Rural Action and Voices for the Environment: Alternative Digital Media in New Brunswick

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Introduction: The RAVEN Project

A goal of the RAVEN project (Rural Action and Voices for the Environment) is to explore the role of alternative digital media in protecting and sustaining rural environments. Another goal of the project is to transform perceptions of rural New Brunswick and build support for environmental justice and sustainable rural communities. Our research team will collaborate with rural champions to produce and distribute alternative digital media. We will also analyze the extent to which alternative digital media support positive action for the environment.

Operating on unceded Wabanaki territory across the province of New Brunswick, RAVEN aims to promote healthy economies and relationships guided by the Indigenous principle of protecting lives and land and waters for the seven future generations yet to be born. The RAVEN multi-disciplinary team, based at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, includes faculty from Arts, Education, the Mi'kmaq Wolastoqey Center and Computer Science. Community partners are the New Brunswick Media Co-op (NBMC) and the Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI).

The RAVEN team has also engaged more than three dozen individuals from various organizations, including representatives from Indigenous groups and communities, farmer and woodlot organizations, environmental groups and the academic community to see if they would be interested in collaborating with the project. All have expressed support and interest.

RAVEN will launch in September 2018. The project has secured funding until 2022 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation (NBIF). The project partners NBMC and JEDI as well as Frictive Pictures, a local film production company, are providing in-kind contributions.

Background

Rural Canada is an important site for food production, energy generation, clean water and air, resource extraction and environmental stewardship (Lauzon, Bollman & Ashton, 2015). Rural regions are historically, culturally, economically, and environmentally significant for Canada (Vodden, Baldacchino & Gibson, 2015). Research has stressed that rural communities must be active participants in planning and investing in their own futures; if not, rural areas become sites of tension and conflict that create economic, social and cultural upheaval.

A New Brunswick example is the 2013 conflict on Mi'kmaq territory in rural Kent County and Elsipogtog First Nation over shale gas exploration. The mainstream media presented this story through a corporate lens that

largely excluded the rural and Indigenous perspectives; alternative media played a vital role in raising awareness and generating support with the residents living and working in these rural regions (Dudziak & Darcy, 2017; Kuyek, 2011).

In her review and analysis of "alternative media" in the digital age, Jennifer Rauch (2016) highlights the ways that many forms of digital media are similar to mainstream media, particularly in their production processes. Alternative media, however, are distinct; although alternative media are more commercially-oriented than in the past, Rauch found that in many empirical studies, they "can be distinguished from mainstream media by the centrality of motives *beyond* profit -- namely, of producing critical content and promoting social change" (Rauch, 2016: 762, emphasis in original). RAVEN partner the NB Media Co-op (NBMC) is a prime example of alternative media in the province producing critical stories unpublished elsewhere and that feature groups and individuals promoting progressive social change.

Recent studies on alternative or local media in Canada include Gasher, Brin, Crowther, King, Salamon & Thibault (2016) and Kozolanka, Mazepa & Skinner (2012). However, few of these studies have focused on rural media. Washburn and Raynauld (2016) suggest the potential of digital technologies to address the paucity of local news in rural Ontario; Lithgow (2012: 139) found that rural community television built "social identity and inclusion by expanding control over symbolic resources" - supporting the RAVEN project's focus on visual media. Our research in New Brunswick will use a variety of digital technologies selected for their local availability to develop rural stories and disseminate them widely through our NBMC partner.

New Brunswick is a suitable location for the RAVEN project. It is one of the most rural provinces in Canada: for the past 30 years, despite significant out-migration, half the province's population still live in rural areas. In the 2016 census it was the only province with a declining population (Statistics Canada, 2017). RAVEN has an inclusive approach to defining rural communities in New Brunswick. In keeping with Statistics Canada definitions and considering common understandings of rural in New Brunswick, RAVEN includes the following communities within the scope of the project: 1) All 15 First Nations in New Brunswick and the Schoodic Band of the Passamaquoddy Nation; we recognize the links existing between the New Brunswick First Nations and the other Wabanaki nations outside the colonial borders of New Brunswick that are also parties to the Peace and Friendship Treaties; 2) Towns, villages and rural areas in New Brunswick with fewer than 1,500 people in the 2016 census; 3) Any other community in the province that wants to be a part of the project and can make the case that its rural attributes and environmental situation is aligned with the rural land-uses of interest to RAVEN: farming, forestry, fishing, energy generation and preservation of lands and waters for future generations.

New Brunswick's rural economy, and the provincial economy as a whole, is strongly tied to resource extraction (Beckley, 2015). According to Dudziak & D'Arcy (2017), rural New Brunswick is under siege from unchecked resource extraction and degradation of lands and waters. A handful of companies "hold a monopoly [and] manipulate political and economic systems so that only they can benefit from natural resources, with the cooperation of a few public officials. In essence, the province's assets are 'tunnelled out' by companies who write their own regulations" (2017:242). Corporate capture of government and the province's resources creates an unsustainable relationship for the residents struggling to survive in their rural environments.

Indigenous land and water protectors are taking the lead in the struggle against the unchecked resource extraction in the province but are facing considerable challenges (Dudziak & D'Arcy, 2017). Virtually all the English-language mainstream print media in the province is owned by Brunswick News, a division of the Irving

family corporation, also the largest corporate entity involved in resource extraction. The concentration of ownership of the media and resource extraction companies has given the Irving companies a dominance and influence that goes beyond that of oil companies in Alberta: in New Brunswick, the public discourse and agenda-setting is shaped by media interests concurrent with maximizing the profits of resource extraction (Couture, 2013; Livesey, 2016; Steuter, 2001, 2002). In particular, the Brunswick News media is critical and dismissive of people and perspectives opposed to corporate resource extraction projects (Livesey, 2016).

The RAVEN project will give voice to and build support for those people and perspectives. Our research has two primary aspects: producing alternative digital media and analyzing alternative digital media. Our team has developed shared principles that each team member and project partner is required to accept. These principles outline how we will work together throughout the research. Participatory action research, a central focus of the project detailed in these principles. Principles of Indigenous research methodologies will also guide this project.

Producing alternative digital media with rural champions

The RAVEN research team will use participatory research methods to engage rural champions to produce digital media that highlight their visions for environmental justice and sustainable rural communities. The studies will include photovoice, participatory video, cellphilm, and Indigenous film-making. All the studies will engage RAVEN investigators and collaborators as well as UNB graduate students and RAVEN partners. The study participants will have the opportunity to increase their digital literacy skills and potential for employment in the cultural sector. The digital media produced will focus on the environment: farming, forestry, fishing, energy generation and preservation of lands and waters for future generations.

The photovoice studies will engage rural champions to produce one or more exhibitions of photographs with text and/or recorded oral commentary that will be exhibited on the New Brunswick Media Co-op (NBMC) website and shared on social media. Photovoice, a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method in which individuals photograph their everyday realities, was introduced as a systematic visual research method by public health researchers Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1999; 1997), influenced by the work of Paolo Freire (1972) and Augusto Boal (1985). Photovoice became a preferred research method for combining participatory research methods and advocacy (Gubrium and Harper, 2013). Photovoice has been used in numerous environmental studies, including perceptions of environmental injustices (Bishop, 2013; Eaves, 2015; Quigley, Dogbey, Megan Che, Hallo & Womac, 2014), and challenges to resisting the resource extraction industry (Bell, 2015; 2011; 2008). Participants will learn how to use the cameras ethically and will meet as a group to view and discuss the pictures taken in previous photo-taking sessions.

The participatory video studies will engage rural champions to produce videos that will be screened in a rural community gathering, exhibited on the NBMC website, shared on social media, and entered into competition at film festivals. Participatory video uses collaborative, community-based, documentary filmmaking to address specific social/political issues (Milne, Mitchell, & De Lang, 2012; White, 2003). The method mobilizes the subjugated knowledges of individuals and groups who have become marginalized in various contexts (Foucault, Bertani, Fontana, Ewald & Macey, 2003). According to Plush (2012), participatory video methods can create opportunities for mobilizing the voices of marginalized groups in a way that can impact social, political, and structural change. For Yang (2012), drawing on Mitchell and de Lang (2012), in participatory video, participants reconstruct their daily experiences with minimal instruction from researchers. Through this collaborative grassroots approach, participatory video is often used as a tool for politically motivated activist endeavors. Kindon (2003) notes that participatory video can destabilize power relations between the

researcher and research subjects and involve participants in inquiry and knowledge-production activities. Increasing local, regional and national awareness using participatory video can attract support and possible economic benefits for local development opportunities.

Cellphilms are films made with cellphones. The cellphilm studies will engage rural champions and result in short cellphilms (see Dockney, Tomaselli & Hart, 2010; Mitchell, De Lange & Moletsane, 2014; Mitchell & De Lange, 2013) that will be shared on the NBMC website and on social media. Cellphone videos have been used as a tool for consciousness-raising and organizing by activist movements including Black Lives Matter in the US (Bylander, 2015), the Arab Spring (Khamis & Vaughn, 2012), and Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution (Burkholder, 2017a, 2017b; Walsh, 2017). As a participatory visual research method, cellphilming refocuses citizens' everyday media making practices (e.g. shooting cellphone videos) and turns the practice toward a research question, community challenge, or concern (MacEntee, Burkholder & Schwab-Cartas, 2016). Given the accessibility of cellphones, incorporating cellphilms in research encourages the democratization of the research process and participant ownership over knowledge produced. In addition, cellphilming is a "means through which researchers might act as allies and in support of creative production by community members that speak to their own ways of knowing" (MacEntee, Burkholder & Schwab-Cartas, 2016:8) by interrupting researcher-researched hierarchies.

The Indigenous film-making studies will engage Indigenous film-maker / digital media producers to work with Indigenous entrepreneurs / trainees supported by RAVEN partner JEDI (Joint Economic Development Initiative). All the studies described earlier - photovoice, participatory video, and cellphilm - may involve Indigenous students and participants however these Indigenous studies are specifically designed for Indigenous participants working in collaboration with the UNB Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre. The studies will produce short films for screening on screens located in the administration offices of all the First Nations in New Brunswick, screens owned by RAVEN partner JEDI. The audience for the films will include the First Nation administrators and community members who pass through the common areas where the screens are located. One option we are exploring is to make videos without sound that feature stories and images that support resurgence of Indigenous language and culture in the context of preservations of lands and waters for future generations.

The Indigenous film-making studies will also use participatory methodologies. As described by Shawn Wilson, participatory research is useful and relevant for research with Indigenous people because "it fits well into our paradigm, because the idea is to improve the reality of the people you are working with" (Wilson, 2008:115). In particular, storytelling (such as the film-making studies) involves being in relationship with someone and strengthening that relationship. Jo-ann Archibald (2008) maintains that "stories have the power to educate and heal the heart, mind, body, and spirit." Margaret Kovach has underlined the need for research methodologies "that are inherently and wholly indigenous" (Kovach, 2010:13). At this point in the project, the team will not prescribe specific methodologies for the Indigenous studies but underline the importance of ensuring that they are culturally appropriate and well-supported. The ownership of the media productions will follow the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP), a First Nations protocol for culturally-appropriate approach to research and research data (Assembly of First Nations, 2007).

Analyzing digital media produced by rural champions

The RAVEN team will analyse the digital media produced by the project as well as other digital media publicly available online and produced by rural champions in New Brunswick. We will conduct content

analysis and social network analysis to determine how the digital media is received by audiences and the extent to which it stimulates progressive change and deeper understanding by viewers. Social network analysis has many applications but is most often associated with social media (Arquilla, 2014; Borgatti, Everett & Johnson, 2013; Scott, 2017; Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017). We will analyze and map how the digital media produced by the rural champions are shared online, using online and freeware applications - including Google Analytics, Netviz, Gephi and Siena. Another component of this study will interview social media users to analyze the impact of these digital media productions.

Content analysis will have two aspects: a) linking with the findings from the social network analysis study to identify the websites that share the media productions online, and analyzing the text on those sites, in particular the comments posted online by viewers of the visual media productions; and b) using visual analysis techniques to analyze the visual media productions from the project (cellphilms, participatory videos, photovoice). Content analysis will include quantitative analysis (counting references or themes within the media content; Krippendorf, 2004), as well as established methods used in visual and video analysis (Rose, 2016) using N-Vivo software to conduct the analysis.

Table 1: Analytical framework and research questions
1. Alternative digital media and cultural connections and solidarity *Do the media express the authentic voices and lived experience of rural champions? *Who are the rural champions? (socio-economic profile/ gender/culture/location/language/historical context) *Does the content challenge dominant codes and create new ideas? *Do the media create or extend networks of support and solidarity? *Are common identities or communities created or maintained? *Do the media activity support building trust and community capacity?
2. Digital media and political participation *Do the media production process link champions with mainstream politics and policy processes? *Do the media stimulate action by viewers with mainstream politics and policy processes? *Do the media advocate action on the environment and / or protection for lands and waters?
3. Digital media and Indigenous resurgence *Do the digital media process link Indigenous people and groups? *Do the media strengthen links between Indigenous peoples and allies? *Do the media support the goals of Indigenous resurgence (language and culture, land and treaty rights)?
4. Digital media and the public sphere(s) *What are the links with the mainstream media and public sphere? *Do the media create or use reliable information sources? *Do the media support individual participation and the free exchange of ideas?
5. Political economy of the digital media *Are there restraints or barriers to audience access (of the broadband infrastructure)? *How are rural champions attempting to increase access to broadband infrastructure and digital media?

The basis for the analytical framework (Table 1) is five broad theoretical areas related to digital media: the public sphere, new social movements (political and cultural elements), Indigenous resurgence, and political economy. Together these theories provide a way to analyse how producing and disseminating alternative media by rural champions can change hearts and minds about environmental issues in New Brunswick while identifying the challenges and opportunities.

The team will refine and develop the analytical framework iteratively over the course of the project at our monthly meetings and through analysis developed in ongoing studies. The analytical framework attempts to categorize the main elements of interest to researchers and to contextualize these elements within current media and social theories. The five main categories listed in Table 1 are described below.

The first element of the framework explores how the digital alternative media support cultural connections and solidarity. Alberto Melucci is a sociologist and theorist of new social movements whose work is directly relevant to the RAVEN research. In his work, echoing critical analysis of the media by Herman and Chomsky (2010) and others, Melucci posits that the world media system "operates basically as the manufacturer of master codes at the world scale," with gatekeepers deciding the language used, selecting and organising the information broadcast and published, making decisions about the popular culture market, controlling the languages of computers and other information and communications technologies, and generally organising the minds of people" (Melucci, 1996: 179). His position describes the situation in New Brunswick with Brunswick News dominating the provincial media and agenda-setting.

Melucci believes that social movements, such as environmental groups and organizations, have the power to reverse the symbolic order, through their alternative use of symbolic codes. Alternative media, including "music, bodily signals and clothing, radios and images, theatre and art, communication networks and virtual reality," can be used to alter and evade the codes imposed by mass society. Within social movements many resources are allocated to creating and maintaining a specific identity rather than to pursuing external objectives. A social movement such as environmental activism must maintain a high level of internal unity, face the challenges of a hostile environment, and reinforce and legitimize itself within the larger society. Independent public spaces such as alternative media help the social movements to articulate and publicise to the rest of society the themes they consider important, and enable political actors to receive the movements' messages more clearly. Therefore using Melucci's analysis, alternative media produced by rural champions is understood partly in terms of a search for community, primary relations, and collective values, as well as its symbolic function to challenge the dominant codes.

Related to the cultural aspects of alternative media is the question of whether the alternative media content reflects the lived experience of the media producers and audience. David Sholle (1995) has argued that a central concern for alternative media is the extent to which they reflect the audience's lived experiences; he is critical of the mass media for its creation of communities of consumers by blocking experiences of everyday life. Sholle believes that alternative media could counter this process by fostering capacities for reflecting upon experience and imagining a different future.

The second broad theoretical area of interest to RAVEN is the link between the alternative digital media produced by rural activists and political action. The theorist most identified with social movements and online activism is Manuel Castells (1989, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2012). His central thesis is that since the end of the Second World War and especially since the 1970s, a combination of capitalist restructuring and technological innovation is the major factor transforming society. Castells believes that at the same time that globalisation and "informationalization" are transforming the world, they are also disenfranchising societies. Social movements such as environmental activism are rooted in how people feel because of their need to control their lives, jobs and their local environment.

Castells believes that much of the environmental movement's success is due to its strong links to the mainstream media and its ability to adapt to the conditions of communication in the network society - to use the internet to organise. Environmental issues enjoy a wide consensus among the public and to a certain extent are broadly supported by all political parties. The movement actors address themselves to citizens, asking them to put pressure on governments or specific corporations. Their ultimate goal is to act on the political process, to influence the management of society by the representatives of society.

Castells notes that the environmental movement has had a long history of involvement with the media. Although the movement relies on grassroots organisations, environmental action is geared towards creating events that call media attention. At the same time, the constant presence of environmental issues in the media has given environmental organizations a legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Environmental groups have been active users of the internet; for example, coalitions of environmental organisations used the Internet to mobilize against approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and more recently against the spraying of glyphosate in New Brunswick's forests. Perhaps most importantly, the internet allows grassroots groups to have the ability to act globally.

The third element of the analytical framework is the link between the alternative digital media and Indigenous resurgence. The late Arthur Manuel (2015) describes generations of resistance and grassroots organization fighting for recognition of Indigenous rights and land claims. Manuel makes the case that the Indigenous struggles are rooted in a deep understanding about the need for environmental sustainability. Many other Indigenous theorists have analyzed the troubled relationship between resource extraction and land and treaty rights (Alfred, 2005; Coulthard, 2014; Palmater, 2011). O'Donnell (2017) has argued that Indigenous communities are central to alternative media production in rural communities. Indigenous communities have a long history of producing media to build alliances for solidarity and self-determination (Alia, 2010; Bredin, 2012; Meadows, 2016; Molyneaux, O'Donnell, Kakekaspan, Walmark, Budka & Gibson, 2014; O'Donnell & Delgado, 1995; Roth, 2005.)

In their report on supporting Indigenous language and cultural resurgence using digital technologies, Perley, O'Donnell, George, Beaton & Peter-Paul (2016) state: "Indigenous languages offer all of us an alternative way of seeing our world, rooted in a deep respect and understanding of how to live in harmony with our planet. When considering the significant threats to our environment and our social systems created by people using Western world views and practices, the wisdom offered by Indigenous languages and their inherent ways of understanding is a precious resource." The processes of resistance and resurgence are rooted in culture and existing relationships; our analysis of digital media produced by rural Indigenous champions will be attuned to these multiple complexities.

The fourth element of the analytical framework is the link between the digital alternative media and the public sphere. Public sphere theory explains the role of the media in shaping opinions. Canada is a settler-colonial state commonly described as a "liberal democracy." The stability of governments in liberal democracies is largely dependent on public opinion. How public opinion is formed, and the extent to which it can be influenced or changed, is central to the RAVEN research analysis. Groups and champions that promote environmental justice and sustainable rural communities try to shape the collective behaviour of citizens. These individuals and groups use the media and all channels of public communication to try to change patterns of consumption and lifestyle choices, which are difficult to regulate by government directives. Their efforts include, for example, encouraging people to reduce energy consumption, eat local foods, and support sustainable farming and forestry practices.

The concept of the public sphere is associated with the work of Jürgen Habermas (1989 [1962]). The public sphere is an arena, independent of government and partisan economic forces, dedicated to rational debate and opinion-formation among citizens. Key elements of the public sphere include universal access, voluntary participation, rational argument, the freedom to express opinions, and the freedom to discuss matters of the state and participate outside institutional roles. The effective functioning of this arena depends on reliable and adequate information sources, in particular records of parliamentary debate and independent news sources.

Feminist Nancy Fraser (1992) argues that in stratified societies - characterised by unequal social groups in structural relations of dominance and subordination - parity of participation in public debate is not possible. In fact, existing inequalities are exacerbated in a single public sphere with no alternative arenas for debate among the excluded groups. Fraser calls these alternative arenas "subaltern publics ... parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (1992:123). On the other hand, critics such as Lisa McLaughlin (1993) have maintained that alternative media conceived as separate from the mainstream media fail to challenge the hegemonic structures of mainstream media; once separate from mainstream debate, alternative media risk developing alternative dominant social relations and structures.

The final element of the analytical framework will analyse access to the technical infrastructure required to produce and view digital media online in rural communities in New Brunswick, using a political economy approach. Digital infrastructures are more robust and less expensive to use in urban centres, compared to rural communities (McMahon, Gurstein, Beaton, O'Donnell & Whiteduck, 2014). In New Brunswick, many rural communities have inadequate digital infrastructure, which can potentially result in frustrating and expensive experiences with producing and consuming online media.

A political economy approach is a systematic analysis of digital media, information and communications in the context of the larger socio-economic system (Herman & Chomsky, 2000; McChesney, 2008; Winseck, 2008). Researchers using this approach analyse the capitalist system to assess the developments of broadband infrastructure, focusing on three issues: the role of market criteria and the profit motive, which results in the commodification of information in which information is available only if it is saleable; class inequalities in the distribution and access to information and the capacity to generate it; and corporate capitalism, how the economic structures are dominated by corporate organisations which have a powerful influence in shaping the development of new digital networks, digital media and digital infrastructure, primarily how they develop for private ends rather than the public good.

O'Donnell et al. (2016) have identified many factors involved in how digital networks and infrastructure are adopted in rural communities. Issues such as availability, price, quality of service and/or experience, interoperability, ownership and accessibility are factors in digital technology adoption. Many Indigenous communities in Canada - in particular those in remote, northern and rural areas - are characterized by low household income (Anaya, 2014; Palmater, 2011). In rural communities with fewer technology resources, connectivity is supported by more fragile technical and social infrastructures, which are often overstretched. Recognizing that urban centres and rural communities are different environments helps explain how a simple challenge such as a computer breakdown can be dealt with more easily in an urban centre than a rural community with fewer technical supports available.

In summary, the framework contains five elements based on four theoretical approaches. The RAVEN team will use this theoretical framework to analyze the alternative digital media produced by rural champions. Through this work, the project will identify the extent to which rural alternative digital media can support positive change and to deepen understanding about farming, forestry, fishing, energy generation and preservation of lands and waters for future generations in New Brunswick.

Conclusion

As RAVEN project researchers, we believe that the people and communities of rural New Brunswick are intimately connected with their lands and waters. The lands and waters provide significant social, cultural and economic benefits for them, the province, Canada and the world. We believe that rural communities have the right to, and are responsible for, their sustainable futures. As researchers, allies and practitioners, we will support their efforts toward rural community sustainability by co-producing their stories of success, challenge and struggle. We will share these stories in ways that honour and respect the people and communities they come from.

The RAVEN project will be launched in September 2018; interviews to date with potential partners conducted over the summer of 2018 identified strong interest in the research by the Wolastoq Grand Council, many rural advocacy groups such as the NB Federation of Woodlot Owners, environmental organizations, as well as rural and media researchers with other universities in New Brunswick, including St. Thomas University, Mount Allison University and Université de Moncton. Dalhousie University's Agriculture Campus is also interested in our project. We anticipate that RAVEN will be a central hub and support for the production of alternative media for environmental justice and rural community sustainability.

Participatory action research is a central theme throughout RAVEN. All the alternative media production initiatives will involve community partners and rural community residents throughout the planning, development and production stages. All RAVEN related articles and productions will include community authors and producers to ensure local voices and information is acceptable and respectful, and they will be shared using appropriate protocols.

Our project principles include the recognition that our work is conducted on the traditional unceded territories of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq and Passamaquoddy peoples, and we are guided in our actions by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UNB Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre is an active member of the RAVEN team. RAVEN partner, the Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI) is a key organization in supporting Indigenous training and entrepreneurs in First Nation communities. RAVEN partner the New Brunswick Media Co-op has consistently reported on Indigenous stories in the province and encouraged Indigenous journalists to publish their work.

The RAVEN team is committed to research that supports support social justice. We align ourselves with a tradition of critical activist researchers that are committed, theoretically principled, and both sourced in and furthered by research. This position requires critical reflection of ourselves as researchers and activists that will happen during our research hub meetings at the University of New Brunswick.

UNB is the oldest English-language university in Canada and the largest university in the province, with an estimated 75 percent of the provincial research capacity. UNB and its faculty members have enormous privilege, resources and wealth in the provincial context. The University has considerable resources and capacity to, in theory, support groups and champions working to challenge the environmental degradation and related lack of rural community sustainability that is arguably one of the biggest challenges facing the province. However, the University struggles to recognize its potentially powerful role to support social and environmental justice in the province. For example, despite UNB having a Truth and Reconciliation strategy in place, there is no mention of Indigenous peoples and our shared history on the UNB website.

On the other hand, a number of UNB faculty members and graduate students are doing research that is engaged and focused on the need for improved environmental practices and policies in New Brunswick. Our hope is that the RAVEN project will complement these existing and ongoing efforts. We will form new relationships and strengthen existing relationships with people and groups working toward environmental justice and more sustainable rural communities.

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