

## **Collaborating for community regeneration: Facilitating partnerships in, through, and for place**

Around the world, communities are facing depletion stemming from mounting sustainability challenges (Johnstone & Lionais, 2004; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). Ecological destruction, economic decline, and social issues are often problems of global scale but are manifested most directly in communities and require an arduous recovery process (Borch & Kornberger, 2015). Despite being stripped of the resources and capacities needed for that recovery, research has highlighted the importance of involving depleted communities in regeneration efforts as they possess place-based values, knowledge, and relationships that are critical for responding to their challenges (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019).

In response to this community disruption and depletion, there is a growing interest in studying community regeneration efforts to facilitate local renewal (Imbroscio et al., 2003; Johannisson & Nilsson, 1989). Prior research has examined a variety of approaches that enable depleted communities to pursue revitalization, including through community and embedded entrepreneurship (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; McKeever et al., 2015), brokering partnerships among local stakeholders (Shepherd & Williams, 2019; Stadtler & Van Wassenhoven, 2016; Williams and Shepherd, 2021) and leveraging networks to build community capacity (Johannisson & Nilsson, 1989; Trujillo, 2018). These different streams of research all highlight the importance of involving communities and local ways of knowing in the regeneration process (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019). Yet, communities may lack the resources and capacities to solve their challenges on their own, and they often “lack the intentionality and cohesiveness” to engage in collective action for local regeneration (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019, p. 388).

Recognizing these challenges, research has highlighted the role of cross-sector partnering for facilitating community renewal, as coordinated efforts across sectors are often essential to create holistic, locally-rooted solutions to these challenges (Bryson et al., 2006; Clarke & Crane, 2018; Kramer & Pfitzer, 2016; Pinkse & Kolk, 2012; Selsky & Parker, 2005; Stadtler, 2018). Research on partnerships has shown the effectiveness and challenges of such collaborations (Gray & Stites, 2013; Stadtler, 2018), and has more recently explored the role of place as an important context to building effective partnerships (Dentoni et al., 2020; Trujillo, 2018). Contextual factors like cultural, social, political, and economic conditions are inextricably linked with and affect the development of partnerships (Pinkse & Kolk, 2012; Rein & Stott, 2009), and these unique local conditions prohibit a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to partnering for social change (Rein & Stott, 2009). While researchers have started to unpack the importance of context for enabling partnerships that can address both local and global sustainability challenges, we lack a nuanced understanding of how depleted places act as more than just a context for collaboration building but can be actively leveraged to facilitate partnerships designed to revitalize them. As such, in this paper we ask: *how can place be leveraged to facilitate cross-sector collaboration for community regeneration?*

We address this question through a community-engaged study (Murphy et al., 2020) of two place-based workshops organized by a team of university researchers and social entrepreneurs located in small communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. The main goal of these workshops was to build a cross-sector network of community leaders from across the province who work on revitalizing coastal communities depleted by the collapse of the cod fishery in the 1990s, along with representatives from support organizations such as municipal, provincial, and federal governmental bodies and university researchers. The workshop organizers

deliberately held each workshop in the rural community where the social enterprise partner was located to showcase the challenges and opportunities of working to revitalize these places, and planned place-based experiences for workshop participants, making these workshops an ideal setting to study partnering in place.

Our analysis of qualitative data from the two workshops, including participant observations, archival data, and interview data, uncovered three main findings. First, the staging of place – i.e., locating the workshops in small coastal communities and designing experiential activities that connected participants to place – reduced barriers to participation. Second, participants' experience of the place was impacted by both the staged and unstaged interactions with place, which together fostered deeper connections among participants. Third, connecting *through* place promoted shared purpose and a sense of belonging, two key elements for building cross-sector collaboration to revitalize depleted communities. With these findings, we induced a model of facilitating cross-sector collaboration in and through place.

Our model contributes to research on cross-sector partnerships (Clarke & Crane, 2018; Stadtler & Karakulak, 2020) by showing how place is not only a context for partnerships but can also be actively leveraged to create bonds between participants, which is essential to collaboration building. We show how engaging with key dimensions of place – the built, natural, and cultural elements – both through staged experiences and unstaged interactions with the place, impacts the development of a cross-sector collaborative network as participants find shared purpose and a sense of belonging through deep engagement with place. Our model also demonstrates that engaging with various elements of place in the early stages of partnership formation can reduce barriers to participation by allowing participants to share rich and sensory common experiences in place. To research on organizing for community regeneration (e.g., McKeever et al., 2015; Branzei et al., 2017), we show the importance of partnering not only in place to address the challenges faced by communities, but also the importance of drawing on the assets of a depleted place, including its traditions and natural setting, to foster partnerships that build capacity and promote regeneration. Finally, we respond to growing calls for engaged scholarship (Hoffman, 2021), while expanding existing research showing how co-creating research using community-engaged approaches can advance creative solutions for community regeneration.

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