

Social Economy, Community Resilience and the Transition to Sustainability

Formal Partnerships

This new research partnership builds upon the BALTA partnership and research model which has functioned since 2006, but with an expanded and diversified membership,. The new partnership also represents a new research scope and methodology focused on the development of an interdisciplinary research program featuring a significant component of applied research and participatory action research at a community and regional level. Other components will examine theoretical and practical linkages between transition to a sustainable economy at micro, macro and mezzo scales¹. The interdisciplinary nature, broad scope and complexity of the proposed research, and the multi-faceted aims in terms of dissemination and mobilization of research, require a diverse partnership and a strong partnership approach. The emphasis on community-based participatory action research and mobilization of research within communities and regions also necessitates the involvement of community and practitioner organizations and networks in the partnership. A community-university partnership model is the only one that makes sense for this project's objectives.

BALTA's Partnership Experience and Approach to Partnership

The new partnership leverages the existing BALTA partnership – many of the partners and participants come from the earlier research partnership – but even more importantly it leverages the successful BALTA model and lived experience of a strong community-university, practitioner-academic partnership approach to co-construction of research and new knowledge (Heisler, Beckie, & Markey, 2011; McKittrick, Wulff et al, 2011; Beckie, Heisler, Markey & Wulff, 2011). The BALTA model emphasizes a balancing of academic and community/practitioner participation and input to decision making with a view to producing research that is relevant to community and social economy sector needs, thus increasing the likelihood of significant longer term impact through uptake and mobilization of research results. Balancing the power and decision making roles of partners, both academic and practitioner, is vital to creating partnerships that go beyond token community involvement. Critical to building an effective long term partnership and an 'owned' research agenda is an approach that embeds co-construction at all steps of the research development, implementation and mobilization process:

- **Co-Visioning** – Partners develop and negotiate a common understanding of the research mandate and aims and the broad scope of the work. **For this new partnership, this process has already begun and will further evolve in the early stages of the development project.**
- **Co-Development of policy and parameters** – A common understanding of how power will be shared and used, how decisions will be made, how research will be managed, how students will be hired and managed, and other aspects of the partnership and research processes is critical. **With this new partnership, this has already begun – notably the Partners Memorandum of Understanding explained later in this document. The new partnership will also draw upon the policies and procedures already evolved in the earlier BALTA partnership.**
- **Co-Planning of research** – Effective collaboration of academic and community/practitioner partners and participants brings the assets of each to creating optimum research plans. This applies both in terms of the broad research framework and specific research projects. **Co-planning will be at the heart of this partnership development project and will occupy a large part of the time committed by partners.**

¹ In using the terms micro, mezzo and macro, BALTA is distinguishing broadly between three levels of economic activity and engagement. Micro refers to activity and innovations at a local level. Macro refers to broader macro-economic policy and interventions. We have adopted the mezzo term to refer to those intermediate level systems of application and support that reinforce or hinder local socio-economic and sustainability developments – finance, policy, technical assistance, etc.

- **Co-Approval of research** – Decision making about research plans, allocation of resources, etc., involves both academics and practitioners. **See the Partners Memorandum of Understanding** (reproduced in full in the Partnership Evidence section of this application) **for how decision making and approval of plans will operate in the partnership.**
- **Co-Management** – Joint management structures, with a balance of community and academic representation, provides ongoing partnership discipline and accountability back to the partners.
- **Co-Implementation of research** – **This is a development project. Thus, we do not anticipate implementation of research except perhaps on a minor scale feeding into the development process. However, we expect that the research plans that are an outcome of this project will feature significant attention to the type of research co-implementation that has become a common feature of BALTA’s approach.** Our experience has shown that, if true co-construction exists at other levels, it is not critical that all research be co-led by both academics and practitioners as long as the researchers are guided by and accountable back to the partnership. However, BALTA has found that a co-leadership model of research implementation can bring important benefits, merging the assets of both academic and practitioner participants in the research process. Co-led implementation has become increasingly common in our work.
- **Co-Analysis/and Co-Synthesis of research results** – The strongest interpretation and mobilization of research results is obtained where both community and academic partners bring their perspectives to the analysis and synthesis of the research.
- **Co-Dissemination and Co-Mobilization of research** – Both community and academic partners bring particular niches and expertise to the dissemination and mobilization of the research. The most effective dissemination and mobilization strategies make optimal use of both.
- **Co-Evaluation** – True partnership requires the full involvement of community and academic partners/stakeholders in evaluating the research partnership, both regarding process and product.

Most of our ‘community’ partners are sector networks and development organizations, not local community organizations. This is a strategic choice reflecting the approach that has been key to BALTA’s earlier success. It enables us to have a manageable number of partners and participants who at the same time bring a very broad understanding of sectors relevant to our research objectives. The focus on intermediary organizations as partners is also a strategic choice with respect to their ability to maximize mobilization of research to a broad range of audiences. The new partnership is already taking form, as evidenced by the significant number and range of partners and participants who have joined this application. The two year project will consolidate and further expand the partnership, while allowing the partners to shape and plan the longer term research program that the partnership intends to undertake. We anticipate the recruitment of additional partners during the development project, both a small number of additional intermediary organizations and specific community based partners in the communities selected for the participatory action research component of the future research.

Participatory action research is an important component of the planned future research, but will also shape the way we develop the partnership and research planning during this project, particularly as we reach out and engage new community level partners. PAR is a form of collective research wherein the researcher joins forces with the community, laypersons, and other partners to conceive of, design and carry out research. Many of our partner organizations and researchers have extensive experience doing participatory action research in a diversity of contexts. In our model all project participants are considered co-researchers with each bringing unique knowledge, insights, and experiences to the table.

Project Management and Governance

The partners have already agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding that specifies important principles and understandings that will govern the research partnership (see pages 1-3 of the Partnership

Evidence section of this application). These principles and understandings reflect the BALTA partnership model described above and include such elements as:

- Ensuring that all partners and participants, both community/practitioner and academic, have a full say in discussions and decisions, with a consensus approach guiding decision making as much as possible and the majority view deciding where consensus is not achieved;
- A balancing of community/practitioner and academic representation in leadership roles, including a steering committee comprising the four co-leads and several other representatives approved by the partners;
- A commitment by all partners to participate actively and to contribute significantly to the partnership, the research program development and knowledge mobilization;
- A commitment to work within the framework (goal, objectives, etc.) in this project proposal in developing the partnership and plans for the future research program, and agreement that the final research/partnership plans developed through this project will be ratified by the partners.

The enhanced framework for project management in this new BALTA partnership includes four co-leads representing the community/practitioner and academic sectors in Alberta and British Columbia. The lead investigator, Mike Lewis, was also the lead investigator for the original BALTA partnership.

Role	Individual Responsible	Institution/Organization
BC Community Co-Lead & Lead Investigator	Mike Lewis Executive Director	Canadian Centre for Community Renewal
Alberta Academic Co-Lead & Co-Managing Co-Lead	Dr. Mike Gismondi Professor, Sociology and Global Studies	Centre for Integrated Studies Athabasca University
Alberta Community Co-Lead	Dr. Noel Keough Senior Researcher	Sustainable Calgary Society (and an Assistant Professor in Environmental Design, University of Calgary)
BC Academic Co-Lead	Dr. Ana Maria Peredo Associate Professor, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship & International Business	Faculty of Business, University of Victoria (and currently Director of the Centre for Co-operative and Community-Based Economy at the University of Victoria)

A steering committee (SC) will be established with broad decision making roles related to providing intellectual leadership, steering the project and managing the partnership. The SC will balance academic and community/practitioner representation, including the four co-leads and several other representatives approved by the partners. The SC will meet as frequently as necessary by tele-conference, with the possibility of a couple of longer face-to-face meetings at critical points in the project’s development.

The four leads will serve as a project management committee that will oversee staff, budget and program implementation within the parameters of steering committee decisions. They will meet as often as necessary, generally via tele-conference, and will report to the steering committee. While the co-leads will exercise joint authority, it is recognized that under SSHRC policies Mike Lewis as lead applicant is responsible to SSHRC and must ultimately authorize the use of SSHRC funds within the project. The fact that the lead applicant is from a BC-based community organization, but Athabasca University (AU) in Alberta will be serving as the administering organization, requires specific arrangements. Should this grant application be approved, then Athabasca University will appoint Mike Lewis as an Adjunct

Professor to ensure clear lines of co-operation and accountability. In addition, AU-based co-lead, Dr. Mike Gismondi, will serve as a co-managing co-lead to directly supervise project operations at AU.

The principal vehicle that the original BALTA partnership evolved for designing, shaping and implementing the research program was several thematic research clusters (RCs). The RCs established research priorities, approved specific research projects and annual plans, strategized dissemination and mobilization of research results, and monitored and assessed research results. Each was co-led by an academic and a community/practitioner co-chair and included representation from both academics and practitioners. We envision a similar model operating in this new partnership, with several RCs having responsibility for developing specific aspects of the project:

- RC 1 Focused on the comparative analysis of micro, mezzo and macro transition to sustainability and a steady state economy. To be co-led by Mike Lewis and Mike Gismondi.
- RC2 Focused on the community based participatory action research, including the engagement and selection of communities, the identification of specific research priorities, and the elaboration of the research methodology and plans. To be co-led by Noel Keough and Ana Maria Peredo.
- RC3 Focused on financial innovation and key issues related to financing transition. To also focus on securing the input and involvement of relevant new co-investigators and partners to become engaged in the long term research program. Mike Lewis will be involved with this group, but the co-leads will be determined later.

There will be a degree of cross-over and coordination of work between the three RCs. Knowledge mobilization will also be part of the mandate of all research clusters, but will be coordinated by the management committee. As the work evolves, it is possible that further RCs could be established and/or that subsidiary working groups might be formed. For example, the work of RC2 might devolve into more than one thematic or geographic group.

While several partner representatives will participate in the steering committee, the principal and most significant way that partners will participate in the partnership is through their participant co-investigators and collaborators participating directly as members of the RCs. It is in these clusters that most of the time will be spent and most of the work accomplished. They will build the various pieces that will go into developing the longer term partnership and research plan.

The work of the RCs will be coordinated and synthesized through the steering committee and integrated into draft plans for the longer term research program and partnership. The draft plan will be reviewed by the partners, with an opportunity for further input. Then it will be finalized and approved by the partners.

The other principal way in which partners will engage with the partnership will be through contributing their particular capacities and outreach niches to the mobilization activities of the partnership. The BALTA partnership will reach specific audiences with its knowledge products in each case through the member partners that are best positioned to reach each audience. Partners will also benefit from this approach in that it will reinforce and enhance with their target constituencies their credibility as a source of reliable and relevant information on the themes of this project.