set for anthropologists from the Chicago school, such as Horace Miner, PhD, and his student, Robert Redfield. These individuals and the Chicago school introduced rural studies to the concept of « folk society ». Rural Quebec, viewed from the 1930s framework of the Chicago school, looked like any other local folk society, such as Yucatan, Mexico where Redfield went to study rural culture. Because Miner was willing to apply the same concept to other rural places, he was invited by his professor to go north to the St. Lawrence valley in Quebec. He chose to study the community of St. Denis located about 150 kilometers from Quebec city on the south shore over the river⁵.

³ These research documents were compiled later. See: Gérin, Léon, *Le type économique et social des canadiens : milieux agricoles de tradition française*, 2e éd, Montréal, Fides , Coll. « Bibliothèque économique et sociale » 7, 1948, 221 pages

⁴ See the reprint and the introductory work on Gérin by Falardeau, Jean Charles et Philippe Garigue, *Léon Gérin et l'habitant de Saint-Justin*, Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1968, 179 pages

⁵ Miner, Horace, *Saint-Denis: A French-Canadian Parish*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, c1930, Coll. "Phoenix Books No 108, 299 p. Traduction française par Jean-Charles Falardeau, *Saint-Denis: un village québécois*, chez Hutrtubise HMM, 1985, Coll. « Sciences de l'Homme et humanisme » No 11, 392 p.

Miner and his family lived in the community for a number of years, in keeping with the basic research assumptions in cultural anthropology at the time. His description of the community life in St. Denis is very thorough. He paid a great deal of attention to the physical environment, and the opportunities and constraints of the local economy. Since he was convinced by his previous assumptions regarding the deep commitment to religion in the lives of these local people, he was very surprised to find that religion was being practiced largely due to social constraints rather than individual choice. He found that religious practices expressed a sense of social inclusion – something socially important in a traditional society. This may also explain why Quebecers seemed to have abandoned so rapidly their religious practices during the 1960s Quiet Revolution. It is probable that in reality religion was not something that was deeply embedded in Quebec rural culture. Overall, Miner used the concept of folk society to provide a new way of representing rural Quebec as communities driven by tradition instead of modernity.

A few year later, Everett C Hughes, also part of the famous Chicago school of human ecology, came to Quebec to study changing rural society. He prepared a monograph on Drummondville (with the pseudonym of Cantonville), which became the first publication of his work⁶. This monograph illustrated how rural Quebec was changing, and how rural society was rapidly becoming an urban society.

I do not know if Miner was familiar with Hughes' work but he decided to go back to St. Denis a few years after WWII. Upon his arrival, Miner was struck by the speed of social change taking place in the community. The urban or modern values were manifested in the community, and the folk society which he had observed and described a decade and a half before was disappearing. He described this in his classical paper entitled "St. Denis Revisited. A new Epoch in Rural Quebec"⁷. In this paper, Miner concluded that he was not able to identify the seeds of change, although he believed that they were probably not present in 1936 when he started his field work.

The monographic approach which was already well-established in American anthropology was adopted by several other French-Canadian social scientists during the 1950s and 1960s. This includes individuals such as Marcel Rioux, Gérald Fortin and Philippe Garigue. Rioux undertook two local anthropological studies which have since become regarded as classics. One of these focuses on the community of *Isle-Verte*, a small island located in the Lower St. Lawrence region⁸. The other was a fishing community located in the Gaspé region. The findings for the latter were published under the pseudonym⁹, *Belle-Anse*. When his research results were distributed back to Isle-Verte, however, his discussion of the large

⁶ A French edition arrive later, with the same Jean-Falardeau as translator. See: Hughes, Everett C., *Rencontre de deux mondes: la crise d'industrialisation du Canada français*, Montréal: Boréal Express, 1972, 390 p. (Première édition: Montréal, Éditions Lucien Parizeau, 1945)

⁷ *American Journal of Sociology*, vol 56 (1), 1953, pp. 1-16

⁸ Rioux, Marcel, *Description de la culture de l'île Verte*, Ottawa: Imprimeur de la reine, Musée national du Canada, 1965. Bulletin 133, *Série Anthropologique* 35, 98 p.

⁹ Rioux, Marcel, *Belle-Anse*, Ottawa: Imprimeur de la reine, Musée national du Canada. 1957, Bulletin 138, *Série Anthropologique* 37, 125 p

number of insects on the island meant that he was subsequently rejected as *persona non grata*.

Gérald Fortin undertook a monograph of Sainte-Julienne¹⁰, a changing rural community located in the Beauce region. In this investigation, he witnessed the beginnings of the modernization of the local economy. Farmers, for example were becoming more specialized and market driven. This meant they were getting out of part-time forestry work since it too was undergoing a transformation that conflicted with agricultural production. Rather than operate in the winter, forestry was becoming a summer activity – thereby interfering with the high demand period in agriculture. Despite those observations, Fortin concluded that the social organization and systems of values of this community were more closely related to the characteristics of a *folk society* than that of a *modern style* of community.

Philippe Garigue went back to St. Justin to research the rural family way of living. He examined the ways in which family farms were transferred. He concluded that the cultural and social practices of these rural families were quite different from those observed by Gauldrée-Boileau, who had also done fieldwork in the same location, yet a century earlier.

These new monographs seem to have been influenced by the groundbreaking and prominent work of Gérin and Miner. Following WWII, they were in a position to document the social change occurring in rural Quebec. However, they were trapped in an analytical and conceptual vacuum because general sociological theory had little to say about rural reality. They were limited to an evolutionary model, where rural is presumed to eventually become ‘modern’ or urban. This paradigm left no room to conceptualize rurality as a component of modernity and post-modernity.

The intellectual influence that Gérald Fortin had on rural sociology in Quebec during the 1960s is quite significant. With the collaboration of Marc-Adélar Tremblay, he undertook what has often been regarded as the first sociological study¹¹. They used new statistical methods to explore the consumption patterns of Quebec families. This study concluded that no significant differences appear between the rural and urban patterns of family’s consumption. As a result, Gérald Fortin was convinced that rurality was disappearing in favor of urban living. He referred to this as the “end of rural”, in a well-known book¹² used to train most social science university students during the 1970s. Fortin’s differentiation between urban and rural life on the basis of consumption patterns is questionable, however. He was also limited by the traditional – modern dichotomous paradigm, which was unable to consider rural as a component of modernity¹³.

¹⁰ Gérald Fortin, “Les changements socio-culturels dans une paroisse agricole” dans *Recherches Sociographiques* 2 (2), 1961, pp.151-160

¹¹ Marc-Adélar Tremblay et Gérald Fortin, *Étude des comportements des familles salariés*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 1962

¹² Gérald Fortin, *La fin d’un règne*, Montréal, Hurtubise HMH, 1971

¹³ On the work of Gérald Fortin, see my comment in a well-known Belgium referee journal of sociology. “La question rurale: la ruralité et sa sociologie”, in *Recherches Sociologiques* 20 (3), 1989, pp. 287-309, Louvain la Neuve, Centre de sociologie rurale et urbaine, Université Catholique de Louvain, numéro thématique intitulé: *Sociologie rurale ou sociologie du rural?*

During the 1960s and 1970s, the rural community monographic approach became utilized much less often¹⁴, but it was still being applied as a means to study social change. This is particularly true of anthropologists working in remote rural areas, exploring things such as material culture, cultural practices¹⁵ and values, as opposed to socio-economic realities and rural restructuring. Quebec historians were still very active in various research initiatives regarding the territorial pattern of settlement. This is particularly true of the communities in the St. Lawrence Valley and the new regions more recently opened to settlement farther away from the St. Lawrence corridor¹⁶. All this research helped to build a new image of rural Quebec as being a more innovative population, characterized by openness and mobility.

During this period, major changes were taking place in the social, political, and sociological discourse on rurality over the past half-century, beginning from the early to late modernity¹⁷. From the perspective of *folk* or *peasant society*, rural became conceived in American sociology as *non-metropolitan areas* and, in European sociology, as an *environment* to be preserved and protected. In fact, many rural sociologists came to self-identify and be called 'environmental sociologists'. The social discourse on rurality also shifted. It began with the classical representation of rural areas as backward and as being made up of *traditional communities*, but it then shifted towards a perception of rural areas as being valuable, and as representing a *natural and human heritage*. On the political side, the discourse started from the perspective that rural areas are spaces where *rural planning* should be enacted with the objective of modernizing the countryside to one stressing the necessity for more gentle encouragement of a *sustainable model of development* in the rural sector. These shifts confirm the way in which rurality is itself a social construction (in the constructivist Giddens's sociological sense) that is still being transformed.

¹⁴ A typical one is: Tremblay, Marc-Adélar, Paul Charest et Yvan Breton, *Les changements socio-culturels à Saint-Augustin: contribution à l'étude des isolats de la Côte-Nord du Saint-Laurent*, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1969, Coll. « Travaux et documents du Centre d'études nordiques », 169 p

¹⁵ Tremblay, Marc-Adélar et Gérald Gold, *Communautés et culture: éléments pour une ethnologie du Canada Français*, Montréal: Éditions HRW, 1973, 428 pages. English version : *Communities and culture in French Canada*, Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1973, 364 p.

¹⁶ We are referring here to the work of historians like Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, and also Jean-Claude Robert, Paul-André Linteau, and René Durocher. This group of historians have collectively led the new interpretation of the history of rural Quebec to which we are referring.

¹⁷ We have completed a more in-depth study analyzing these discussions in a paper published in France. See: Bruno JEAN, « territoires ruraux, territoires d'avenir. Ruralité, modernité avancée et recomposition des systèmes ruraux » dans Nicole CROIX (texte réunis sous la direction de), *Des campagnes vivantes. Un modèle pour l'Europe ? Mélanges offert au Professeur Jean Renard*, IGARUN et CESTAN, Nantes, 2000, pp. 149-164 (ISBN 2-86947-500-0)

The rural community over the time: continuity or change

What is rural? What is urban? Does rural mean something tangible and different from other territorial forms of organized social life? It is evident that there is no consensus regarding what constitutes rurality today. According to a review of the literature, rural means non-metropolitan areas, signifying a low density area often in a small community. So, living in a small rural community might be described as the pivotal component in the definition of rurality.

In his classic work entitled *The Little Community*, Robert Redfield provided a specific definition of a rural community. Margaret Mead¹⁸ also wrote about Redfield's book, in her work entitled "Robert Redfield's multifaceted contributions to the place of community studies in social science". Redfield identified the dimensions and attributes which make up a rural community, including a small size, isolation, high social homogeneity, face-to-face relationships and a natural, resource-based economy¹⁹. Many of these characteristics reflect the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gessellschaft* (community and society) introduced by Ferdinand Tonnies. Both of these studies remain seminal theoretical foundations for the rural-urban dichotomy.

A decade ago, when I was giving a rural sociology lesson to a group of local development agents, I borrowed Redfield's definition of a rural community. Without telling them where I had found this definition or from what era this definition was created, I asked the development agents to undertake a short debate. The question for this debate was: "Does this definition of rural community fit well with your knowledge and experience of local communities in the Gaspé region today?" According to them, Redfield's definition is largely suitable for describing contemporary local communities in this region because the communities are still small, kinship is still very important, the local economy is based on natural resources, and the importance of face-to-face relationships still prevails. Following an expression found in the local area, they went on to add that community should also include "fax-to-fax" relationships – reflecting their recognition that rural communities are lagging with respect to several modern practices.

What struck me the most about this debate was that the group members were ready to adopt a definition of rural community that is very similar to the concept of folk society in order to describe contemporary communities. This is particularly striking because contemporary communities have entered the modern and perhaps even the post-modern world. Many studies have demonstrated that the patterns of consumption and the values of small rural places do not differ significantly from those of people living in large cities. From this experience, however, we cannot conclude that folk societies still exist in these remote regions. Rather, we conclude that Redfield's definition of rural community is a universal definition: it continues to be accurate and relevant, irrespective of the time.

As it relates to rural communities, the major query that the social sciences currently face is to understand what has changed and what continues to remain the

¹⁸ Quoted from the text on the back page of Robert Redfield's, *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Book, c1957, reprint fifth edition 1967.

¹⁹ Redfield also uses the following words: "distinctiveness, smallness, homogeneity and all-providing self-sufficiency" as "qualities" of any little community.

same as they become participants in the global economy. Although some areas will change and become urban or suburban areas, many will remain rural communities. Examining rural communities in Western France during the modernization era of the French rural economy, Jean Renard concluded that "Everything is moving but nothing seems to change". What he is expressing is that some things appear to remain constant and stable throughout the eras within rural communities. For us, it is clear that rural communities have changed a great deal and have lost many of their social and economic functions. We observe this because many social, cultural, and economic institutions are no longer organized on a local basis but rather are organized on a regional basis. This leads us to question whether rural communities are the most relevant and appropriate level for observing and studying how rurality has changed in the late modernity world.

Rural communities: a relevant level for understanding changes in the rurality?

Rural Quebec, as well others traditional societies, was organized like a patchwork of many local and small communities with a great deal of ecological, social and economic autonomy. In one sense, some could argue that this territorial form of social life was not all that different from a sustainable development model. From this perspective, studying local communities through the monograph approach made sense. These communities - and the families that composed them - were the basic elements of the society.

Since local economies are integrating into national or international economies, it may no longer be appropriate to study local communities for the purpose of understanding the changes that reshape them. The forces that may determine the course of a local community are often external, such as decisions made by the central government, by the metropolitan financial elite, and so on. As such, not taking into account and researching these external forces means that the possibilities for understanding changes in rural communities might be severely limited.

This is probably why the monographic approach was largely abandoned by mainstream rural sociology during the 1970s since it was no longer a powerful method for understanding changes in the rural sector. It remained popular among anthropologists and ethnologists, however, who were more focused on accurately describing rural culture as opposed to understanding and explaining change.

The recent upsurge of interest in the rural community monographic approach is based on a number of factors. For instance, scholars seem to have found a way of escaping the methodological trap. It is still relevant to undertake local studies as long as one devotes attention to studying how external forces reshape local entities. Taking into account external forces (such as economic, political and ideological) as well the internal forces (such as kinship, local power, capacities, social capital, and governance) adds many powerful tools to the monographic approach. Through this, one can build a new and accurate understanding of local communities. Since rural communities in the modern world are less homogeneous, we can also benefit from the analysis of the local social structure with respect to political, social and economy power. This new context leaves many questions unanswered. Most prominent are around the organization of everyday civil life (like planning the

physical development of the village) as well as public interest in the community. Today, from various sides, local communities and local governments are seen as capable of being more proactive, not only as providers of local services but as political constituents, taking leadership in local economic development.

This provides a new environment for studying local communities. But this new model is different from the old way of writing local monographs. For instance, as was the case in France in the seventies²⁰, and as it is currently the case with the *New Rural Economy Project* (NRE)²¹, these local studies are undertaken in a comparative fashion, taking into account a large number of regions and diverse types of local communities. These local studies also give a great deal of attention to external forces and focus on understanding how they combine with local forces to drive the restructuring processes in the communities. As such, it is appropriate that projects like the *New Rural Economy*, and the one in France some decades ago, consider themselves and call themselves "Observatories". I am personally convinced that putting in place such a *Rural Observatory* is, over time, the best way to understand the changing rural sector. The accumulation of knowledge of these various local communities, through various Masters and PhD dissertations will allow us to be able to give back rapidly some accurate diagnosis and analysis regarding social and economic issues of interest to policy makers. As such, not only does this approach foster a new manner of doing rural research to address the scientific questions, it also puts the rural researchers in a position to be able to produce good applied research. This will improve our understanding of many rural social problems and improve the agenda of governments and public policy today.

The recent revival of rural communities: community capacity building

After the declining interest in community studies due to the methodological and theoretical problems mentioned above, the NRE project aims to track rural changes by undertaking a long standing observation of 32 communities. The academic focus on rural collectivities is burgeoning once again, but it appears more of a reaction to an external demand from state and rural sectors than something coming from inside the scientific arena. This is not completely true, however, since we have also seen the rise of new concepts within the broader context of the economic sciences and sociology, such as *social capital*, *innovative milieux*, *social apprenticeship*, *social cohesion* and *governance* which open the path to a new interpretation of successful local development. According to this new approach, a vibrant rural community is one which is capable of generating and mobilizing intangible factors of development like social capital and governance.

Even if there are strong arguments for employing these new concepts and approaches, this bottom-up approach towards local development by governments at various levels is suspicious. Many academics have raised the point that this

²⁰ See Marcel Jollivet et Henri Mendras, *Les collectivités rurales françaises, Études comparatives du changement social*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1971

²¹ This initiative has been launched by the *Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation* (CRRF) and is led by Bill Reimer from Concordia University. See: <http://www.crrf.ca> and <http://nre.concordia.ca>.

attitude means a demise of government interest in communities and regions facing devitalization. How can an approach be powerful if it is centered on the local community at a time when we are experiencing globalization? We also know that for a long time rural economies have lost their ability to decide their own futures due to the integration of rural economies into the larger national and global economies. It is clear that the prosperity of a specific local place is often related to decisions made far away from these places by multinational firms, or as a result of changes in the market like the proliferation of free trade. In other words, events and decisions in which local leaders are not involved and do not have a voice are greatly affecting local communities.

Many social scientists have commented that the paradox of our post-modern world is that it is going in two opposite directions: globalization being one direction, and the re-discovery of the virtues of local communities being the other. We cannot ignore the social demand for a more territorially grounded social and economic development. But, in our work at the local level, we also need to produce knowledge about the links which relate this particular community to the global economy, and this work must be a central part of the diagnostic stage when producing development plans for a community. If we fail to understand the way by which a community is dependant on the rest of the world we will also fail to find efficient and appropriate solutions for restoring social vitality and economic viability in the community in question.

Rural communities and the new rural governance

Most of our discussion has been about rural communities, yet in most cases they are governed by local governments. However, local governments are not usually entitled with the specific mandate or powers to sustain economic development. In addition, local officials often do not recognize the leadership capacity of local institutions, and they are therefore limited as proactive actors for local development. Many are not aware of the “tax free” arrangements they may implement to support enterprise start-ups, for example. Nevertheless, some communities have been quite active and innovative in this regard with local authorities taking innovative action in the face of municipal regulations. If a municipality is not allowed to undertake joint-ventures with the private sector or enterprises, for example, some members of the municipal council have created and taken control of a non-for-profit organization (NGO). This NGO is then eligible for federal public money and can make deals with enterprises willing to establish their production plant within the municipality.

For a long period of time, municipal governments considered themselves more of an organization devoted to delivering basic services to the population as opposed to the first level of the political system in the country. The electoral process reveals the prevalence of this view in many places, since the average participation in elections is poor and many officials are elected without any opposition. But with ongoing governmental reforms, local governments will now be asked to be more concerned with local economic development. This is quite a new mandate for the municipal system which will have to put some resources in that direction rather than into classical municipal services like water services and garbage disposal. Other ways by which local governments are becoming more involved in local economic development are through their mandates regarding land management,

responses to ecological concerns of local residents, and their willingness to take part in decisions regarding private investments, such as in agriculture. This engagement of local governments with economic development has expanded for more than two decades now as a result of such programs as the Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDC) and Rural Economic Development Associations (REDA).

According to many social scientists, a key feature of rural communities is the “social cohesion” provided by such communities. But the social cohesion in the past was linked to a structure of local power where the local economic elite, municipal leaders, and the local civil society (represented by different volunteer organizations) were acting without sharing information as in a real cooperative decision-making process. Today, the social cohesion and social capacity to plan the future is linked to the generalization of a new form of local governance where the three distinct sectors work together more closely to achieve a desirable future for the community. As such, the concept of governance is a powerful one for understanding how a local community may have the freedom to act and influence its future without being overly determined by external forces²². We have started to see that “leading” communities are those who are able to put in place a local governance arrangement where these three basic sectors are in positive synergy.

Governance is about the decision-making processes inside a community, a group, a society. Nowadays, we are finding new models of governance where the citizens, organized in various constituencies, represent what is called “civil society”. By including civil society as part of the decision process at the local level, the decisions become more appropriate and effective. Stimulated by the research of Robert Putnam and Patrick Le Galès in France the theoretical debates related to these new forms of governance go far beyond the scope of this paper²³.

²² See Bruno Jean and Mario Carrier, « La reconstruction de la légitimité des collectivités rurales : entre gouvernement et gouvernance » dans Mario CARRIER et Serge CÔTÉ (sous la direction de), *Gouvernance et territoires ruraux. Éléments d'un débats sur la responsabilité du développement*, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, Coll. « Sciences régionales », 2000

²³ See Putnam, Robert D. (1993) *Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy*, Princeton, N.J, Princeton University Press and Patrick LE GALES, « Du gouvernement des villes à la gouvernance urbaine » in *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 45, n° 1, février 1995.- pp.27-95 Salamon, Lester M. and Elliot, Odus V. (2002), *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also : Pierre BOURDIEU, (1986), «The forms of capital» in John G. Richardson. *Handbook of theory an research for the Sociology of Education*. New York-Westport-London : Greenwood Press. 377: Woolcook, M. (1998) “Social capital and economic development : towards a theoretical synthesis and policy framework”, *Theory and Society*. Vol. 27, no. 2, 151-208; Putnam, Robert D. (1993) ,“The Prosperous Community : Social Capital and Public Life”, *The American Prospect*, no. 13, 35-42; (1995) “Bowling alone : America declining social capital”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 6, p. 65-78. (1996) “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America”, *The American Prospect*, no. 13, 34-48. Coleman, James S. (1988) “Social capital in the creation of human capital”, *American journal of sociology*, vol. 94, p. 95-121. Portes, Alejandro (1998) “Social Capital : Its origins and Applications in Modern Sociology” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, 1-24.

Governance is not a unique organization of local forces, however, since these arrangements may be organized in many different ways and styles. In Table 1, we have represented the political leadership in local rural communities in terms of two extreme types or ideal-types. In the first case, local authorities manage as a business-like organization – taking into account economic performance in service delivery. In the second case, authorities see the local government as a democratic institution - as the first stage of civil society.

Some may argue that there might actually exist a third kind of governance that lies in the middle of these two types. It would contain elements of both. Many times, local debates are structured along the lines of these ideal-types even if the local actors have no sense that they are expressing points of view referring implicitly to one of these two models. As a mayor once mentioned to me: “It often depends: for some decisions, we act as if the community were a business; and at others times, we act as a political body representing local interests.”

Table 1: Ideal-types of governance styles

Functional or utilitarian local governance	Citizenship-based local governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local residents are consumers and tax-payers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local residents are citizens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local government delivers "services" to the resident and view residents as consumers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • municipal government is an institution entitled with the role of representing the community (or civil society)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • residents have individual rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • residents have collective responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a pragmatic organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a democratic institution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • efficiency is based on the market-driven model (ratio cost/benefits for various economics units...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • efficiency is based on social or ethical assessment of the vitality of the community able to build its capacities for a sustainable development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • solution to fiscal constraints: local amalgamation of small rural communities or : contracting out, user fees for an efficient consumption of a service, etc... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • solution to fiscal constraints: partnership between small communities to share services delivery, or creation of special-purpose bodies and use of intermunicipal agreements

If we consider the amalgamation process of local governments currently taking place in this country, it is clear that the local community is under pressure. For a long time, the social and political or administrative boundaries of the community have been the same. Now, many communities may be combined into a single local government. The question that gets raised by this process is whether the community's social identity will remain the same over time. The answer to this will depend on the capacity of the community to maintain a permanent process of social construction whereby this identity remains a social reality. The social construction of rurality and of small rural communities might even come from urban discourses and practices that maintain an interest in rural communities. Rural communities provide an alternative territorial form of collective living within late

modernity – a fact that is getting recognized by many urban dwellers. At the same time, the high value placed on the village as the best place to live creates many questions. As such, there is a need to engage in a new study to understand why such an idealist representation of rural life is so widespread in urban public opinion.

Conclusion

Rural community studies have remained vibrant both in Quebec and in other parts of the world. But, as we have illustrated here, the focus has shifted from a classical “folk society” monographic approach to the study of local processes of economic and social development stimulated by intangible factors like social capital, community capacity building, and governance. Contrary to what was expected by some sociological theorists, rurality is not disappearing in modern society. The way of life in small communities that characterizes rurality includes roughly one quarter of the overall Canadian population.

Since small rural communities are the cornerstone of rurality itself, this means that social science may legitimately use them to study the many social phenomenon taking place at the local level such as decision-making processes, power, authority, the dynamics of economic development, and many others. Even if the concept of “place-based development” is somewhat ideological when this approach is promoted by central government agencies, it creates new opportunities for the revival and study of small communities by social scientists. However, a question remains: Is the study local communities a relevant level for understanding changes in rurality? According to researchers like those in the *New Rural Economy* project in Canada, something “new” is happening in the rural sector – something that warrants the attention of social scientists. As we have seen with the study of local governance, there is much we can learn from rurality and rural communities. And if we can learn, it is because over time, those communities have learned to manage their environmental, economic and social life in a variety of rural contexts.