

Oregon State University

The Factors Associated with Rural Community Success:

A Review of Rural Community Vitality Research

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Executive Summary.....	2
Introduction	4
Background	5
Community Attributes	6
Community Processes.....	7
External Forces.....	8
Community Changes/Outcomes.....	8
Methods.....	9
Findings	14
Resources Related to Community Vitality	14
Conditioning Influences Related to Community Vitality.....	23
Elements of Capacity Related to Community Vitality	30
Process Elements Related to Community Vitality.....	37
External Forces Related to Community Vitality	41
Discussion	50
Conclusion.....	52
References	53
Appendix	56
Additional Works Examined.....	56

Executive Summary

Between the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2012, Oregon State University graduate students and a faculty member engaged in an effort to identify the factors associated with rural community vitality based on findings of past scientific research. Rural community vitality refers to the ability of rural community members to work together and realize positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes. Though the search for scientific findings regarding community vitality yielded a limited amount of literature it can provide some insight into vitality, and illuminate possible avenues for rural community development practitioners to achieve vitality.

The factors associated with vitality are grouped into five broad categories, reflecting the aspects of communities and their contexts that are pivotal in the collective change process: resources, conditioning influences, capacity, processes, and external conditions. In order for rural communities to become more vital they will have to go through some sort of collective change, thus recognizing that there are some key features of the community and external conditions that play a role in that transformation is important. The following table outlines the factors that were found, via this review of social science research articles and book chapters, to be associated with community vitality along with information about the direction of their relationship.

Resources	Conditioning Influences	Capacity	Processes	External Conditions
Public built environment (+)	Prevailing social structure (depends)	Cohesion (+)	Transparency & diversity (+)	Social inequality (-)
Private built environment (+)	Economic Base (depends)	Leadership (+)	Reason for process (depends)	Spatial inequality (-)
Natural Environment (+)	Values (depends)	Civic Participation (+)	Stability (+)	Federal policy (depends)
Human Capital (+)	History (depends)	Planning (+)		Population stability (+)
Network Resources (+)				Innovation-inspiring perturbations (+)
Financial Resources (+)				Rapid extraction of resources (-)
(-) indicates negative association with vitality (+) indicates positive association with vitality (depends) indicates that the direction of the association to vitality depends on the particular factor				

Research on community vitality indicates that vital rural communities need to be situated in macro-contexts in which there is limited inequality, resource extraction is done in a gradual manner, human migration patterns are relatively stable, and externally-driven shocks to the system inspire local innovation and do not unseat the stability at the core of the community. In addition, rural communities need to be situated in a federal policy environment that supports steady trade relations between them and other communities, highly paid rural workforces, rural industries, and development of both public

and private rural infrastructure, but also deters unregulated, large monopolies from exploiting rural consumers and workers. Given the large influence the macro-context has on rural communities, changes to factors in this realm have the greatest chance of setting the stage for the realization of rural vitality.

Once the stage has been set at the macro level, the local community will need to engage in processes to attain vitality. Research suggests that these processes should engage diverse stakeholders on issues that address root causes of problems and that they should be transparent, with stable funding and core leadership. In addition to processes taking a certain shape, the research reviewed here suggests that certain elements of capacity are present in vital communities. The research reviewed here indicates that community members need to be cohesive and have a sense of and respect for the physical place of their communities. In addition, they should be active participants in the community, discussing and hashing through controversial issues in a depersonalized manner. Research findings reviewed here also suggest that leaders in vital communities will be collaborative, open to new ideas, knowledgeable about vitality development, and engage in planning that yields a united vision for development as well as strategies that get implemented. Again, the research suggests that these elements of capacity and processes are going to be present in vital rural communities, but it is not clear if these are required for vitality to emerge or if they result from vitality.

There were also particular attributes of rural communities that past research indicates are present in vital rural communities, and may be worth cultivating if vitality is to be attained. In particular, vital rural communities have low levels of inequality, a diverse economic base with farming, manufacturing, health, and trade service industries, as well as values that make them proactive, persistent, learning-oriented, diversity-oriented, and willing to invest in the community. In addition, the research indicates that vital communities today are likely to have been demonstrated their resilience in the past, suggesting that past successes positively influence future successes or that current successes can build to future successes.

Community vitality research also reveals that vital rural communities tend to have certain resources at their disposal that can be cultivated by external as well as internal actors. In particular, vital communities tend to have inviting public gathering places, public social service infrastructure, basic services provided by private businesses, diverse natural resources, educated community members, network resources within and outside the community, and internal financial resources. Unfortunately, it is not clear from the research if these are required for vitality to emerge or if they result from vitality, but it is clear that they tend to coexist.

While the research findings outlined here suggest that communities might become more vital if they have these attributes, engage in these processes, or are situated within particular macro-level contexts it is important to note that these factors are not guaranteed to positively affect vitality if implemented in rural communities. The research has merely indicated that the factors are somehow associated with vitality; they may be the result of, the cause of, or merely coincidental to vitality. It will be necessary for those seeking to increase the vitality of rural communities to interpret the findings of this review carefully and use them as springboards for possible experimentation in communities and further research.

Introduction

The economic base of rural communities is changing as the natural resource industries that prompted their growth restructure for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. Changes to the economies of rural communities have prompted changes to the composition of their populations, resulting in further changes to political institutions and processes both locally and nationally. In the face of these changes, rural communities have encountered challenges and opportunities, both of which have affected their vitality, or the ability of their residents to work productively together and realize positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes. Policy makers, private foundations, and rural development practitioners are actively seeking ways to foster rural community vitality, often with limited information about possible strategies or approaches to doing so.

In order to inform the activities of those seeking to foster rural community vitality, this review of social scientific research seeks to reveal the factors scholars have found to be associated with vitality. Between fall 2011 and spring 2012 a comprehensive search for social scientific studies of rural community vitality, wellbeing, resilience, and sustainability was conducted by the authors. The search was limited to peer-reviewed, social scientific articles and book chapters that dealt with these broad notions of community success in an effort to reveal unbiased and scientific viewpoints that might inform the actions of those seeking to foster rural vitality.

This review begins with an outline and model of the community change process, as it provides a useful backdrop to the discussion of ways to foster greater community vitality. Following the explanation of how communities change is an explanation of the methods used to find social science research literature related to community vitality. The results of this literature search follow and the factors hypothesized to and those that have been found to be associated with rural vitality are explained. This review finds that to date, limited social science research points to resources, capacities, local conditions, processes, and external conditions that are associated with rural community vitality.

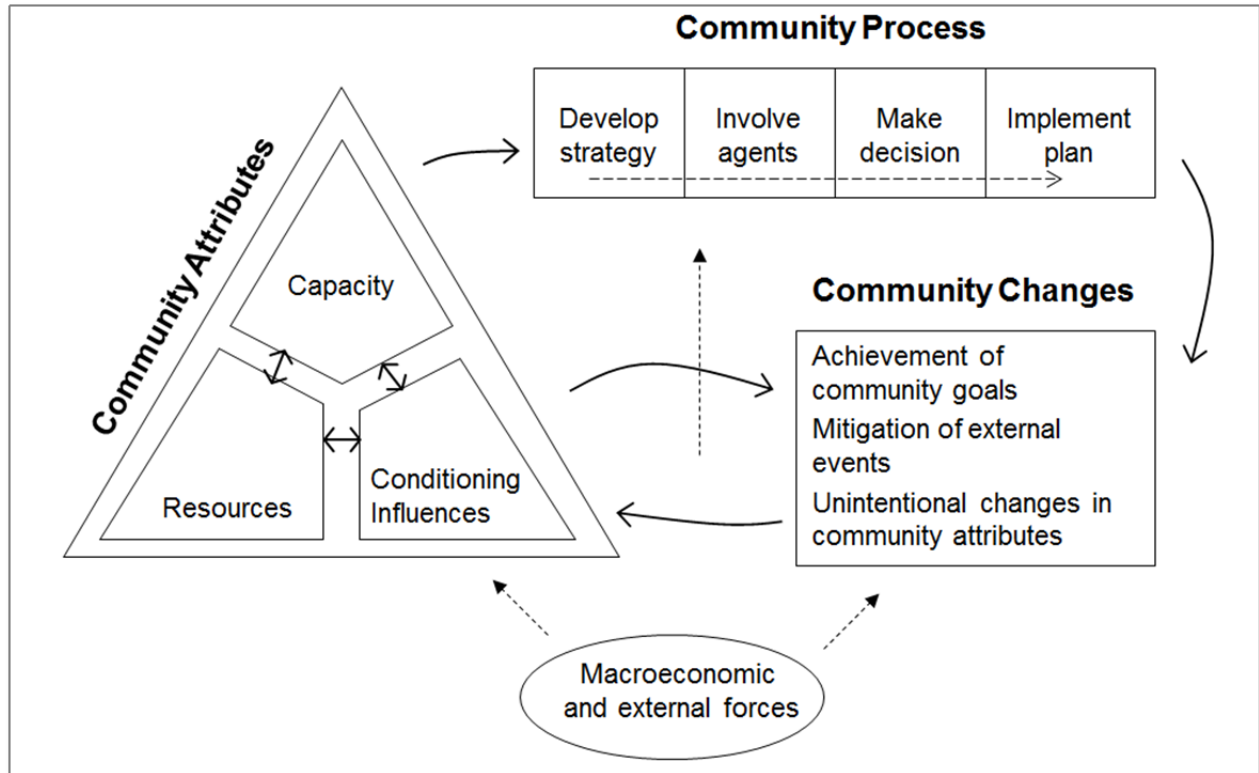
Background

The challenges facing rural communities in the Northwest U.S. are well-known to most serving these areas. The decline of the timber industry in this region, due to changes within the industry itself, was followed by actions at the federal level (the Northwest Forest Plan) in 1994 that further limited the supply of timber (Chen & Weber, 2011). The timber industry was associated with a high number of jobs, and the loss of those job opportunities meant that many communities lost population in the 1980s and 1990s (Charnley, Dillingham, Stuart, Moseley, Donoghue, 2008; Chen et al., 2011). Non-metropolitan counties in the U.S. west are also getting older, more ethnically diverse, and increasingly female (Kirschner, Berry, & Glasgow, 2006). Rural communities have to navigate these changes to the environment, economy, and population, but also have to contend with the devolution of federal policy, which places pressure on states and local communities to manage and set policy for public welfare services that used to be administered by the national government (Kondratas & Goldstein, 1998; McGuire, Rubin, Agranoff, & Richards, 1994). Though some rural communities are able to face these challenges and thrive, others are left struggling. Many of those concerned with the prospects for rural communities in the face of these challenges would like to contribute to development efforts that increase the vitality of rural communities.

Inherent to the desire to increase the vitality of rural communities is a desire to change them in some way. Therefore, to understand how organizations, agencies, and individuals might affect the vitality of rural communities it is important to understand how communities change. An understanding of the factors associated with vitality should be accompanied by an understanding of them in the context of the community change process. By understanding the change process, rural development decision makers will be better-equipped to strategically establish the factors associated with vitality and anticipate the ripple effects they may have on communities.

Drawing on work from a variety of community development scholars including Pender (2010), Flora & Flora (2008), Reimer (2006), Summers (1986), Chaskin (2001), and Green & Haines (2002) the following model of community change displayed in Figure 1 is proposed.

Figure 1



In this model, communities are comprised of attributes that interact with one another: resources, conditioning influences, and capacity. Community change arises when the prevalence of attributes or the ways they interact with one another change as a result of either a change in external forces or the engagement in local community processes. The resulting change in the community then feeds back into the community and is manifest as a new conditioning influence, resource, or capacity.

Community Attributes

Community attributes refer to the characteristics of the community and its residents. Although the model depicts the three types of attributes as mutually exclusive, many attributes of communities are hard to place in only one of these categories. While some attributes overlap, the important idea to glean from the model is that it portrays them as interacting with one another.

The first attribute represents the unique resources that every community of place has: particular assets that can be used such as land, labor, financial capital, human capital, social capital (networks of people that can be leveraged for access to additional resources), political capital, and cultural capital (Flora et al., 2008; Green & Haines, 2002; Pender, 2010; Reimer, 2006; Summers, 1986). In addition, there are factors and conditions within the community that affect the ability of the

community and its residents to fully utilize their resources; these are represented by the conditioning influence attribute. Conditioning influences include the level of local control over and benefit from resources located within the community (Rubin, 1994). Additional conditioning influences include things like culture and values, the local distribution of power and status, average wages, the health of the natural and built environment, as well as social conditions like crime and mobility (Summers, 1986). At some points in this review conditioning influences may be referred to as local conditions, reflecting the fact that conditioning influences exist within the community and can be shaped somewhat by the local community.

The third attribute of communities included in the model is that of capacity. Resources like social and political capital overlap with this notion, but capacity includes more than those forms of capital. Community capacity is the ability of individuals and organizations in a community to leverage their assets in order to work together and accomplish community-wide tasks “that improve or maintain the well-being of a given community” (Chaskin, 2001, p. 295). According to Chaskin (2001), communities with capacity have four fundamental characteristics, namely; a sense of community, commitment among community members, an ability to solve problems, and access to resources (economic, human, physical, and political). All four of these characteristics are embedded within this model of community change.

Community Processes

Individuals within a community with a given set of attributes (resources, capacity, and conditioning influences) can take actions to achieve certain changes or outcomes. Actions taken by these individuals are products of a process that typically follows a step-wise progression from development to implementation. The final decision that is made and its implementation depend not only on the initial strategy developed, but also on the agents involved (Summers, 1986). This community process may involve one person or many community members. The nature of the community process can also vary considerably. As Reimer (2006) explains, community processes can be bureaucratic, market-based, communal, or associative. The agents may include only the elite in the community, only the marginalized, outsiders, or some mixture (Summers, 1986). Macroeconomic and external forces may also influence the nature of the community process. These factors all shape the way the community process will unfold, but if members of a community engage in some form of community process, then the community is likely to change in some way as a result.

External Forces

Community change does not require that residents follow an intentional decision-making process. Change may happen due to the influence of macroeconomic and external forces on attributes of the community that interact and affect each other. Drawing on work by Reimer (2006), Summers (1986), and Colocousis (2008), in this model external forces are conceptualized as things like: federal and state policy, external agencies or organizations, programs and projects initiated in the community by an outside entity, the nature of the relationship between a community and other communities (horizontal or vertical, competitive or collaborative), market forces, the state- or culture-determined allocation of resources and distribution of power, and the nature of the global economy. Communities are inevitably influenced by external forces and in the absence of community processes the changes to the community that arise may be both unanticipated and undesirable.

Community Changes/Outcomes

In some cases, a change to the community may be the achievement of goals set by the community like an increase in homes purchased by residents. In other cases, the change may be the intentional mitigation of negative events that are affecting the community, but are outside the community's influence, such as local jobs created to replace jobs lost from a sector that is declining due to global pressures. Once change has occurred, the outcomes can be identified. Outcomes are changes in the community's resources, local conditions, or capacity, in either positive or negative, intended or unintended ways.

This framework illuminates the ways in which communities work, and can be used to situate the findings regarding the factors associated with rural community vitality. By identifying where the various factors associated with vitality intersect with this community model it is possible to better understand the pathways of influence for those seeking to promote and foster improvements to vitality. Such an approach can strategically focus energies on the drivers of community vitality.

Methods

In order to gain insight into the factors that are associated with rural vitality, a comprehensive literature search was undertaken between October, 2011 and April, 2012. The search for literature was originally limited to peer-reviewed, social scientific research on rural community vitality and aspects of rural vitality, but then narrowed to peer-reviewed, social scientific research on rural community vitality only (excluding studies on particular indicators of vitality). Rural community vitality was defined in accordance with the Ford Institute for Community Building's conceptualization, which encompasses six dimensions:

1. Safety
2. Environment
3. Education
4. Health
5. Economy
6. Arts/Culture

Within these six dimensions of vitality, the Ford Institute for Community Building has identified the following as the corresponding indicators of rural community vitality, displayed in Table 1Table 1.

Table 1

Indicator	Measure
1. Young Adults	% of population, age 25 - 34
2. Youth	% of population, age 0 - 17
3. Early education, 3rd grade reading (County-level data)	% met or exceeded state standards
4. Early education, 3rd grade math (County-level data)	% met or exceeded state standards
5. Criminal activity (County-level data)	Index Crime Rate per 100,000 population
6. Population Change	% Change
7. Housing	% owners paying more than 30% of income on housing costs
8. High School Dropout Rate (County-level data)	% of 9 - 12 graders, dropped out
9. Teen Pregnancy Rate (County-level data)	Pregnancies, 10-17 year olds, per 1,000 population
10. Availability of Social Services (County-level data)	# of social assistance establishments

Indicator	Measure
11. Social Service Demand	% of population <185% of poverty
12. College	% of population, Associate's deg. or more
13. Available Arts, Culture, Recreation (County-level data)	# of Arts, Entertainment, Recreation establishments
14. Voter Turnout (County-level data)	% of registered voters voting (General Elections)
15. Health Services (County-level data)	# of health care establishments
16. Third Places (County-level data)	# of food service & drinking places establishments
17. Civil Society (County-level data)	# of religious, civic, professional, similar organizations
18. Public Places (County-level data)	% of land publicly owned
19. Water Quality (County-level data)	Miles of streams, 303d listed (Water quality limited)
20. Material Recovery Rate (County-level data)	% of total waste recovered (recycled, composted, etc.)
21. Entrepreneurship (County-level data)	% of employed who are proprietors
22. Entrepreneurship (County-level data)	Average Proprietor Income
23. Unemployment	% civilian labor force unemployed
24. Median Income	Median household income
25. Home Ownership	% of housing units owner occupied
26. Living Wage Jobs (County-level data)	Ratio of County Avg. Wage to Cost of Living: 1 parent, 1 child
27. Deposits in Banks (County-level data)	Deposits made, millions
28. Job Growth (County-level data)	# of jobs
29. Employment (County-level data)	# of people employed

Apparent from Table 1 Table 1 is that the Ford Institute for Community Building's concept of community vitality is quite broad. It incorporates social, economic, and environmental indicators as well

as indicators of social connectedness. According to the Institute, vital communities do not just have healthy economies; they have healthy social and environmental systems as well.

With this broad notion of community vitality in mind, the search for research literature that can shed light on the factors associated with vitality unfolded. Initially, the search included studies that touched on vitality overall as well as certain aspects of the vitality concept. This search yielded many titles pertaining to factors associated with outcomes like population growth, per capita income growth, or unemployment. The problem with these studies is that they do not uncover the factors associated with vitality overall. This is because the factors associated with high per capita income might be associated with low social or environmental wellbeing in communities (Ohman, 1999; Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin, 1998). For example, in a study of the effects of rural economic restructuring on well-being in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, Ohman (1999) noted that some of the same factors that contributed to economic well-being (income growth) were associated with decreases in social well-being (as measured by income inequality). Drawing practical lessons from studies that focus solely on identifying the factors associated with positive economic outcomes, for instance, might reveal factors that are good for economies but that may be bad for the environment or other aspects of life in communities. Without testing for their effect on social or environmental outcomes such studies only reveal a sliver of insight into community vitality. Their findings cannot be translated into practice in communities seeking to improve their social, economic, and environmental futures.

In addition, it became clear from the literature search that if insights into the factors associated with particular aspects of vitality were desired, a comprehensive review of the literature on each separate indicator of vitality would be needed. This would be out of the scope of the current project. While this literature review does not discuss the findings of studies that only examined the relationship of various factors to particular components of vitality, the Appendix provides a list of the articles and chapters that were read by the authors pertaining to particular indicators or aspects of vitality. This list might prove useful to the Ford Institute for Community Building as it continues to explore research on community outcomes.

Once it became clear to the authors that it would be more appropriate to limit the literature review to studies pertaining to a broad notion of vitality, the search was subsequently limited. As community vitality is a broad and relatively new term in the realm of community studies there were some additional terms included in the search, however. Studies pertaining to community resilience, sustainability, and wellbeing were also included in the scope of the search. Specifically, the search terms used were the following:

- Rural community vitality
- Community vitality
- Rural community resilience
- Community resilience
- Rural wellbeing
- Community wellbeing
- Rural community sustainability

In order to find research articles, books, and book chapters related to rural community vitality the authors primarily used two techniques, namely searchable databases and works cited in other articles. The searchable databases used were all accessible via Oregon State University's library system, and are comprehensive databases with search functionality that allows registered users to search across many journals, books, and sometimes other databases. Specifically, the authors used Web of Knowledge's Web of Science database, Oregon State University Library 1Search engine, and JSTOR. In addition, some articles served as springboards for the discovery of other articles related to community vitality that were not identified in the research databases. By relying on multiple research databases and allowing the bibliographies of articles to lead to the discovery of other relevant research the authors conducted a comprehensive search for scientific findings identifying factors associated with rural community vitality.

The articles and book chapters included in this literature review were limited to those that were peer-reviewed, and thus scientifically valid. Largely, the research included here corresponds to studies conducted on communities in the United States, but some were conducted on communities in Canada and Australia. Studies of communities outside the United States were included in the review only if the contexts and lessons learned were applicable to communities in the United States. Overall, the studies included in this review represent social science research (Geography, Economics, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, History), but there were some pertinent Environmental Studies research articles that were also included.

Not all articles and chapters included in this review were original, empirical research, some of them were review articles themselves or more theoretical in scope. The factors associated with community vitality discussed in this review are therefore divided into those that are hypothesized to relate to vitality and those that have been scientifically tested and found to be associated with vitality. Factors scientifically tested and found to be associated with vitality will be given more weight in the

discussion than those hypothesized to be important corollaries. Articles and chapters that reveal the factors that may be associated with vitality were included in order to illuminate directions for further research and experimentation by development practitioners.

Findings

Resources Related to Community Vitality

Resources are assets that members of the community have access to that can be leveraged or utilized to bring more and often different resources into the community. An example would be natural resources. If a community has access to natural resources that can be used or sold, when the community uses or sells those resources it receives something in return, be it a product as a result of local processing or money through the sale. The review of vitality research revealed four types of resources hypothesized or empirically proven to be associated with rural vitality: physical, human, social, and financial. Table 2 and Table 3 outline the specific resources hypothesized to and empirically linked to community vitality.

Resources Hypothesized to be related to Vitality

Table 2

Resources		
These resources are hypothesized to be associated with vitality		Source
Physical	Physical infrastructure - To support high-tech global communications - To remove constraints to markets	Rainey, Robinson, Allen, & Christy (2003) Epps (2002)
Human	Human capital to support high-tech jobs and industries that are rapidly changing	Rainey, Robinson, Allen, & Christy (2003)
Social	Active social networks to get diverse people in the community collaborating and planning strategically	Rainey, Robinson, Allen, & Christy (2003)

Physical Resources

As Table 2 shows, the physical resource hypothesized to be related to vitality is physical infrastructure that supports high-tech global communications and removes barriers to accessing markets (Rainey, Robinson, Allen, & Christy, 2003; Epps, 2002). Rainey et al. (2003) argues that past research has revealed that globalization has changed the landscape for rural communities. They claim that “for rural communities to succeed in the global economy, they must be able to compete not only with other rural communities both at home and abroad, but also with urban areas” (Rainey et al., 2003, p. 709). From this perspective, infrastructure such as telecommunications, bridges, roads, waste disposal, and transportation are critical to helping rural producers get their products to global consumers and to helping communities be attractive sites for non-local firms that need to get their

products to global consumers. Epps (2002) goes on to explain that while improved transportation and communication infrastructure has helped rural producers gain access to distant consumers it has also reduced the reliance of local consumers on local sellers, making regional markets less dense and vulnerable. For this reason Epps characterizes the development of physical telecommunication and transportation infrastructure as conditional in its contribution to sustainable development of communities. He argues that only if the infrastructure developed removes all of the constraints encountered by local sellers to marketing goods to non-local consumers will the benefits to sustainable development be fully realized. In order to validate the arguments of Rainey et al. and Epps it will be important to test two relationships; first, the ability of infrastructure development to provide rural producers access to larger global consumer markets, and second the translation of increased consumption of local goods to broader improvements to the social, economic, and environmental components of rural communities.

Human Resources

In addition to physical resources, Rainey et al. (2003) argue that human resources are tied to the sustainability of rural communities. As Table 2 shows, these authors specifically posit that human capital, or the skills and education of individuals, matters to the ability of rural communities to be sustained into the future. Rainey et al. (2003) argue that this resource is needed in rural communities due to changes that are occurring to the technology in the workplace. They argue that globally competitive firms require technology to make their products and services, but also to deliver their products and services to consumers across the globe. The workforce must, therefore, be able to function within this technologically advanced environment. Instead of advocating for the development of particular technological skills, the authors suggest that communities should offer workforce training that “equip[s] workers with the ability to think independently and adjust quickly to a changing work environment” (Rainey et al., 2003, p. 712). According to Rainey et al., rural areas with this type of highly skilled workforce are more likely to attract and retain employers, a critical component of a sustainable rural community. Again, more research is needed to validate this link from human capital to firm attraction/retention, and then on to improved economic, social, and environmental outcomes for rural communities, but the suggestion seems logical.

Social Capital

Finally, Rainey et al. (2003) cite the findings of social capital researchers and hold that networks among businesses and among community members are important resources for sustainable rural

communities. Specifically, they argue that active and inclusive social networks are resources to rural communities for two reasons. For one, communities in which residents are well-connected to one another can overcome the “stagnation” associated with old patterns of leadership in which special interests and small groups of business leaders were protected in public decision making processes (Rainey et al., 2003, p. 712). By having strong resident networks Rainey et al. hold that communities are more likely to have a diversity of residents and interests represented in these public processes. For another reason, the authors argue that business networks have the potential to foster the connectivity needed to produce economies of scale across local producers, making them more competitive within the context of globalization. Though the authors’ arguments are largely consistent with theory on social capital it is unclear from their article the extent to which social network resources are truly associated with community sustainability or vitality.

Resources Found to be related to Vitality

In order to gain further insight into the resources associated with rural community vitality the findings from empirical research articles are described here. Table 3 outlines the resources that have been empirically tested and linked to some broad notion of community success, be it wellbeing, prosperity, sustainability, or vitality.

Table 3

Resources		
Empirical evidence suggests these resources are associated with vitality		Source
Public built environment	Community gardens and green spaces	Okvat & Zautra (2011) Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
	Social service infrastructure	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
	Gathering places	Kulig, Hegney, & Edge (2010)
Private built environment	Basic service business infrastructure	Cook, Bruin, Yust, Crull, Shelley, Laux, Memken, Niemeyer, & White (2009)
	Diverse availability of housing	Cook, Bruin, Yust, Crull, Shelley, Laux, Memken, Niemeyer, & White (2009)
Natural Environment	Diverse types of natural resources to leverage	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
Human Capital	Human capital - With High School or greater	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009) Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin (1998)
	Opportunities to learn from adversity or about general topics	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
	Diverse types of residents (with different skills and ideas)	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
Network Resources	Social capital	Flora & Flora (1990)
	Networks with shared cultural, economic, or recreational interests	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
Financial Resources	Tax dollars for the maintenance of rural infrastructure	Flora & Flora (1990)
	Surplus resources (to allow for collective risk-taking)	Flora & Flora (1990)

As Table 3 indicates, there is evidence that quite a few specific resources are associated with community vitality. These specific resources can be grouped into six types, namely public built environment, private built environment, natural environment, human capital, network resources, and financial resources.

Public Built Environment Resources

Public built environmental resources have the potential to provide publically-supported spaces in which community can be cultivated and the needs of community members can be met at a low cost to individuals. In Okvat and Zautra's (2011) article reviewing the empirical research conducted on community gardens and green spaces they find evidence for a relationship between these public spaces and a broad range of community well-being indicators including social networks, multicultural relations, community organizing, crime, nutrition among low-income populations, as well as property values and property tax revenue. The studies Okvat and Zautra include in their review are primarily case studies conducted in particular communities with community gardens or green spaces, thus may not be generalizable to all communities, but they do provide insight into the ways community gardens and green spaces produce these positive community outcomes. Largely, it appears that they do so by facilitating interactions among community members, beautifying neighborhoods, and providing access to low-cost fruits and vegetables (Okvat et al., 2011).

Buikstra et al.'s qualitative study of resilience in a rural Australian community corroborates Okvat and Zautra's (2011) findings regarding the importance of the public built environment. Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010) conducted and analyzed 68 in-depth interviews with community members of Stanthorpe, a resilient rural town in Queensland, Australia to uncover why community members think their town is resilient and what the characteristics of an ideal resilient community are. According to Buikstra et al., community resilience is the capacity of community members to "respond positively to adversity" (Buikstra et al., 2010, p. 979). The researchers found that residents of this small Australian town perceive communal green spaces and support service infrastructure as "most essential to community resilience and in the development of an ideal resilient community" (Buikstra et al., 2010, p. 984). Interviewees talked about communal green spaces as important resources for community resilience because they provide opportunities for recreation and for socializing with friends and neighbors, which benefits community wellbeing in ways not dissimilar to that found by Okvat et al. (2011). Stanthorpe residents went on to identify support service infrastructure as important to the resilience of their small town because it helps members of the community access resources and gain skills (Buikstra et al., 2010). Both communal green spaces and support services exist with community funding through tax dollars or philanthropic giving and as such are perceived by these rural residents as important public built resources for the continued resilience of their community.

Kulig, Hegney, & Edge's (2010) case study of two rural communities in Alberta, Canada underscores how publically-funded built features of the environment act as resources in the

development of a resilient rural community. Based on the 55 interviews conducted in the two communities the authors conclude that gathering places are important ways to bolster the resilience of rural places by contributing to a “positive infrastructure” for community development. Though they do not stipulate that the gathering places must be public, public green spaces and gardens function as gathering places, providing opportunities for community residents to meet one another, get to know each other, and build the relationships necessary for working together in the future. Features of the rural built environment that can function as easily accessible gathering places are thus likely to contribute to the vitality of the community, based on the findings of Kulig et al. (2010), Okvat et al. (2002), and Buikstra (2003).

Private Built Environment Resources

As Table 3 also reveals, elements of the built environment that are privately owned have been found to be associated with community vitality. In an attempt to understand the ways local housing infrastructure affects community vitality Cook, Bruin, Yust, Crull, Shelley, Laux, Memken, Niemeyer, & White (2009) gathered and analyzed data from the U.S. census and key informants in 48 randomly selected counties in the north-central region of the nation. The authors created a community vitality index for the study based on the responses from interviewees to three questions: “1) ‘economically, this community is better off than most communities of similar size,’ 2) ‘the quality of housing is better here than in most communities of similar size,’ and 3) ‘overall, this community has more things going for it than most communities of similar size’” (Cook et al., 2009, p. 124). They then used statistical techniques to estimate a structural-equation-path model of the relationship among a number of factors to community vitality. The variables in the model were measured at the county level and included housing planning activities, housing finance trends, housing inventory change, economic vitality, businesses, medical amenities, services, total population (2000), population change, and community leadership.

With respect to private built environment resources, Cook et al. (2009) found that the presence of basic service businesses and increases in the diversity of housing options in rural communities were both positively associated with community vitality in 2000. Specifically, they found that having a drug store, hotel/motel, hardware store, bank, restaurant, gas station, car service station, convenience store, grocery store, and clothing store contribute to vitality directly as well as indirectly, by promoting diverse housing options. These resources may function as amenities, drawing population that can contribute to the vitality of the community.

In addition to business service resources, Cook et al. (2009) found that increases in the diversity of housing inventory over a ten year period was associated with greater community vitality across the

north-central counties included in their analysis. Communities in which high-cost, moderate-cost, and low-cost rental housing, high-cost, moderate-cost, and low-cost single-family homes, nursing-home beds, assisted-living units, and retirement housing were perceived to have increased in the prior ten years by key informants, tended to have higher community vitality. Cook et al. (2009) recognize that rural community vitality is related to communities' ability to attract jobs, and they argue that the availability of a diverse array of housing options is a critical part of communities' ability to attract and retain those jobs without negatively affecting the existing social fabric. Though this may explain the relationship between housing inventory and community vitality, Cook et al.'s study is not able to verify this hypothesis.

Natural Resources

As Table 3 shows, natural resources have also been found to be associated with community vitality. Buikstra et al. (2010) found that residents of the rural Australian town in which they conducted 68 interviews perceived that having a diverse set of resources to be capitalized upon, as opposed to a single natural resource, is important to the resilience of the community. They talked about diversity as a way to counteract the community's potential over-reliance on one sector. In their case community, respondents were able to cite the presence of multiple types of agricultural production, which they translated into less overall community economic volatility if one type of agriculture wanes (Buikstra et al., 2010). It is important to note that the findings of these researchers pertain to the perceptions of community residents regarding the factors they think are related to their community's resilience, they were not objectively tested for their association with resilience.

Human Capital Resources

The fourth broad type of resource that the review of research identified as positively associated with community vitality was human capital. Human capital generally refers to the skills and knowledge individuals have that can be applied in work settings. Some researchers simply use level of education attained by an individual as the indicator of human capital, while others use more complex measures that can reveal ability along with training. It is possible to measure the human capital of individuals, but it is also possible to measure it at the community level by aggregating the individual levels of human capital there or by using an indicator that is measured at the community level.

As Table 3 indicates, three studies found human capital significantly associated with community vitality. The Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009) and Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin (1998) studies involved statistical analyses that examined the association of multiple factors to notions of community vitality

across many places in the U.S., while the Buikstra et al. (2010) study took a more qualitative approach, examining perceptions of resilience among rural residents of one Australian community. Isserman et al.'s (2009) study examined the factors associated with prosperity, an index of four items: high school dropout rate, percent unemployment, poverty rate, and percent with housing problems. In their study, rural counties in the U.S. were prosperous if their rates on these four items were above the U.S. average. They found that rural counties with high percentages of adults over age 25 with high school degrees tended to have higher odds of being prosperous than other counties, all else being equal (they controlled for many factors in their statistical analysis). Tolbert et al.'s (1998) study corroborates this finding, though their notion of vitality was defined a bit differently. Their outcome variable was socioeconomic wellbeing as measured by median income, income inequality, poverty rate, and unemployment rate. They did not combine their measures into one index, however. Instead, Tolbert et al. estimated four separate equations to reveal the factors associated with each indicator of socioeconomic wellbeing. Their analysis revealed that the percentage of adults with a high school education or more was associated with all four wellbeing outcomes in encouraging ways. The greater the percentage of the population with high school or more education there were in the county the higher the median income, the lower the income inequality, the lower the poverty rate, and the lower the unemployment rate. Though Tolbert et al. did not conduct the analysis solely on rural counties, they controlled for rural status and these findings regarding the relationship between human capital prevalence and county socioeconomic wellbeing hold, regardless of rural or urban county status. According to these two statistical analyses there appears to be evidence that the prevalence of human capital, as measured by the percentage of adults with high school or greater education in counties, is an important factor associated with rural community vitality.

Buikstra et al.'s (2010) interviewees in Stanthorpe, Australia talked about the importance of human capital to rural resilience in a slightly different way than that implied by the findings of Isserman et al. (2009) and Tolbert et al. (1998). From these Australian interviews it is apparent that residents found the process of learning an important requirement for community resilience as well as the diversity of skills among residents, not just the educational level of residents. Buikstra et al. (2010) noted that for some interviewees, "community resilience was the result of [the community's] ability to learn from adversity" (pg. 983). These findings suggest that the ability of residents to think critically and reflect on the past, and not just their level of education is related to their ability to learn from adversity to help the community recover. There were other residents interviewed who felt that access to "enhanced learning opportunities" was also critical to the formation of a resilient rural community (Buikstra et al., 2010, p.

983). Yet other residents interviewed by Buikstra et al. felt that their community's resilience was due to the influx of new community members who brought in different skills and ideas. These new members of the community were thus perceived as increasing the overall level of human capital in the community.

Based on the findings regarding human capital's association with vitality it appears that not only is the prevalence of residents who have a high school degree or more important, vital communities also have opportunities for residents to increase their levels of human capital, and residents with particular sets of human capital skills related to community-recovery.

Social Capital Resources

Though there are many popular definitions of social capital, when it was originally conceived of by Pierre Bourdieu it referred to the connections among people that can be leveraged to gain access to other types of resources, typically economic (Bourdieu, 1985; DeFillipis, 2001). According to work by Flora & Flora (1990) and Buikstra et al. (2010), social capital of this type is positively associated with community vitality. Flora et al. (1990) come to this conclusion based on years of fieldwork in rural communities in the Great Plains region of the U.S. They argue that farming communities in this region that have "displayed local initiative" and are thus "entrepreneurial" rural communities, have a tendency to "network vertically and horizontally to direct resources, particularly information, to the community" (Flora et al., 1990, p. 203). Flora et al. also discuss that these network connections, especially to state and national agencies, are important for entrepreneurial communities' ability to access money for community improvement efforts, such as grants. Though Flora et al.'s definition of entrepreneurial rural communities differs slightly from the vitality notion, it is indicative of capacity, which is part of the vitality concept.

Buikstra et al. (2010) discuss social networks as a heavily cited factor related to the resilience of the Stanthorpe, Australia community. Many of the residents they interviewed reported that networks among people with shared backgrounds and interests were foundational to the development of their resilient community. Instead of being useful to providing access to specific information or financial resources, the rural community residents in Buikstra et al.'s sample discussed networks as useful for general support during times of adversity, thus contributing to the ability of community members to manage during tough times, together.

These two studies suggest that network connectivity among rural community residents and to other communities or agencies can be a useful resource that can be leveraged during tough times in the community, in order to take intentional action.

Financial Resources

Flora et al.'s (1990) observations of farming-dependent communities with the capacity to respond positively to structural changes, or be "entrepreneurial," reveals that most had financial capital. The authors explain that these entrepreneurial rural communities had surplus resources to ensure that basic needs were met. Once those basic needs were met, community members could afford to take risks and innovate, using their surplus resources for the community good, especially in response to problems arising for the community. Flora et al. go on to identify another shared attribute of entrepreneurial communities, namely the "willingness to support local services through taxes" (Flora et al., 1990, p. 205). By taxing themselves, the authors argue that rural communities are able to build and maintain necessary infrastructure without being dependent on federal or state financial aid to do so. Local taxation for local infrastructure thus represents a way in which rural residents can meet their basic needs and do so while building their senses of empowerment and agency. Local financial capital being raised and then invested back into the community, according to Flora et al.'s study, is a critical component of a rural community's ability to meet the basic needs of residents without fostering dependencies and encouraging innovation in the future.

Conditioning Influences Related to Community Vitality

Conditioning influences are those attributes of a community that affect the ability of the community and its residents to fully utilize or develop their resources. They represent the prevailing structure of a local community, and include things like: the demographic composition of residents, the values and culture, the local system for determining how resources get used, and the organization of the local society. Table 4 outlines the conditioning influences that scholars have found to be associated with rural community vitality.

Conditioning Influences Found to be related to Vitality

Table 4

Conditioning Influences		
Empirical evidence suggests these factors are associated with vitality		Source
Prevailing social structure	Income equality	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009)
Economic Base	Footloose manufacturing jobs	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009)
	Secondary and tertiary industry jobs	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009)
	Small manufacturing firms	Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin (1998)
	Farming: - Number of farms - Number of family farms	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009) Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin (1998)
	Diverse economy	Kulig, Hegney, & Edge (2010)
Values	Proactive, persistent, and flexible, community outlook: - Proactive community attitude - Persistence/“Stick-to-it-iveness” - Positive attitude towards development	Kulig, Hegney, & Edge (2010) Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010) Pittman, Pittman, Phillips, & Congelosi (2009)
	Willingness to learn	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
	Value diversity: - economy - human	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
	Community pride	Kulig, Hegney, & Edge (2010)
	Long-term emphasis on academics (compared to sports) in the schools	Flora & Flora (1990)
	Willingness to invest in the community: - surpluses in local private initiatives - taxes in infrastructure	Flora & Flora (1990)
	Ability to define community broadly	Flora & Flora (1990)
History	Residents honor history	Kulig, Hegney, & Edge (2010)
	Legacy of hard-working, resilient residents	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)

As Table 4 shows, there were four broad types of conditioning influences that have been tested and linked to rural vitality, though each study may have defined vitality differently. The prevailing social

structure, economic base, values, and history have all been found to contribute to the levels of vitality observed in different communities.

Prevailing Social Structure

With respect to the prevailing social structure, Isserman et al.'s (2009) statistical analysis of U.S. rural counties found that income inequality was a significant and negative predictor of rural prosperity. Recall that prosperity was defined as an index of four indicators: unemployment, high school dropout, poverty, and housing quality. In places where income inequality was high, prosperity tended to be low in 2000. In places where there was more income homogeneity, or where there was relatively greater income equality, prosperity tended to be greater. Though it is unclear exactly why this is the case, Isserman et al. hypothesize that this relationship between inequality and prosperity “suggests the importance of building a larger middle class through upward mobility to reduce household income inequality” (Isserman et al., 2009, p. 334). These findings provide solid evidence as to a relationship, but more research must be done to understand the implications as well as the underlying reason for the relationship.

Economic Base

Isserman et al. (2009) also find that certain features of the economic base are related to the prosperity of rural counties in the U.S. Overall, they find that prosperous rural counties tend to have more non-farm private sector jobs. By breaking-out private sector jobs by industry the researchers were able to isolate the types of jobs that are associated with prosperity. They found that prosperous counties tend to have more footloose manufacturing jobs than non-prosperous counties. Footloose manufacturing is an industry that “is not tied to local resources and inputs and, consequently, has more location choices,” (Isserman et al., 2009, p. 310); examples would include paint manufacturers, automobile factories, or apparel manufacturing. The authors also found that the prevalence of jobs in secondary and tertiary private industry, which included health care, trade, professional services, real estate, and other white collar industries, was linked to prosperity. In particular, Isserman et al. find that prosperous counties had more secondary and tertiary private industry jobs than non-prosperous counties, all else constant. Interestingly, the number of mining, resource-based manufacturing, food and lodging, or government jobs per capita had no statistically significant relationship to prosperity in rural U.S. counties in 2000.

Work by Tolbert et al. (1998) goes an additional step toward clarifying the relationship between manufacturing and community vitality. In their study of the factors associated with socioeconomic

wellbeing Tolbert et al. (1998) found that counties with high wellbeing tended to have more small manufacturing firms (firms with fewer than 20 employees) than those with low wellbeing. Specifically, the more small manufacturing firms the higher the median income in counties, the lower the income inequality, and the lower the poverty rate. Contrary to Tolbert et al.'s expectations, however, the more small manufacturing firms there were in a county the greater the unemployment rate. These data corresponded to the early 1990s, so there may have been forces affecting small manufacturing firms that negatively affected their ability to hire or retain workers. It is unclear the type of manufacturing firms that these small firms predominantly represented, so speculations about why the positive association with unemployment exists are difficult to substantiate. Overall, however, the findings from the Tolbert et al. study suggest that small scale manufacturing may be important for the development of vital rural communities.

Findings from the work of Isserman et al. (2009) and Tolbert et al. (1998) suggest that farming may play a role in the vitality of rural communities. Isserman et al. find that as the number of farms in counties increase, the odds of a county being prosperous also increase. Tolbert et al. (1998) find that as the number of family farms (corporate or non-corporate farms owned by families) increases, county median income decreases, but so do income inequality, poverty, and unemployment.

Tolbert et al. (1998) hypothesize that the positive relationship of family farming to community wellbeing is driven by the same set of factors tying the prevalence of small manufacturing firms positively to wellbeing. In short, they argue that these small, local businesses represent local capitalism and as such tend to be associated with strong ties to place and strong local networks that get built across firms in a community. The networks that get built support the formation of "adaptive systems that continually reinforce and support local socioeconomic climates geared toward long-term vitality and enhanced welfare" (Tolbert et al., 1998, p. 404). In addition, the authors argue that local, small-scale, and family-run firms and farms tend to be "anchored to place by social and economic relationships," which tends to make them more likely to reinvest in the community, thus bringing about positive outcomes for residents (Tolbert et al., 1998, p. 404).

Isserman et al. (2009) do not go so far as to provide rationale for the relationship they find between farming and rural prosperity, but they find evidence that the size of farms may not be the only farming indicator associated with vitality. In their analysis, the authors find that as the number of farms overall in a county increases, the higher the odds of it being prosperous, all else constant. Interestingly, Isserman et al. (2009) found that this relationship was not significant in counties that had no concentrations of racial minorities. In all white counties, the number of farms had no relationship to the

prosperity of the county. Perhaps differentiating between small and large farms would reveal a relationship between farming and prosperity in all white counties.

As Table 4 shows, having a diverse economic base is also a conditioning influence with a positive association to community vitality. Kulig et al.'s (2010) case study work in multiple rural communities in Canada, Australia, and the U.S. reveals that resilient communities tend to have diverse economies. Unfortunately, the authors do not clarify the nature of that diversity within the economy; whether it is across or within key sectors, or how diversity is measured. In fact, Isserman et al.'s (2009) statistical analysis of the factors associated with rural prosperity actually contradicts Kulig et al.'s conclusions. Isserman et al.'s analysis included a quantitative index of industrial diversity (the Herfindahl index), measured at the job-level, and they found that diversity had no significant relationship with prosperity. Given these contradictory findings and the fact that diversification of rural economies is an increasingly salient topic among rural development professionals it will be important to study further the relationship between economic diversity and rural community vitality.

Values

The third broad type of conditioning influence found in this literature review to be a significant factor related to community vitality is values. Four studies pointed to multiple aspects of the community value system that can be influential to or influenced by the vitality of rural communities. Because most of these studies are unable to determine the causal direction of the relationship, it is important to note that vitality may be a prerequisite for some of these values to emerge or vitality may result from the presence of these values in the community.

The first value of importance to community vitality listed in Table 4 was cited by three sets of authors, and encompasses the notion that residents of vital communities have a proactive, persistent, and flexible community outlook. In vital communities that outlook is apparent not only among community members, but it is reflected in the institutions and processes in the community. Kulig et al.'s (2010) case study interviews with over 400 residents of rural Canadian, U.S., and Australian communities revealed that resilient communities tended to be proactive. The authors found that organizations and individuals in the communities took action to deal with divisions among residents and changing circumstances in a positive way, and that they had visionary leadership and they engaged in community problem solving. These actions signaled proactive behavior to the authors, or "flexibility and openness to change," an outlook they found crucial to the resilience of these rural communities (Kulig et al., 2010, p. 392).

Buikstra et al.'s (2010) case study interviews with 68 residents of Stanthorpe, Australia and Kulig et al.'s (2010) case study research go on to further clarify the nature of the outlook that is most beneficial to the resilience of communities. Both sets of authors point to the persistence of residents needed to weather the adversity their communities face and thus be resilient. Buikstra et al. (2010) found that Stanthorpe residents believed that determination and perseverance were essential components of their community's resilience, though only a few interviewees felt it was necessary for the development of an ideal resilient community. Kulig et al. (2010) find that community members need to exhibit "stick-to-itiveness" and persist in their efforts to build community in order to be resilient. Kulig et al.'s large sample size provides stronger evidence than Buikstra et al. that persistence among residents is important to resilience.

A statistical analysis of data collected by Pittman et al. (2009) from community and economic development officials and community leaders in Louisiana about their views of 36 community and economic development factors as assets, liabilities, or neither revealed that having a positive attitude toward development was associated with various development factors. The development factors included education, infrastructure, business climate, quality of life, and racial harmony. Communities in which having a positive attitude toward development was viewed as an asset were more likely to be communities in which the education, infrastructure, business climate, quality of life, and racial harmony were also viewed as assets. Though Pittman et al. (2009) did not combine the development factors into an index, when analyzed separately they found that having a positive attitude toward development was positively correlated with each of these factors. Further research would be needed to determine if the positive relationship between having a positive attitude toward development and vitality, as Pittman et al. (2009) define it, holds if other factors are held constant across communities.

Two additional values emerged from the literature review as associated with vitality. Based on their 68 interviews with residents of Stanthorpe, Australia, Buikstra et al. (2009) identify willingness to learn and diversity as important to rural resilience. According to residents of this small town, their resilience was dependent on their willingness to learn from adversity and seek out new information to be prepared for the future. Though this concept of knowledge and information was discussed earlier as a resource, namely human capital, there is a nuance to the concept that Buikstra et al. elude to that should be acknowledged. It is one thing to simply have an abundance of people with education or skills in the community and it is another to value the cultivation of knowledge and skills by a community. This nuance is reflected in the value Stanthorpe residents placed on diversity as well. Stanthorpe residents talked about having a diverse economy and diverse residents as critical to their resilience. On the one

hand these attributes can be viewed as important to resilience because they represent resources that can be leveraged for the provision of jobs and for innovation, but on the other hand these attributes can be viewed as important to resilience because their presence requires a certain value structure in the community. It would be difficult for a community to be diverse economically or socially if its residents did not value these types of diversity. According to this research, in order for a community to reap the potential benefits of diversity on vitality, it is necessary for its residents to embrace diversity and knowledge acquisition as a strategy, cultivate it, and integrate it into their value system.

As Table 4 reveals, community pride was another value found by Kulig et al. (2010) to be associated with rural vitality or, in their case, rural resilience. Across the many community case studies Kulig et al. have done a consistent theme of resilience was that community residents had pride. The authors argue that community pride is an important part of a community's expressed sense of place, and because of that sense of place residents are able to take positive action when difficult times strike the community.

Finally, Flora et al.'s (2009) case study work on entrepreneurial rural communities provides insight into three additional values important to the vitality of rural places. They argue that the successful communities they studied in the Great Plains region of the U.S. all had three particular values: academics in schools, community re-investment, and regional identity. The authors found that the innovation required of communities facing challenges was cultivated, in part, by the emphasis on academics, as opposed to sports, in the schools. In addition, the authors found that entrepreneurial rural community members were willing to invest their surpluses in local private initiatives and their taxes in local infrastructure. Here again, we note that the values structure the ways in which resources manifest and are developed in communities. Finally, the authors found that though the local community has traditionally been the main source of identity for rural residents, it was necessary for entrepreneurial communities to adopt a more regional or county-wide notion of community to respond to the declines in population occurring at the local level.

The findings from four sets of social scientists indicate that certain values are present in vital rural communities, namely diversity, being proactive, learning-oriented, persistent, and willing to reinvest in the community. Though these values have been found in vital rural communities, it is unclear if they provide the foundation upon which vitality is built or if they result from some level of vitality in the community. More research will be needed to verify the causal direction of this relationship.

History

Kulig et al. (2010) argue that honoring the community's history is an important characteristic of resilient rural communities. They reached this conclusion based on the findings from over 400 interviews conducted as part of case study research in rural communities in the U.S., Canada, and Australia. They hold that honoring history is an indicator that the social infrastructure of the community is intact and this social infrastructure plays a key role in fostering interactions across the community. According to the authors, these interactions lead to the development of a sense of community among residents which, when leveraged during times of adversity, lead to community actions to address the challenges facing the community. Resiliency, to the authors, is the ability of a community to "bounce back" from adverse events and in order to bounce back they need to take collective action. These findings imply that if residents do not honor history the community is unlikely to exhibit resiliency.

In related work by Buikstra et al. (2010), residents of a resilient rural town cite history as an important determinant of their future. Specifically, the residents interviewed talked about the resilience of their forefathers affecting their resilience more recently. Knowledge that prior generations of community members had dealt with adversity many times before and managed despite it served as an important reminder to the community that the current generation could do the same (Buikstra et al. 2010). In some cases, interviewees' comments suggested that there was not a conscious reflection on past generations' experiences with adversity in order to deal with current adverse events, instead interviewees explained that the resiliency strategies employed by past generations were simply engrained into the ethos of the current community. The findings of Buikstra et al.'s case studies indicate that the resilience of the community was, to some extent, the result of historical experiences with adverse conditions and events.

Elements of Capacity Related to Community Vitality

As explained earlier in this report, community capacity is the ability of individuals and organizations in a community to leverage their assets in order to work together and accomplish community-wide tasks. Though somewhat straightforward in definition, some question remains as to what it takes for a community to have the capacity to realize positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes. In the following section, the elements of capacity that community scholars have hypothesized to and have found to be associated with some form of community vitality will be discussed. The findings are outlined in Table 5 and Table 6.

Elements of Capacity Hypothesized to be related to Vitality

As Table 5 shows, two broad types of capacity were identified from this review of the literature as being hypothetically related to community vitality. The ability to work together and certain types of knowledge have been argued by scholars as important to the vitality of rural communities.

Table 5

Capacity		
These elements of capacity are hypothesized to be associated with vitality		Source
Ability to work together	Entrepreneurial social infrastructure: - view of all alternatives as legitimate - mobilization of local resources - diverse, inclusive, horizontal, vertical networks	Weinberg (2000)
Knowledge & use of information	Economic development capacity	Weinberg (2000)
	Adaptive learning	Kraybill & Weber (1995)

Ability to Work Together

As a result of his efforts to help make Madison County, NY a sustainable rural community, Weinberg (2000) is able to shed light on the capacities needed to undertake such an effort in a rural community. As his research findings are drawn from only one case his findings are not treated as empirically-based in this report, but they can be useful for guiding directions of future inquiry and experimentation by practitioners. As Table 5 indicates, one of his findings regarding the capacity needed to engage in sustainable economic development, or “practices that simultaneously create economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and social equity” (Weinberg, 2000, p.174), is that entrepreneurial social infrastructure needs to be in place. He borrows this concept from Flora, Sharp, Flora, and Newton (1997), and argues that in his case study community sustainable economic development required local mobilization of assets. Through this mobilization the community built up an entrepreneurial social infrastructure which meant that controversy was depersonalized and all alternatives were viewed as legitimate, diverse individuals and institutions participated in an effort together to mobilize resources, and complex community networks were formed. Weinberg argues that these factors contributed to the extent to which the community could become well-organized and achieve their goals of sustainable economic development.

Knowledge & Use of Information

Weinberg (2000) goes on to discuss another element of capacity that emerged as important for the sustainable economic development efforts in rural Madison County, NY. He argues that the community had to have economic development capacity to get the work done. The community needed the following types of knowledge and abilities to realize sustainable economic development goals: knowledge of the local economy, understanding of the global economy, access to information about best practices in sustainable economic development, partnerships among educators and employers, partnerships between lenders and entrepreneurs, and a federal grant writer (Weinberg, 2000). Most of these capacities were not present in the community when he started his work there and efforts stalled when these elements of capacity were not present, but after building them, efforts were able to resume. This finding is an important one as it relates to the notion of community change. Weinberg's (2000) findings suggest that in order to engage in a change process to realize vitality goals, there needs to be knowledge in the community about how to attain community vitality, ability to create linkages among stakeholders, and ability to access financial resources.

In addition to the insights provided by Weinberg regarding the type of capacity needed to develop vital rural communities, Kraybill & Weber (1995) suggest further that communities need to have the capacity to engage in adaptive learning. Based on Kraybill & Weber's (1995) assessment of local economic development and land management trends in the 1990s, the authors hypothesize about the best ways to manage the challenges associated with each and be resilient in the process. According to the authors, adaptive learning is the "ability to understand current trends; to accurately identify opportunities and threats; to acquire useful information in a timely manner; to implement solutions consistent with the constraints posed by market prices, political possibilities, and civic norms; and to mold the institutions that affect economic performance" (Kraybill et al., 1995, p. 1269). The authors cite this type of learning as critical to the ability of communities to respond to opportunities and threats resulting from economic development and public land management policies. With respect to community vitality it is likely that adaptive learning is also a necessary component to realizing such a goal, though future research should focus on establishing such a relationship.

Elements of Capacity Found to be related to Vitality

Table 6

Capacity		
Empirical evidence suggests these elements of capacity are associated with vitality		Source
Cohesion	Sense of place	Kulig, Hegney, & Edge (2010) Dale, Ling, & Newman (2010)
	Shared sense of purpose	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
	Shared belief structures	Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
Leadership	Leadership that is perceived to: use resources wisely, work together to make things happen, have helped the community meet changing needs	Cook, Bruin, Yust, Crull, Shelley, Laux, Memken, Niemeyer, & White (2009) Buikstra, Ross, King, Baker, Hegney, McLachlan, & Rogers-Clark (2010)
	Leadership in economic development	Pittman, Pittman, Phillips, & Congelosi (2009)
	Ability to work together and avoid factions	Pittman, Pittman, Phillips, & Congelosi (2009)
	Quality of local government	Pittman, Pittman, Phillips, & Congelosi (2009)
	Stability at the core of the community, but open to changes in who is involved at the periphery to allow for new ideas	Dale, Ling, & Newman (2010) Kulig, Hegney, & Edge (2010)
	Flexible, dispersed community leadership	Flora & Flora (1990)
	Depersonalized politics	Flora & Flora (1990)
Participation	Citizen participation in community activities	Pittman, Pittman, Phillips, & Congelosi (2009) Kulig, Hegney, & Edge (2010)
	Acceptance of controversy as normal	Flora & Flora (1990)
Planning	Effective planning & implementation	Pittman, Pittman, Phillips, & Congelosi (2009)
	United vision for economic development	Pittman, Pittman, Phillips, & Congelosi (2009)

As Table 6 shows, there were four broad types of capacity that the research review revealed as empirically linked to community vitality, namely cohesion, leadership, participation, and planning.

Cohesion

Based on Kulig et al.'s (2010) extensive case work in communities they are able to explain rural resilience and the processes that create and foster it. The authors argue that interactions as a collective foster a sense of community, which in turn can be leveraged into action as a collective in times of adversity. According to Kulig et al., taking action as a collective is the way resilient communities navigate adverse events. Their findings suggest that key to the ability of the community to interact as a collective and have a sense of community is cohesion, in other words they must get along, feel some sense of community togetherness, have community pride, and feel a sense of belonging. These findings from interviews with over 400 rural community members by Kulig et al. suggest that cohesion and more specifically, senses of place, belonging, togetherness and community pride, are important to the development of a resilient or vital community.

The implications of Kulig et al.'s (2010) findings on the importance of sense of place to community vitality are supported by findings by Dale, Ling, & Newman (2010). Dale et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis of 35 case studies done on community efforts to encourage sustainable development reveals that sense of place stimulates attitudes toward development that keep "ecology as the basis of community action" (Dale et al., 2010, p. 225). The authors cite Vancouver, British Columbia as an example where "a desire to preserve access to key landscape features and the city...contributed to the ecological and social vitality of this city" (Dale et al., 2010, p. 225). As environmental and social goals are included in the notion of community vitality, these findings indicate that sense of place can foster vitality through its ability to keep residents connected to the landscape when engaging in development efforts.

Buikstra et al. (2010) go on to outline two other facets of cohesion that they found to be associated with resilience in the community of Stanthorpe, namely sense of purpose and shared belief structure. A number of Stanthorpe residents they interviewed felt that "having a shared sense of purpose was...particularly important in times of crisis," and a few felt it was important for an ideal resilient community (Buikstra et al., 2010, p. 985). This finding suggests that a shared sense of purpose is an element of capacity that is not needed at all times in order for a community to be vital or resilient; it is an element whose strength can be allowed to wax and wane as needed. By contrast, many Stanthorpe residents Buikstra et al. interviewed indicated that having a shared set of beliefs or practices was important to the resilience of their town and would be present in an ideal resilient community. Interviewees went on to clarify that this shared belief system helped create a sense of unity among residents.

Leadership

As Table 6 indicates, quite a few scholars find evidence for a relationship between leadership and community vitality. Some are able to identify particular attributes of leaders that are related to vitality while others find that certain attributes of the leadership system are.

Work by Cook et al. (2009), Pittman et al. (2009), and Buikstra et al. (2010) illuminates the leadership attributes related to vitality. Cook et al. (2009) find that communities in which leaders are perceived to “use community resources wisely,... work together to make things happen in this community, and...have helped this community meet changing needs” tend to have significantly greater community vitality than other places, other factors held constant (Cook et al., 2009, p. 127). Pittman et al. (2009) go on to identify another attribute of leaders in vital communities, namely their economic development skills. Pittman et al.’s correlation analysis of data gathered in Louisiana shows that communities with leadership in economic development are more likely to have positive education, infrastructure, business climate, quality of life, and racial harmony attributes than communities without that type of leadership. In addition, Pittman et al. (2009) find that the perceived quality of local government is also correlated with all of the indicators of vitality they measured, though their analysis did not take other factors in the community into account. Buikstra et al.’s (2010) analysis of data from interviews with residents of Stanthorpe corroborates the finding that perceived leadership quality matters. In their case study interviews the researchers heard more complaints of a lack of quality leadership in the community than evidence of its existence. Though Stanthorpe residents did not feel that their community’s resilience was due to leadership, many felt that good leadership was critical for the creation of an ideal resilient community. These findings suggest that it may be possible for a community to be resilient despite a lack of high quality formal leaders, but the resilience is more likely if good leadership is present. Overall, these three studies indicate that vital communities tend to have high quality leaders with the ability to get things done and knowledge about development.

With respect to the attributes of the leadership system in rural communities, Dale et al. (2010), Kulig et al. (2010), Flora et al. (2009), and Pittman et al. (2009) all point to particular ways the leadership style of communities can positively relate to community vitality. Flora et al. (2009) provide some of the most explicit and detailed insights regarding the ways leadership should be structured in order to foster entrepreneurial rural communities. They find that entrepreneurial rural communities in the Great Plains region of the U.S. tend to depersonalize politics so that individuals do not become the focus of political debate, the issues do. In addition, Flora et al. (2009) find that entrepreneurial rural communities have “rotation in public office and a sharing of informal leadership roles...leadership is seen as positive, rather

than a way of ‘putting on airs’” (Flora et al., 2009, p. 206). This latter attribute of the leadership system in entrepreneurial communities is similar to the attributes Dale et al. (2010) and Kulig et al. (2010) refer to finding in their research. Both sets of authors refer to the importance of a stable core of leadership, but that this core leadership must engage with others inside or outside the community. As Dale et al. put it, “a balance between continuity [of leadership] and openness [to partnerships], therefore, appears to be an essential link to vitality” (Dale et al., 2010, p. 225). Finally, research by Pittman et al. (2009) indicates that an ability of leaders to work together and avoid factions is positively correlated with positive educational, infrastructure, business climate, quality of life, and racial harmony indicators of vitality. All of these research findings suggest that not only are leaders important to the vitality of rural communities, but the way in which the leadership system operates and interacts with the broader community is crucial as well.

Participation

There is also evidence that the extent to which and the way in which rural residents participate in their communities is related to vitality. Pittman et al. (2009) find that Louisiana communities in which citizen participation in community activities is high and thus perceived as an asset tend to have higher vitality outcomes (education, infrastructure, business climate, quality of life, and racial harmony) than those in which citizen participation is low and perceived as a liability. Kulig et al. (2010) also find evidence for the importance of citizen participation in their analysis of interviews with rural residents in the U.S., Australia, and Canada. They refer to the presence of leadership and civic participation as “people infrastructure” in communities, which they argue facilitates the interaction of residents as a community unit and contributes to the resilience of communities. Flora et al. (1990) take the notion of participation a step farther to clarify what that participation in entrepreneurial, or resilient, communities looks like. The authors find evidence that civic participation in entrepreneurial rural towns is not around small, socially acceptable issues. People get involved in their communities around controversial issues, and the controversy is discussed openly. Coupled with the depersonalized politics that Flora et al. (1990) find in these resilient communities, the authors suggest that civic participation is quite lively and fluid in these places. All three sets of authors, therefore find evidence for the existence of active and purposive civic participation in vital communities.

Planning

The final element of capacity that the literature review revealed to be associated with vitality was planning. Pittman et al. (2009) were the only authors that found a relationship between planning

and vitality. Though Cook et al. (2010) included planning in their statistical model predicting vitality in 2000 they were specifically looking at housing planning and vitality, and did not find a strong direct relationship between the two. Pittman et al. (2009) find that Louisiana communities that are perceived by survey respondents as doing effective planning and implementation were also perceived as having greater vitality outcomes. In addition, communities that had a united vision for economic development were perceived as having greater vitality outcomes, according to Pittman et al.'s (2009) correlation analysis. The correlation coefficients were highest for the relationship between planning indicators (vision, effective planning, and effective implementation of plans) and quality of life indicators (downtown redevelopment, historic preservation, and appearance of community), though the coefficients between planning and the other four vitality indicators (education, infrastructure, business climate, and racial harmony) were all statistically significant (Pittman et al., 2009).

Process Elements Related to Community Vitality

Communities can realize vitality goals as a result of individual residents taking collective action to achieve certain changes in the community. Collective action involves individuals engaging in community processes that typically follow a step-wise progression, from process development, to the involvement of agents (individuals with the power to make change), to decision making, and finally to plan implementation. At each step of the process there are different choices that can be made regarding how the process unfolds. The review of vitality literature has revealed that there are certain ways community processes should unfold that are more likely to yield vitality outcomes than others. Table 7 and Table 8 outline the specific ways processes should be run that community scholars have hypothesized to and have found to be associated with some form of community vitality.

Process Elements Hypothesized to be related to Vitality

As Table 7 shows, one broad element of community processes was identified through the literature review to be hypothetically associated with community vitality, namely that they entail organized, local mobilization.

Table 7

Processes		
These process elements are hypothesized to be associate with vitality		Source
Organized local mobilization	Local assets are identified and used	Weinberg (2000)
	Strategic planning process	Weinberg (2000)

As Table 7 shows, Weinberg's (2000) case study that involved participant observation of a process in up-state New York to realize sustainable economic development goals reveals process elements that may be useful for the attainment of community vitality. Though at the time of publication the community had not yet realized large-scale sustainable economic development outcomes, there was some evidence of a shift toward a more sustainable economy (Weinberg, 2000). Based on the successes and challenges of this process, Weinberg provides some insight into the ways in which processes to realize sustainable development goals might best be structured.

Specifically, Weinberg (2000) argues that local mobilization is vital to realizing change in the community and that there must be an organized structure around tapping community assets and using them in ways to achieve sustainability outcomes. In his case, creating workforce development efforts in the community meant that schools and firms had to come together, to identify their assets that could be shared, in order to develop a collaborative school-to-work program (Weinberg, 2000). In order for those assets to be identified, each community institution had to be brought to the table by a facilitator, avoid fractionalized perspectives, and recognize their connections to one another. According to Weinberg, strategic planning processes foster that milieu for collaborative development, because they gather a broad spectrum of community input and encourage people to think about their community in a long-range way. That process, according to the author, "generates local mobilization" (Weinberg, 2000, p. 182). So a combined strategic planning process with asset-based implementation effort may help communities realize community vitality outcomes.

Process Elements Found to be related to Vitality

Weinberg's (2000) case study reveals process elements that may be related to community vitality, but more substantial research efforts by Dale et al. (2010) and Stedman, Lee, Brasier, Weigle, & Higdon (2009) provide insight into process elements that are more likely to be related to community vitality due to the more rigorous methods use. Table 8 shows that research by these social scientists suggests that transparency of and diversity within community processes, along with having an issue-driven impetus, and stability are elements of processes related to vitality.

Table 8

Processes		
Empirical evidence suggests these process elements are associated with vitality		Source
Transparency & diversity	Open, trusted, diverse	Dale, Ling, & Newman (2010)
	Cross-sector partnerships	Stedman, Lee, Brasier, Weigle, & Higdon (2009)
Reason for process	Perceived to address root cause or are non-controversial	Stedman, Lee, Brasier, Weigle, & Higdon (2009)
Stability	Stability at the core leadership of the process	Dale, Ling, & Newman (2010)
	Stable funding for process	Dale, Ling, & Newman (2010)

Transparency & Diversity

Dale et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis of 35 sustainable development projects reveals a number of process elements that are associated with community vitality, or sustainability in their case. Though the unit of analysis in this study was not rural communities, the lessons learned from these efforts can be applied to rural communities because any effort to achieve rural community vitality is a change effort. Cases Dale et al. (2010) analyzed included watershed management plans, sustainable community planning, sustainable transportation planning, green waste programs, storm water management, farmers' markets and local food systems, and pedestrian zone planning. These cases represent community efforts to make communities more sustainable, which are the types of projects rural communities seeking vitality will have to undertake. Thus lessons relevant to the realization of community vitality can be drawn from the research Dale et al. conducted.

Dale et al.'s (2010) analysis reveals that openness and trust among diverse sets of stakeholders involved in sustainability projects is important. They found that typically, successful sustainability efforts involved partnerships across public sector, private sector, and civil society groups and that communication flowed easily and openly across partners. They also found that "thirty two of the case studies exhibited facets of trust (or the lack thereof) that directly impacted the full realization of sustainable development" (Dale et al., 2010, p. 224). Sustainable development and vitality goals are broad and necessarily intersect with the interests of diverse stakeholder groups in the community, Dale et al.'s study points out the importance of engaging with those stakeholders and doing so in an inclusive manner in order to realize positive change.

Dale et al.'s (2010) findings regarding the importance of engaging diverse sets of stakeholders is corroborated by research from Stedman, Lee, Brasier, Weigle, & Higdon (2009) on the effect of community-based resource management on the natural environment, specifically watersheds, and community capacity. In their study, Stedman et al. (2009) statistically analyze survey data from over 170 community watershed organizations in Pennsylvania to understand their effectiveness and the factors contributing to their effectiveness. The authors assessed effectiveness with three concepts: perceived improvements to the watershed environment, garnering support for the organization's efforts, and the mobilization of watershed stakeholders. For the purpose of this discussion the factors associated with improvements to the watershed and the mobilization of stakeholders will be considered, as they most closely align to concepts embedded within the notion of community vitality.

Stedman et al. (2009) find that community watershed organizations that engaged with local government and environmental groups were more likely to see improvements to the watershed and greater mobilization of stakeholders than organizations that did not engaged those groups, other factors constant. Though there were many other types of organizations with which these watershed organizations could have partnered, including the federal government, agricultural associations, chambers of commerce, the media, and landowner associations Stedman et al.'s research finds that including them was not significantly associated with improvements to the environment or capacity. This may be due to the relationship these stakeholders have to the watersheds in question. Local government and environmental groups are likely to exercise a fair amount of control through ownership or threat of litigation over watersheds, thus having them at the table was able to help the watershed organization realize positive outcomes. Expanding this notion to other goals vitality developers may have suggests that community processes should engage a diverse group of stakeholders, and the stakeholders should represent those with power over the issue in question.

Reason for Process Formation

Stedman et al. (2009) also find that the reason for community watershed organization formation was related to the extent to which changes to the quality of the watershed and community capacity were realized. The authors find that organizations that formed as a result of agriculture, water quantity, and concentrated animal feedlot operation concerns as well as concerns over aquatic habitat and water quality were more likely to have realized changes to the watershed environment and capacity than organizations that formed to address issues related to land use, forests, or mining. There may be multiple reasons for this. For one, organizations that form around general water quality issues may define watershed quality changes more broadly than other groups, making it is relatively easy for them

to attain improvements to the watershed. In addition, it may be that forming organizations around agriculture-related issues and general water quality are not viewed as highly contentious in the community, thus the organization is able to make more of a difference because it is not viewed as controversial. Finally, it may be that agriculture-related issues are at the root cause of watershed problems in the region, therefore by forming an organization to address those particular issues the organization is setting itself up for success at realizing environmental and capacity improvements. Unfortunately, Stedman et al.'s (2009) research is not able to illuminate which of these possible explanations underlie the relationship between the reason for organizational formation and community wellbeing outcomes, therefore more research is needed. Without that research it is difficult to apply the findings of Stedman et al.'s research to processes aimed at improving vitality overall, though it seems likely that forming processes around non-contentious issues that address issues from their perceived root causes might be a take-away point.

Stability

Finally, as Table 8 shows, stability with respect to leadership and funding have been found by Dale et al. (2010) to be positively associated with the achievement of sustainable development outcomes. Though the authors also find that flexibility and fluidity among participants at the periphery of a community change process is necessary, they argue that the steady presence of the same leader at the core of the effort is important to the continuity of the effort and to the preservation of institutional memory (Dale et al., 2010). In addition, the authors find that stable funding is able to “protect the leadership from the constant stress of fund raising and therefore from burnout” that would entice turnover of leadership and subsequently hurt the continuity of the effort (Dale et al., 2010, p. 225). The authors go on to cite that the stability of these sustainable development processes actually “contributed to the freedom that these project had to engage with a greater diversity within...and in some cases, outside the community,” which put them in a better position to realize sustainability goals (Dale et al., 2010, p. 225). In sum, Dale et al.'s research findings suggest that stability at the core of development efforts in combination with fluidity and porosity at the periphery are important elements for processes aimed at achieving vitality goals.

External Forces Related to Community Vitality

The model outlined earlier illustrates that community change does not require that residents follow an intentional decision-making process. Change may happen due to the influence of macroeconomic and external forces on the community. There are numerous forces acting on rural

communities that affect their access to resources, their capacity, their conditioning influences, and their processes, such that the community’s ability to be vital is affected. Sometimes these external forces can improve the vitality of the rural area and sometimes they can degrade the area’s vitality. Research findings by community scholars point to a variety of external forces that have been hypothesized to and found to be related to community vitality. Their findings are outlined in Table 9 and Table 10.

External Forces Hypothesized to be related to Vitality

Table 9

External Forces/Conditions		
These external forces are hypothesized to be associated with vitality		Source
Spatial inequality	Decentralization of services and industry away from cities (limited)	Epps (2002)
	Embeddedness in global economy (-) - Loss of control over food and fiber production for own consumption	Wilson (2010)

As Table 9 shows, two research articles point to external factors that may be related to rural community vitality. Both articles illuminate forces related to vitality that are based on spatial inequality that limits rural areas’ access to resources. Though further research is needed to verify the claims these authors make, they can provide some preliminary insight into factors associated with vitality.

Epps’ (2006) review chapter discusses the benefits of government-sponsored efforts to shift services and population away from cities and into the countryside on rural sustainability. Epps (2006) argues that such decentralization efforts are only beneficial to the sustainability of the whole urban-rural system, and only when the pressure on the urban area is so great as to threaten the ecosystem and infrastructure there; rarely is decentralization beneficial to the rural receiving area. He explains that this failure of decentralization is due to one of three reasons. For one, he argues, it is almost impossible for the government to correctly identify rural areas that would best serve as regional centers. Epps cites as evidence the observation that when particular rural areas are targeted as new regional centers they rarely experience long-term broadening and growth of the economic base after the initial hay-day of infrastructure development and government agency establishment. Epps makes his second point by arguing that an alternative approach to decentralization, namely directing development resources to all rural areas, is equally problematic. According to the author, though strategies like this are initially politically appealing they lose their appeal in only a few years and areas that received resources at one time are quickly cut off at the next lean budgeting period. Finally, Epps argues that decentralization

efforts that focus on providing tax incentives to businesses to relocate to the rural area typically end in the business leaving the rural area at the end of the incentive period, thus negating the temporary benefit to the area. For these three reasons Epps is critical of the decentralization approach to promoting the development of sustainable rural communities.

Though decentralization approaches might be able to narrow the gap in resource access between rural and urban communities it may be a false panacea if other policies are not also put into place that could help rural and communities. For example, forces of globalization play a role in affecting the vitality of rural communities and policies may be needed to ensure that this role is a positive one for vitality. Work by Geoff Wilson (2010) illustrates that globalization as a spatial force can place downward pressure on the vitality of rural communities. Wilson (2010) argues that resilient rural communities have strong multifunctionality, and that level of multifunctionality is threatened by forces of globalization. By resilient, Wilson means rural communities with well-developed economic, social, and environmental capital and a willingness to take control of their development pathways; and by multifunctional he means areas that are characterized by food and fiber production, but also the production of environmental and social functions (Wilson, 2010).

Drawing on work by a variety of social scientists, Wilson argues that rural communities that are embedded in the global economy through dependencies on external agri-businesses for seeds and technology are “often associated with the loss of endogenous [internal] power and control...over internal decision making structures” and the possible reduction in the environmental capital that undergirds the community (Wilson, 2010, p. 373). Though for these communities Wilson sees globalization leading to the reduction in their multifunctionality and subsequent resilience, in others he sees globalization as an opportunity to “improve infrastructure, reduce dependency on external [presumably federal] funding, improve education or [gain access to] better information” about how to address environmental problems (Wilson, 2010, p. 374). In these latter types of communities, multifunctionality may be strengthened if the community is able to shift from agriculture to a more diverse economic base in the face of globalization.

Wilson goes on to discuss a policy strategy used in the EU to strengthen multifunctionality in rural communities dependent on global systems of production and consumption. He cites the “EU agri-environmental scheme...aimed to enhance environmental quality in the countryside while simultaneously maintaining rural incomes,” creates a “relocalized low-intensity rural system” (Wilson, 2010, p. 375). Thus Wilson explains that the resilience of rural communities is diminished when they are dependent on global consumers and suppliers, but that communities can become resilient again if they

reengage with local spaces of consumption and production. He does note, however, that even though these relocalized low-intensity rural systems represent the most resilient rural community possible in a globalized economy they will likely still need support from policies that bolster their ability to generate economic capital (i.e., still participate in trade at the global scale to bring external dollars into the community). Wilson's summary of the literature and subsequent theorizing illustrates the important role globalization and space plays in creating winners and losers when it comes to rural community vitality.

External Forces Found to be related to Vitality

Work by Wilson (2010) and Epps (2006) suggests that the relationship of rural spaces to broader geographies has an effect on the vitality of rural communities. Their work is more theoretical in nature, however, and it will be important to validate their hypotheses with empirical research before acting on them with policy or program decisions. As Table 10 shows, a number of researchers have found evidence of six broad types of external forces or conditions being associated with rural vitality, namely social inequality, spatial inequality, federal policy, overall population stability, innovation-inspiring perturbations, and resource discoveries.

Table 10

External Forces/Conditions		
Empirical evidence suggests these external forces are associated with vitality		Source
Social inequality	Legacy of colonization and racism	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009)
Spatial inequality	Proximity to urban areas	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009) Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin (1998)
Federal policy	Negatively affected vitality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deregulation • Relaxation of anti-trust laws • Federally mandated increases in cost of labor via payroll tax • Tax laws favoring capital intensive urban development and urban construction • Increase in spending for ag programs benefiting large farms • Cuts in federal non-metro discretionary non-military spending • Shift from formula funding to competitive funding 	Flora & Flora (1990)
	Farm payments per farmer	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009)
	Policies that promote/encourage the consumption of goods/services that come from rural US	Ramsey & Smit (2002)
Population stability	Low percentage of in-migrants (1995-2000)	Isserman, Feser, & Warren (2009) Dale, Ling, & Newman (2010)
Innovation-inspiring perturbations	Externally-driven shocks to the system, so long as they don't challenge the core stability and encourages core stability to be leveraged	Dale, Ling, & Newman (2010)
Resource discovery	Boom-bust economies (booms decrease social well-being and in busts thereafter social well-being goes back to old level)	Smith et al. 2001. Growth, Decline, Stability, and Disruption: A longitudinal analysis of social well-being in four western rural communities.

Social & Spatial Inequality

As Table 10 shows, statistical analyses by Isserman et al. (2009) and Tolbert et al. (1998) on the factors associated with rural prosperity and socioeconomic wellbeing, respectively, reveal the significance of social and spatial inequality. With respect to social inequality, Isserman et al. (2009) find that as the percentage of the county that is American Indian or African American increases, the probability that the county is prosperous declines, and that this finding for the American Indian

population holds true in counties that are 90% or more white. The authors go on to explain that these findings “are forceful reminders that the United States has not overcome the legacies of its original racial policies” (Isserman et al., 2009, p. 334). In addition, Isserman et al. (2009) find that rural counties close to urban areas with 50,000 people or more are more likely to be prosperous than those located in isolated locations. Tolbert et al. (1999) corroborates this finding as their results indicate that non-metropolitan counties that are adjacent to metropolitan counties have higher median income and lower income inequality, poverty, and unemployment than counties farther away from metropolitan areas. These findings indicate that spatial location plays a role in determining the vitality of counties, as the opposite is highly improbable (that vitality affects proximity to urban centers). Isserman et al.’s (2009) and Tolbert et al.’s (1998) findings lend some support to the hypotheses discussed earlier that space matters to vitality.

Federal Policy

Table 10 goes on to outline the many aspects of federal policy that three sets of scholars have found to be associated with rural vitality. Flora and Flora’s (1988) case study work in rural communities throughout the Great Plains illuminated a number of federal policies from the 1980s that worked against that part of the country and arguably against other rural communities across the nation.

Flora et al. (1988) argue that deregulation disadvantaged rural communities because they can easily become the target of monopolies. Without large enough population bases to allow for the siting of multiple providers of one service, rural communities typically have very limited choices. When deregulation allowed private companies to take over for government in providing some services, rural communities experienced deterioration in quality and access to services, particularly telecommunications, when one company would take over, face no competition, and have a profit-seeking as opposed to a welfare motive for providing the service (Flora et al., 1988). The authors argue that this trend was exacerbated by the relaxation of anti-trust laws, which led to the absorption of small firms by large ones. This decreased the number of options for rural communities with respect to providers and sellers of goods, but also had impacts on employment opportunities. Flora et al. (1988) explain that the large firms that acquired the small ones in rural communities typically closed the operations in these small towns because they found that moving to a place with cheaper labor was going to be more profitable. This meant that “many of the light industry firms previously in rural areas of the United States” moved overseas in the 1980s (Flora et al., 1988, p. 202). According to Flora et al. (1988), jobs and choices with respect to service providers and product sellers were undercut in rural

areas by these federal policies that were not ultimately targeted at rural communities, but had major impacts on them.

Flora et al. (1988) go on to cite the effects that changes to tax laws had on rural communities in the 1980s. They argue specifically that payroll tax increases raised the cost of labor for labor-intensive rural industries like manufacturing, and the subsequently increased tax revenues never cycled back to rural areas (Flora et al., 1988). The authors also argue that tax laws were put in place in the 1980s that favored “capital intensive urban development and urban construction,” which “increased the cost and decreased the availability of capital in rural communities” (Flora et al., 1988, p. 202). Thus, through the tax system, Flora and Flora (1988) illustrate that money was drawn out of rural areas in the 1980s and never replaced with investments in infrastructure or business development.

Finally, Flora et al. (1988) cite changes to federal spending that negatively affected the vitality of rural communities. They argue that rural communities were disadvantaged through increased spending on agricultural programs that primarily benefited large farms, cuts in spending on public works and social programs, rural housing, and revenue sharing programs that were part of nonmetropolitan discretionary funds, and shifts away from formula funding to competitive funding which favored more privileged metropolitan areas (Flora et al., 1988, p. 202). With decreased access to resources, rural communities were unable to fund projects that could have made them more vital.

Though Flora et al. (1988) find evidence of a negative effect of federal agricultural program spending on rural communities in the 1980s Isserman et al. (2009) find evidence of the opposite among rural communities in the 1990s. Isserman et al. (2009) find that as the number of farm subsidy dollars increases, per farmer, so does the prosperity of the county. This discrepancy in findings may be due to changes in the Farm Bill and how certain types of farms and farmers were favored therein between the 1980s and 1990s. The 1980s may have been characterized by more subsidization of large farms and the 1990s greater subsidization of small farms or more funds for programs benefiting small farms. Regardless of the direction, both sets of scholars find evidence for the impact of federal agricultural spending on rural community vitality, therefore more work should be done to fully examine the ways in which certain agricultural policies negatively and positively affect vitality.

Finally, with respect to federal policies, a study by Ramsey and Smit (2002) on the changes to the wellbeing of rural communities in the tobacco growing region of Ontario, Canada reveals that policies that encourage or discourage the consumption of products that come from rural areas has effects on community wellbeing. For their study, Ramsey et al. conducted a survey of 63 tobacco farmers to understand changes to individual wellbeing and community wellbeing, and their views on the

causes for these changes between 1981 and 1996. The authors also relied on secondary data from the Ontario Flue-cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board on production trends and cigarette taxation as well as the agricultural census of Canada on changes to the tobacco sector. Combining the survey data and the secondary data, Ramsey et al. (2002) find that a variety of forces were responsible for the decline in tobacco farming and the subsequent decline in community wellbeing (out-migration of youth, business closures, unemployment, reduced quality of life, and loss of services). Though macroeconomic conditions, social forces, and the production atmosphere were perceived as contributing to the changes in the tobacco sector, public policy that sought to decrease cigarette consumption was the factor most often cited as negatively affecting the sector and subsequently community wellbeing. This finding illustrates the close tie between rural resource-based industries, public policy, consumption trends, and community vitality.

Population Stability

Isserman et al. (2009) find that the stability of rural populations is also associated with prosperity and Dale et al. (2010) find that stable populations are more successful at sustainability efforts. Isserman et al. (2009) find that counties with higher percentages of in-migrants tend to be less prosperous than those with relatively small percentages (Isserman et al., 2009). That effect goes away, however, when the relationship is examined among predominantly white counties. The authors argue that these findings are likely due to the greater amounts of in-migration in less prosperous parts of the U.S. that also happen to be non-White (Isserman et al., 2009). More analysis is needed to clarify the nature and causal direction of the relationship between the prevalence of in-migrants and prosperity. It is important to note that migration trends are the manifestation of push and pull factors. Forces outside of the community push people to move and forces inside of the community pull people to move in. What those forces are that drive rural in-migration requires further study.

Innovation-Inspiring Perturbations

Though Dale et al. (2010) find that stability and continuity are positively associated with sustainability efforts they also find evidence that perturbation, or shocks to the community system, can be beneficial. They find that perturbations that inspire community actions to rethink the status quo in communities foster the establishment of successful sustainability efforts. Dale et al. (2010) argue that perturbations give communities the opportunity to move from exploitation to conservation to renewal to release, an important dynamic for ecosystem function (p. 226). He goes on to clarify that these

perturbations can only be positive for sustainable development if the community already has some amount of resilience and core stability.

Resource Discovery

In an attempt to reengage with the social scientific literature that grew out of the 1970s and 1980s regarding the impact of rapid energy-related development, or “boom-towns,” on community wellbeing Smith, Krannich, and Hunter (2001) conduct a longitudinal analysis of social wellbeing in four rural communities in the U.S. west. Theirs is one of the only longitudinal studies of the “boom-town” effect on rural community wellbeing and as such is significant for the field. Their data come from four rounds of community surveys collected in 1982, 1984, 1986, and 1995 in four towns from almost 500 people per year. Smith et al. (2001) define community wellbeing with a set of ten separate indicators: perceived social integration, perceived community friendliness, borrowing/trading with neighbors, task support from neighbors, helpfulness of neighbors in event of a personal crisis, trust in other local residents, importance of locking doors, safety walking alone after dark, fear of crime, and community satisfaction. The authors use one-way analysis of variance statistics to reveal the relationship between the energy-development boom (and subsequent bust) and each of these wellbeing indicators. Overall, Smith et al. find that in the short-run, boom periods of rapid development are accompanied by declines in social wellbeing (excluding some of the neighbor-based indicators), but that after the initial boom, wellbeing goes up. That said, the authors find evidence of slightly lesser wellbeing among the boomtowns studied than they found in a similar type of rural community that did not experience a boom in development. Smith et al.’s (2001) findings suggest that resource discovery or rapid development of resource management can have both positive and negative effects on rural community vitality, such that communities would be well-served to carefully manage that development as much as possible to ensure minimal deterioration in vitality.

Discussion

How do we create vital rural communities? Unfortunately, no one has written the instruction manual for attaining community vitality. In fact, this search for scientific literature on community vitality was only able to uncover 16 theoretical or empirical articles or book chapters that have actually engaged with the topic in a rigorous manner. Despite increasing desire among development practitioners to improve whole community systems, and not just the economy, very little research has been done on community sustainability, vitality, wellbeing, or resilience – except perhaps to define those terms. This review indicates, therefore, that more original research must be done in and with vital, prosperous, and sustainable communities to truly understand how these outcomes can be attained. This literature review has therefore revealed the findings of the fledgling body of research on community vitality and from here it is possible to begin honing the discourse for further study. Combining this review with knowledge about affecting change in communities can provide more insight than has existed up to now regarding factors related to community vitality and strategies for attaining it, but it is hardly a recipe book or instruction manual at this point.

The research on community vitality reviewed in this paper indicates that vital rural communities need to be situated in macro-contexts in which there is limited inequality, resource extraction is done in a gradual manner, human migration patterns are relatively stable, and externally-driven shocks to the system inspire local innovation and do not unseat the stability at the core of the community. In addition, rural communities need to be situated in a federal policy environment that supports steady trade relations between them and other communities, highly paid rural workforces, rural industries, and development of both public and private rural infrastructure, but also deters unregulated, large monopolies from exploiting rural consumers and workers. Given the large influence the macro-context has on rural communities, changes to factors in this realm have the greatest chance of setting the stage for the realization of rural vitality.

Once the stage has been set at the macro level, the local community will need to engage in processes to attain vitality. Research suggests that these processes should engage diverse stakeholders on issues that address root causes of problems and that they should be transparent, with stable funding and core leadership. In addition to processes taking a certain shape, the research reviewed here suggests that certain elements of capacity are present in vital communities. The research reviewed here indicates that community members need to be cohesive and have a sense of and respect for the physical place of their communities. In addition, they should be active participants in the community, discussing and hashing through controversial issues in a depersonalized manner. Research findings reviewed here

also suggest that leaders in vital communities will be collaborative, open to new ideas, knowledgeable about vitality development, and engage in planning that yields a united vision for development as well as strategies that get implemented. Again, the research suggests that these elements of capacity and processes are going to be present in vital rural communities, but it is not clear if these are required for vitality to emerge or if they result from vitality.

There were also particular attributes of rural communities that past research indicates are present in vital rural communities, and may be worth cultivating if vitality is to be attained. In particular, vital rural communities have low levels of inequality, a diverse economic base with farming, manufacturing, health, and trade service industries, as well as values that make them proactive, persistent, learning-oriented, diversity-oriented, and willing to invest in the community. In addition, the research indicates that vital communities today are likely to have been demonstrated their resilience in the past, suggesting that past successes positively influence future successes or that current successes can build to future successes.

Community vitality research also reveals that vital rural communities tend to have certain resources at their disposal that can be cultivated by external as well as internal actors. In particular, vital communities tend to have inviting public gathering places, public social service infrastructure, basic services provided by private businesses, diverse natural resources, educated community members, network resources within and outside the community, and internal financial resources. Unfortunately, it is not clear from the research if these are required for vitality to emerge or if they result from vitality, but it is clear that they tend to coexist.

By mapping these findings onto the community change model proposed earlier in this paper it is possible to start identifying some key drivers of vitality, worthy of attention by development practitioners. Drivers in a system are the attributes or factors that tend to influence many other attributes, and are affected by relatively few. In the community change model it is evident that macro-structural forces tend to affect many parts of the community, with very few community-level factors affecting them in return. In addition, community attributes can affect outcomes and processes, but they are affected by outcomes and macro forces. Community attributes are therefore not as influential as macro forces, but are still powerful predictors. Processes, in turn, are affected by macro forces and attributes, but only affect community outcomes and are therefore the least powerful driver of change in rural communities. These relationships suggests that in order to cultivate the vitality of rural communities it is wise to focus on changing macro forces and community attributes like resources, capacity, and local conditions first. Which forces and which attributes is not entirely clear, but the

findings of this literature review suggest that there are certain forces and attributes that if changed or increased are highly likely to have an impact on the vitality of rural communities.

Conclusion

Policy makers, private foundations, and rural development practitioners are actively seeking ways to foster rural community vitality, often with limited information about possible strategies or approaches to doing so. In order to inform the activities of those seeking to foster rural community vitality, this review of social scientific research sought to reveal the factors scholars have found to be associated with vitality. Between fall 2011 and spring 2012 a comprehensive search for social scientific studies of rural community vitality, wellbeing, resilience, and sustainability was conducted by the authors. Though many articles and book chapters were reviewed that illuminated factors associated with purely economic, purely social, or purely environmental outcomes the findings of these studies are not useful to those trying to improve the vitality of rural communities. Vital communities are those with positive economic, social, and environmental outcomes; factors that may be positively associated with one set of outcomes may be negatively associated with another set, so it is important to look at research that has examined factors associated with a broad notion of vitality. Limiting the relevant research to studies that have engaged with a holistic notion of vitality revealed fewer than 20 that have done so in a rigorous manner, and of those not all represented empirical work.

Despite the limited number of studies that have sought to model or assess the relationship of various factors to community vitality this review has revealed their insights and placed them in a common framework. Vital communities tend to have certain built, natural, human, network, and financial resources. They also tend to have particular social structures, economic bases, values, and relationships to history. Vital communities also tend to be cohesive, have high quality leadership, have residents who actively participate in civic life, and engage in planning. Processes in vital rural communities tend to be transparent and diverse, stable, and tend to form for particular reasons. Finally, vital rural communities tend to exist in macro contexts with stable populations as well as certain types of equality, federal policies, resource extraction development models, and external shocks. More research is clearly needed to identify if these factors are universally related to vitality across time and places, but also if there are other factors associated with this desired outcome. Hopefully, this literature review can provide a springboard for those deeper investigations.

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Appendix

Additional Works Examined

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