



Bioregional Belonging: Mapping How Newcomers and Long-Term Residents Build Place Together

Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience | uwaterloo.ca/waterloo-institute-for-social-innovation-and-resilience

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About the Problem

The Grand River bioregion is now one of the most culturally diverse and rapidly growing regions in the country, drawing migrants from around the world at a time when climate, economic, and geopolitical disruptions are reshaping patterns of movement. This project would map the systems that shape how newcomers encounter the bioregion including housing realities, transit networks, labour markets, settlement services, cultural infrastructures, ecological access, and local narratives of belonging. It would explore how new and long-term residents co-create (or struggle to co-create) a shared sense of place in a landscape that is simultaneously Indigenous territory, agricultural engine, tech hub, and ecological corridor. By illuminating the relational, institutional, and material conditions that support or hinder belonging, this project speaks to the future cohesion and resilience of the bioregion.

About the Community Partner

The Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR) is a hub for place-based research, social innovation, and collaborative problem-solving focused on building resilient communities and systems. WISIR works across sectors including community organizations, governments, Indigenous partners, and researchers, to support initiatives that address complex social challenges through relational, participatory, and systems-informed approaches. As a community partner, WISIR brings deep experience convening diverse actors, centering lived experience, and translating research into practical action for community benefit.

Impact on the Organization

This project strengthens WISIR's role as a regional backbone for social innovation and resilience. It enhances WISIR's capacity to support partners in understanding how housing, mobility, labour, settlement, culture, and ecology interact to shape belonging and vulnerability at the bioregional scale. The project builds shared language, tools, and evidence that WISIR can use to inform convenings, learning initiatives, and policy engagement, while reinforcing its ability to connect community insight with systems-level change.

Potential Connections & Data Sources

Community partner program data (settlement agencies, housing organizations, community groups), lived-experience insights (workshops, interviews, participatory mapping), municipal and regional open data (housing, transit, demographics).



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