This presentation begins with a summary of our PhD Research Proposal written from 2020 to 2024 and still evolving and responding to the constant changes we are experiencing in the Age of Covid.

Our proposal is called: Building the Seventh Wave of NL Participatory Development Support Communications for Community Sustainability in Rural Newfoundland and Labrador

Our focus is an attempt to support the sustainability of NL outports while recognizing that this is not the goal of a neo-colonial provincial government which continues a six decade resettlement program with a relocation scheme which calls upon outports to vote 75 per cent in favour of abandoning their communities with an award of $270,000 per household of three.

My point of view is not neutral. I do not accept economics-driven theories of the necessity of closing small communities and resettling the people. By economics-driven I mean economism - policies and governance that make money the highest value, more important than community, human beings or the natural environment (Robinson, 1969, p. 20; Schumacher, 1974). Instead, I adopt a sustainability-centred and socio-ecological perspective that recognizes people and communities as part of their environments (Hadron et al., 2005; Oliver et al., 2015), and try to support sustainability of rural NL outports and participatory democratic practice.

Informed by the Australian practice of Open Systems Theory (OST) thinking (Emery, F., 1974; Emery, M. 1993) and prompted by concern for the sustainability of rural NL communities, we are trying to solve the puzzle of why, after a rich and unique history, NL participatory development support communications projects for community sustainability have stalled and, more importantly, what together can we do about it.

I draw on the Australian approach put forward by Emery and Emery as a practice of participative democracy, which was introduced to NL within the 2003 Enlarging the Circle project. Lessons learned include the effectiveness of participative (vs. representative) democratic practice; the ability of people to collectively decide their own "desirable future", and the wisdom of Indigenous knowledge systems (and democratic practice) as known for thousands of years. Further, to support community development and development support communications we all must seek to be "ideal seeking" and "actively adapt" in an era of continuous change (M. Emery, personal communication, 2019).

Noting the acknowledgement in OST of Indigenous knowledge systems, we will ally with the Flat Bay Mi'kmaq in a participatory action research (PAR) partnership. The historic Mi'kmaq experience is to be wary of the centralized control of colonial and neo-colonial governance, both provincial and federal (C. White personal communications). Aside from critical analysis of Westminster style neo-colonial governance, other similarities between OST and the Mi'kmaq experience (as expressed by Calvin White and Fred Emery) include the importance of oral methods for participatory democratic communication (Sack et al., 2023). In contrast, neo-colonial governance and education depend on the written word. The role of both oral and written communications will be considered as well as how both are facilitated today through digital information communication technologies (NCAP, nd; McMahon, 2020).

I been involved in participatory development communications in NL since 1989 when I was hired by the Memorial Extension Service as a program developer to train community television volunteers to produce local programming in support of rural community development. After the demise of Extension in 1991 I formed Ryakuga, a registered not-for-profit organization, and have continued to work in the field of participatory development communications in NL since that time. In this PhD project I will draw extensively from these experiences, as well as the related literatures (academic and "grey") .

The last director of Extension Services pointed to "the usual politics of a University where some faculty regarded the application of non-formal learning to community problem solving as inappropriate for an institution of higher learning" (Harris, 1992, p. 15). In this project non-formal approaches to community and lifelong learning will be acknowledged as equal to formal education – no hierarchies.