The Governance of Unincorporated Areas

Dr. Tamara Krawchenko

Assistant Professor, Chair of the Local Governance Hub, Associate Director of the Institute for Integrated Energy Systems, Rural Researcher

School of Public Administration

A bit about me…

- Public policy scholar interested in regional, rural and urban development and governance
- Worked on rural policy at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Paris)
- School of Public Administration at UVic:
  - Local Governance Hub
  - Certificate and Diploma programmes in Local Government Management
  - Masters in Public Administration (many of our students work in Local Government)
- Focussing now on decarbonising economies in a way that is just/equitable (Accelerating Community Energy Transformation)

Questions I've been thinking about…

- Are our systems of regional governance fit for the types of challenges we're facing today?

- What is our vision of local and regional economic development?

- Are there gaps in governance? If so, how might we address them?

- Do the solutions need to be 'hard' (formal institutions and rules) or 'soft' (new ways of working, cooperating) – or some mix of both.

VICC-CLP

"Electoral areas cannot implement tree by laws but they are becoming increasingly important [with regard to] protecting water supply." – Cowichan Valley
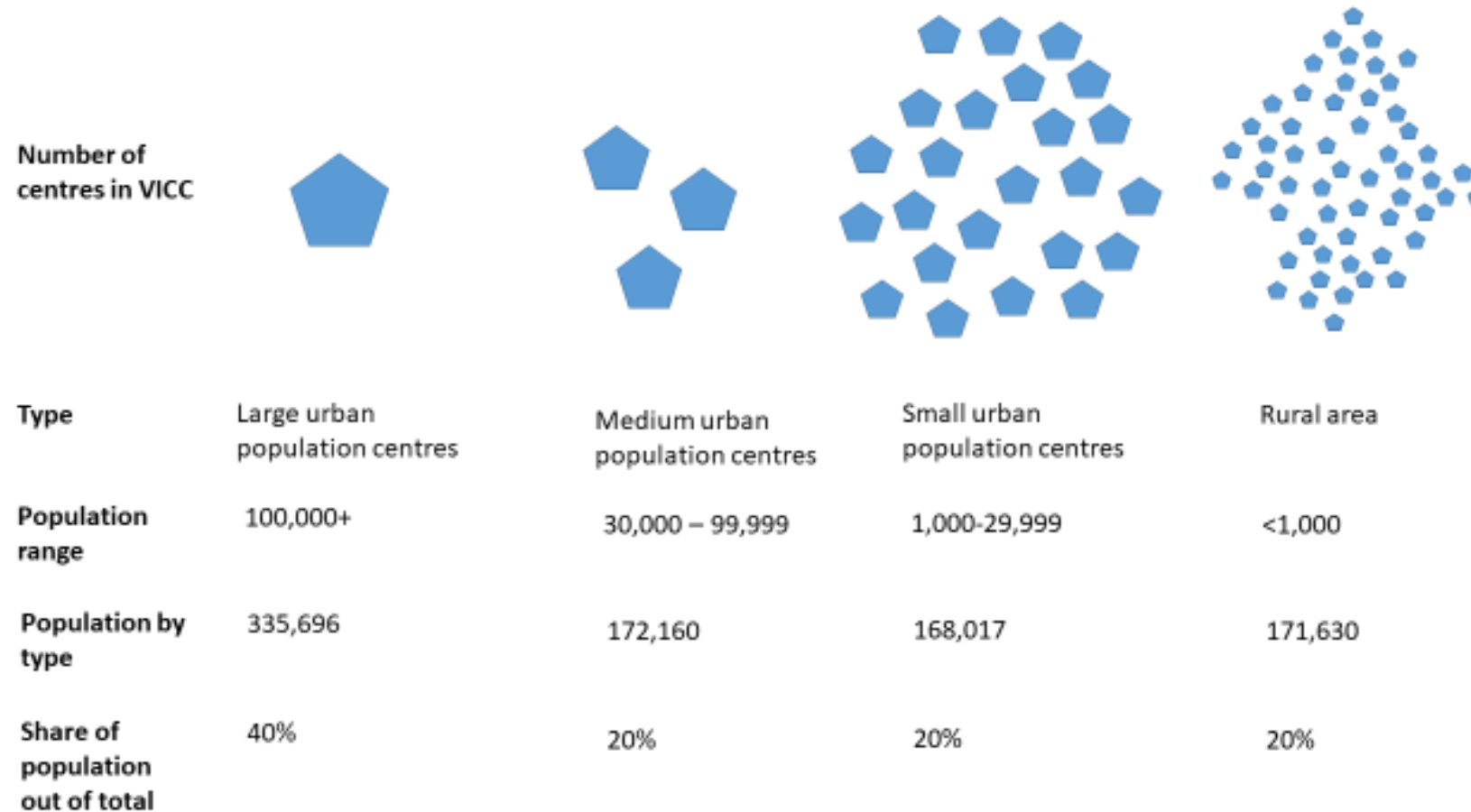
Key findings:

- Urgent mitigation and adaptation efforts are needed.
- Nearly all communities in the VICC region are already experiencing hazards and impacts related to climate change.
- Municipalities and regional districts are overwhelmingly supportive of climate action.
- Local government cooperation and scaling-up efforts will be critical.
- There is a need for increased senior government support to assist municipalities and regional districts in effective climate action.

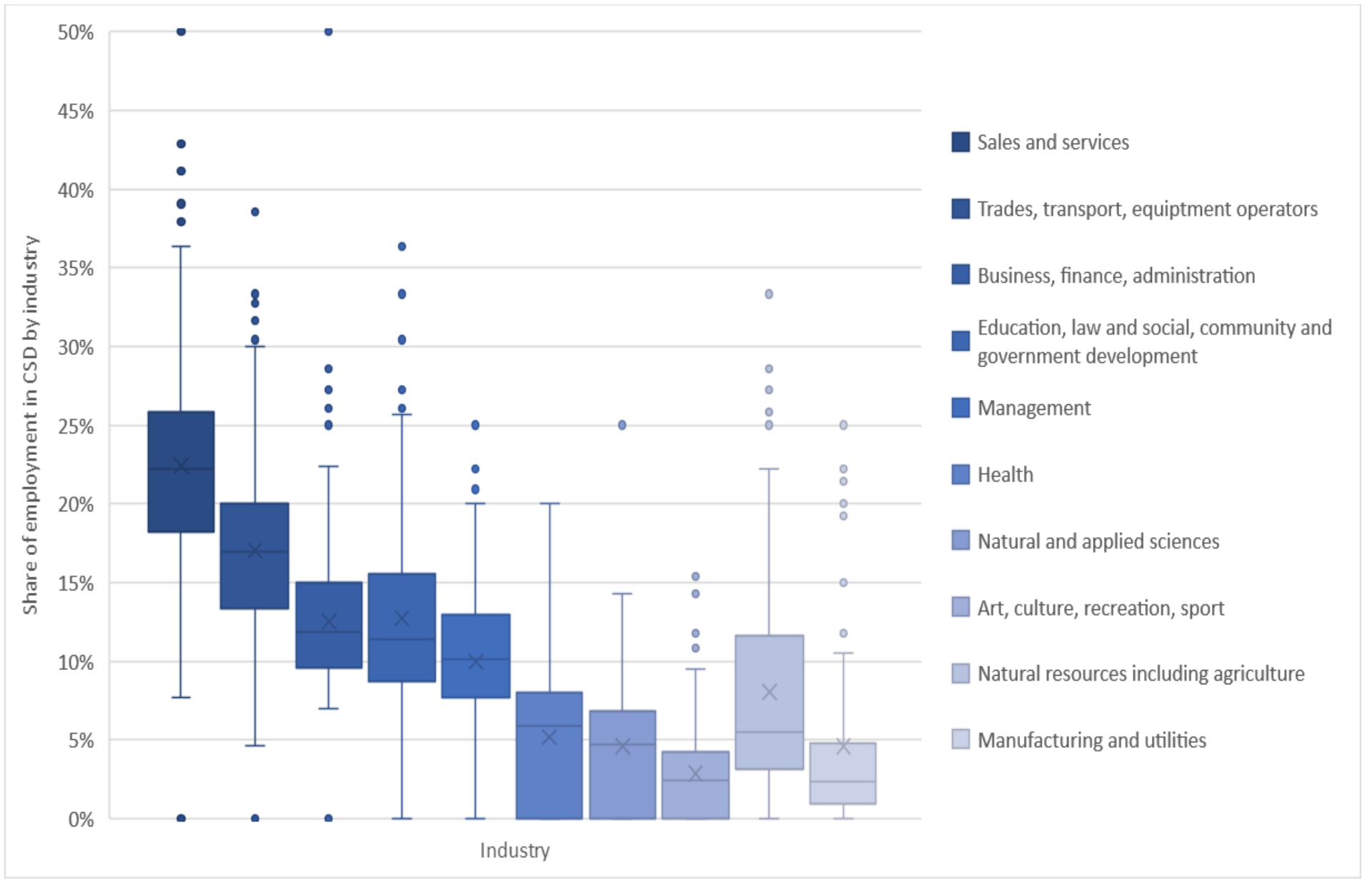# Urban Hierarchy by Population Centre, VICC, 2016

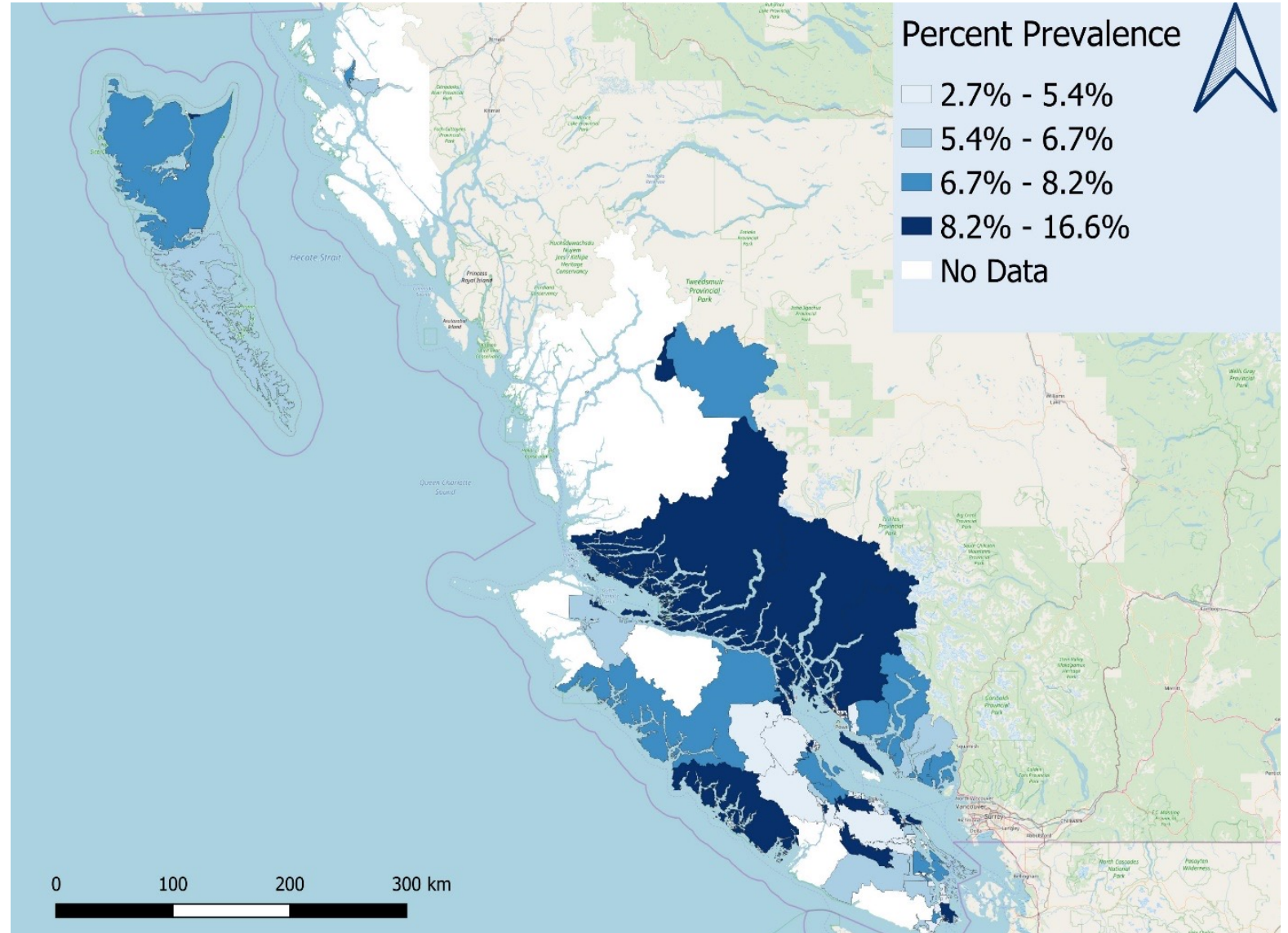|	Large urban population centres	Medium urban population centres	Small urban population centres	Rural area
Type	Large urban population centres	Medium urban population centres	Small urban population centres	Rural area
Population range	100,000+	30,000 – 99,999	1,000-29,999	<1,000
Population by type	335,696	172,160	168,017	171,630
Share of population out of total	40%	20%	20%	20%

Number of centres in VICC

Share of Employment by Industry, CSD, VICC, 2016

Prevalence of Low Income, Percentage, VICC, 2015

Note: Classed by LICO-AT: Income levels at which families or persons not in economic families spend 20 percentage points more than average of their after-tax income on food, shelter and clothing.
Source: Statistics Canada (2020b). Income Highlight Tables, 2016 Census.

Percent Prevalence
- 2.7% - 5.4%
- 5.4% - 6.7%
- 6.7% - 8.2%
- 8.2% - 16.6%
- No Data

Challenges facing unincorporated areas

- **Lack of authority** or even influence over decisions that affect rural communities (e.g. land use).
- How to be **flexible** to changing needs in the face of statutory authorities (e.g., no general contingency fund).
- Challenges of navigating **multiple jurisdictions** (e.g., road that is half MOTI/ half town).
- Having to navigate across **multiple provincial ministries** and a lack of coordination between them.
- **Transportation** solutions not working for rural communities.
- Increasing urbanisation but **incorporation** of new municipalities rare.
- **Capacity amidst growing pressures** (complex planning environment, public expectation for dialogue and engagement, work on Reconciliation).

Debates about governance and scale

- Debates on amalgamated vs. polycentric governance in urban contexts (functional urban areas)

- Rural and esp. remote areas are unique and need different governance solutions: higher transport/inf. costs, thinner labour markets, lower access to services etc.

- Major governance trends in advanced economies: scaling back of state activities in rural government, shifting responsibilities from the state to 'active citizens' and the rescaling of functions to regional bodies—collectively referred to as the shift from rural government to governance

- Examples: rural municipal restructuring in Ontario in the late'90s, Australia, Denmark, Sweden

- Benefits and drawbacks....

These debates are ongoing… New Brunswick reforms

- Number of local entities will be cut from 340 to 90 through forced mergers.
- 77 local governments, 12 rural districts and an expanded mandate for regional service commissions (replacing solid waste commissions and land use planning commissions.
- As of Jan. 1st, 2023, rural districts est. - coordinated by the provincial government through a rural district manager (RDM). Taxation powers!
- Each rural district will have councillors elected to *advise* the Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform.
- Minister is responsible for the administration of the district, including the provision of local services.
- Communities within the regions will not be able to opt out of the "mandated" services the commissions must provide, and will have to help pay for them under the changes.
- In local service districts that are absorbed by municipalities, there will be "increases or decreases" in property tax rates.
- Those changes will be determined during the transition period next year and will be phased in over time.
- Future local government mergers will no longer have to be approved by residents in plebiscites but will be approved by a new provincial commission.

Made in BC solutions for the decades ahead?

- Culture of 'Gentle Imposition'- but is this changing?
- Do regional districts need reform? Should BC consider municipal mergers to build economies of scale?
- Coordination through 'carrots,' 'sticks' and or 'sermons'?
- Mandated integrated and comprehensive planning frameworks (as in France).
- Spatial coordination for service delivery and infrastructure in rural and remote territories (e.g., Sweden)

Thanks for the conversation – I'd be very pleased to stay in touch.