EXPLORING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHODS IN NON-URBAN SUSTAINABLE PLANNING

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Background

- Sustainability has become an increasingly important component of urban development

- U.S. Green Building Council → LEED for Communities, LEED for Cities

- Smart Growth America → Complete Streets

- **Sustainable Holistic Planning Systems (SHPS)**

  - Comprehensive approach to community action and decision making

  - Metric-based

  - Tackle problems of climate change in ways that are "smart and connected" (Backus et. al)

Non-Urban Communities

■ The problem?

– *Focus toward urban development and neglect an equally important sector: the* **non-urban**

– encompassing both properties of peri-urban spaces and rural small towns.

"Peri-urban defines the transect of space between town and country. It is a rural-urban landscape interface or transition zone beyond the urban." (Backus, et al.)

Non-Urban: Different Characteristics= Different Planning Needs

Declining downtown sectors/ centralized activity

Higher levels of Social Capital

Importance of Natural Areas

Limited housing choices

Lack of transportation options

Less financial capital

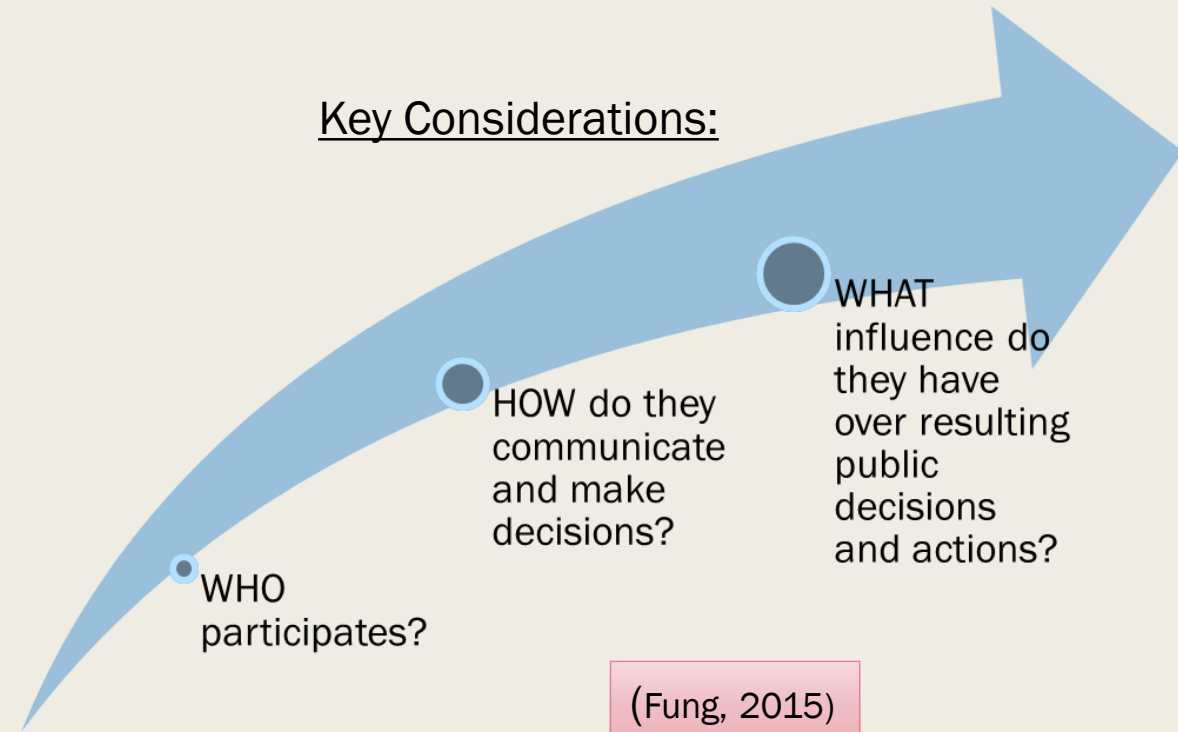**Limited planning capacity**

Result: Large-Scale planning processes difficult to carry out

Effective solutions require combined efforts of all levels of government, business sectors, individuals, and the collective citizenry acting together. (Sheppard, et al., 2011)
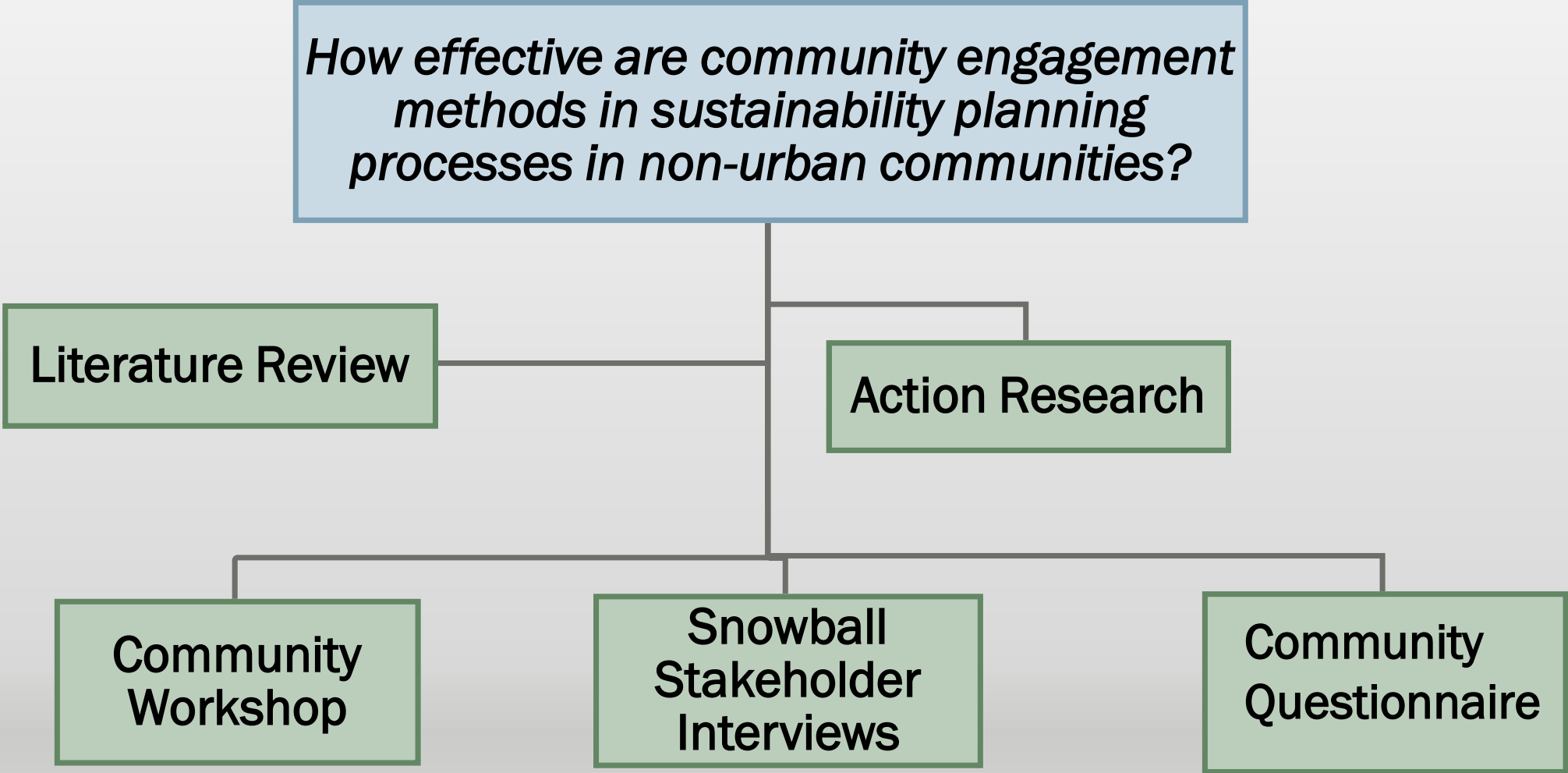
Research Question

How effective are community engagement methods in sustainable planning processes in non-urban communities?

- Community Engagement
  - Going beyond community participation to include working collaboratively with relevant partners who share common goals and interests (Tindana et al, 2007).
  - Enhance Community Participation

Key Considerations:

WHAT influence do they have over resulting public decisions and actions?

HOW do they communicate and make decisions?

WHO participates?

(Fung, 2015)

Research Design

How effective are community engagement methods in sustainability planning processes in non-urban communities?

Literature Review

Action Research

Community Workshop

Snowball Stakeholder Interviews

Community Questionnaire

Complete Streets in Gouverneur, NY

- St. Lawrence County, 7,074 pop

- Most common jobs: construction and extraction, sales and related occupations, office and administrative support

Complete Streets:

- Safer, more walkable communities

- People and Place $\rightarrow$ planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of transportation networks

NATIONAL
COMPLETE STREETS
COALITION

let's complete america's streets

Active Transportation & Complete Streets Workshop

Small business-owners

Employees from Gouverneur Hospital

Town and Village Government

Local Police Chief

Representatives and Planners: St. Lawrence County

Local Engineering firm

Employees from School District

Walk Audit

Community Vision
Increase # of Students Walking
Fully occupied business on Main Street
Uniform Sidewalks throughout
Increased State of Good Repair
Safe Access to School and Park
Local Transit Development
Education and Engagement Wayfinding

Visioning Exercise

Strengths
- St. Lawrence County Fair
- the River
- parks
- engaged local gov't
- community center
- street grid
- school bus system
- county + state highway system
- pedestrian bridge
- Life Saver

SWOT Analysis and Prioritization

Snowball Stakeholder Interviews

Goal: Utilize local networks to engage stakeholders beyond those who were at the community workshop

- 'Snowballing": initial list of stakeholders propose further stakeholders, continuing the list of stakeholders in an expanding manner (N. R. Haddaway et. al).
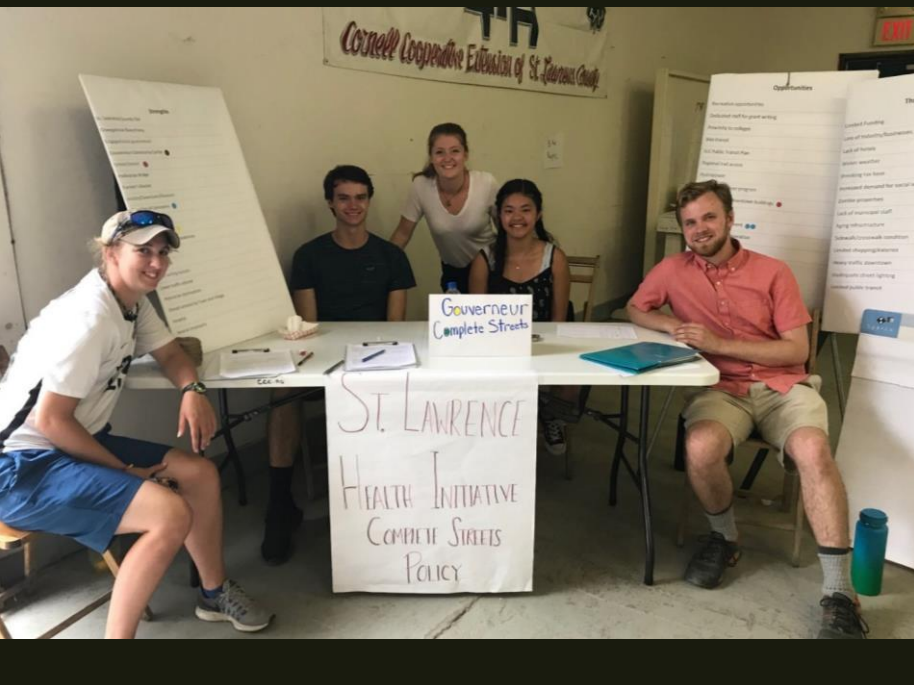
- Qualitative sociological research strategy

- "Bottom-Up", tapping into local networks, more nuanced approach

- In progress: conducted 5 semi-structured interviews

Community Questionnaire

- Developed 10-question questionnaire

- Pop-up engagement

- County Fair

- 25 responses

- Challenge: Context and audience

Key Findings

- Community Workshop:
  - Multiple stakeholders in the room at the same time resulted in productive conversations (development of Vision Statement, SWOT analysis).
  - Provided actionable data
  - BUT sample was not representative of entire community

- Snowball Stakeholder Interviews:
  - Effective conversations, snowballing strategy worked well
  - Presence of a local elite culture
    (network didn't expand beyond local leaders, decision-makers and influencers)

- Key Challenge: Time / Resources

Questions for Further Consideration

What?
- What method of planning is most appropriate for a community (if at all)?
- Is a formal planning system necessary?

Which One?
- Which sustainable planning system is most appropriate for a community's specific needs?

When?
- When is it best to engage the community in these planning efforts?
- Throughout entire project? Project-by-project basis?

How?
- What is the best way to engage the public in these efforts?

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Acknowledgements