

**Urbanizing the Countryside? The Governance of Rural Restructuring in Bancroft
and North Hastings, Ontario**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation comprises a case study of local governance in the Town of Bancroft, Ontario, and the surrounding municipalities of North Hastings County. The capacity for strategic agency by local governance actors, regarding economic development initiatives and mitigation of inequality, is the central object of analysis. The contexts of economic change - from lumber production, through mining, to tourism and recreation - and political structures - considering colonial origins, Canada's hierarchical system of government, and the relatively recent impacts of amalgamation and downloading in Ontario in the late 1990s - are shown to be profoundly structure the agency of local governance actors. The dissertation demonstrates a resulting intensification of "urban" phenomena in a traditionally "rural" space - while new forms of work encroach, and development pressures intensify - and highlights the limitations of existing structures of local government regarding the maintenance of a cohesive and inclusive community. A fundamental social disjuncture is shown to correspond to mixed land tenures of the sub-region: public Crown Land supports a generational rural economic culture at odds with the dynamics inherent to urbanizing spaces governed by municipal corporations. Semi-structured interviews with actors in local governance and key economic sectors, alongside document analysis of plans, reports and local histories provide the methodological foundation.

To the field of rural geography, the dissertation contributes an early analysis of post-COVID 19 rural transformation, demonstrating the effects of North Hastings being brought into the metropolitan space economy of Southern Ontario to an unprecedented extent. The distinctive analytical perspective - centring structured agency - offers a new approach to rural research in Ontario. Regarding the study of local government, the dissertation contributes an important case study in intergovernmental relations under twenty first century neoliberalism. Analysis of a small municipality - in relation to horizontal and vertical governmental dynamics and with regard to the management of essential infrastructures - provides a clear demonstration

of the pressures driving institutional change. Finally, the dissertation interjects into contemporary urban theory debates, presenting an empirically grounded argument that planetary urbanization is best understood as a process inherent to the particular land use and political systems of the municipal system, spread by European colonization.

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Chapter One - The Governance of Rural Restructuring: Discussion and Debates

1.1. Introduction

In 2022, the publication of Henri Lefebvre's *On the Rural* - a volume edited by Elden and Morton containing early writings on rural sociology - provided an important boost to scholarship which is guided by urban theory but substantively concerned with the “rural” spaces of an urban hinterland (see also Brenner and Katsikis 2020). Following Lefebvre (2022[1953]), the small town municipality of Bancroft - the central case study of this dissertation - is embedded in a “countryside [which] received its models from the cities and towns...” (p63). Unaccounted for in Lefebvre’s analysis of France, however, is the locally significant factor of Canada’s Crown Land, a state-protected wilderness. In this geographic context, an “urban reality... bathed in a rural milieu and stood on a vast agricultural [or, more broadly, “productivist”] foundation” (Lefebvre 2022[1953] p59) remains in place through Ontario’s overarching structure of land use. Bancroft - unlike densely populated areas further south, or resource communities in “Northern Ontario” proper - exists in an evenly balanced area between municipally-managed lands and Crown Lands.

In this dissertation, I show how these two dominant land use structures in “Central Ontario” - imposed upon the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, Ojibway and Anishinabek peoples - influence the social fractures and fragmentation which increasingly characterize the region. Through analysis of changing political structures and economic bases over the *longue durée* since colonization, Bancroft - and the surrounding communities of North Hastings County - reveals a distinctive manifestation of the rural-urban dichotomy.

An enduring *rural economic culture* persists, established in the early years of European settlement, and expressed - through the use of Crown Land - in a generational forestry economy and traditional rural recreational practices. Culturally

“rural” sections of Bancroft-area society exhibit what Lefebvre (2022) calls “secreted” and “sedimented” characteristics, articulated within the local landscape and economic tradition, and contrasting starkly with the creatively-destructive milieu of nearby cities. The embattled rural economic culture, enmeshed with economic practices of diminishing vitality, clashes frequently with cultures of in-migrants.

At the same time, adjacent municipal governing institutions affect a contrasting trajectory of social change. Drawing on Roy’s (2016) rejoinder to a universalizing notion of planetary urbanization (Brenner and Schmid 2015) - which contextualizes a specifically political sense of “the urban” within a multiplicity of global land tenures - I show how the the colonial municipal corporation fosters intensifying *urban political and economic dynamics* in this region. In the present moment, a structurally harmonious relationship exists between municipalities’ fiscal interests and the growth of emerging post-productivist economies (Shucksmith 1993, Halfacree 1997, Evans et al. 2002). Economies related to real estate, development, in-migration, and remote work - bolstered by the COVID 19 pandemic - provide benefits for local municipal governments, while also challenging the traditionally “rural” milieu.

I show how pressures resulting from a distinctive articulation within Ontario’s hierarchical system of government have transformed the local municipality, over time, from a basic administrative unit to a strategic and entrepreneurial agent of local development. Municipal spaces in the region, however, are also subject to an increasing number of “urban” questions around a greater need for collectivity and redistribution in local politics, and I argue that new rounds of political restructuring are necessary to mitigate what is currently a conflictual and unsustainable development trajectory. Here, I draw on the concept “structured coherence” (Harvey 1985, Cloke and Goodwin 1992, Halfacree 2006, Moulaert, Jessop and Mehmood 2016) - an enduring socio-economic spatial unit - to illustrate how the relationship between capitalism and its regulating institutions have changed on the regional scale since the late twentieth century.

Thus, through an empirical focus on land and local government, interpreted by way of structurally-informed urban theory (Harvey 1985, Lefebvre 2003[1970], 1991[1971], 2022, Castells 1979, Jessop 2001, 2008), I bring a novel perspective to prevalent questions in rural studies on social and economic change (Shucksmith 1993, Halfacree 1997, Evans et al. 2002, Marsden 1999, Phillips, 2005, Halfacree 2006, Hines 2010), and discussions about Canada's own hinterland spaces (Halseth 1998, Markey 2005, Luka and Lister 2012, Michels 2017, Norcliffe 2019). While providing an overarching demonstration of how land use traditions and political structures influence socio-spatial change, the research makes contributions in three key sub-areas: First, it provides an exposition of the form and function of a small Canadian municipality, considering the impact of structure-agency relationships relevant to this institution in depth. The small-scale case study, hopefully, reveals more generally applicable municipal dynamics. Second, important factors shaping local and regional inequalities are identified and theorized, and third - on a more conceptual level - I offer a framework for understanding the contested terms "urban" and "rural" with relevance to the political and economic dynamics of Bancroft and North Hastings.

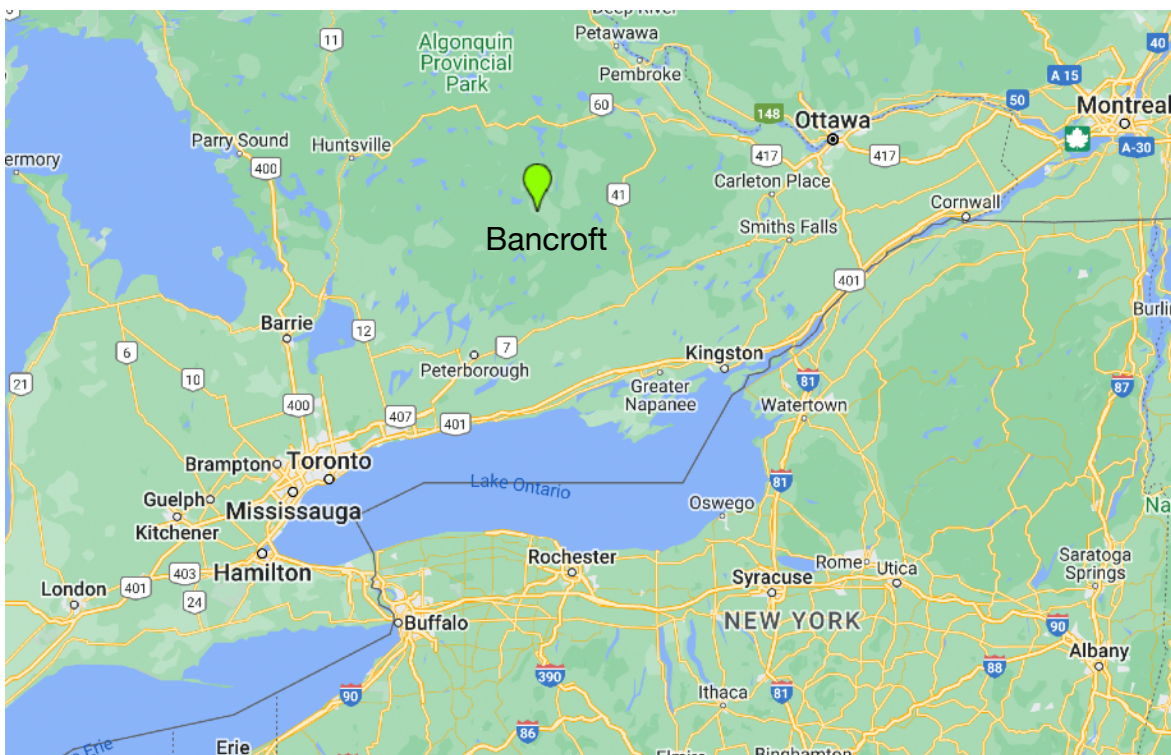


Figure 1: Map of Southern and Central Ontario (Google Maps)

Next, beginning a review of the key concepts and debates underpinning the dissertation, is a summary of literature exploring epistemologies of the “urban” and “rural”. Here, I present relevant material across the academic silos of “urban studies” and “rural studies”, emphasizing Lefebvre’s concept of the “residual rural”, and a sense of the “urban” which highlights the significance of political collectivity.

1.2. Henri Lefebvre: The Residual Rural in an Urban Society

Lefebvre conceptualization of the urbanization process is utilized - at times with a critical distance - throughout the dissertation. In “Urban Revolution” (2003[1970]), Lefebvre understands “the rural” as a bygone stage of social and economic development, preceding “the industrial” and “the urban” on a timeline which, famously, depicted a continuum from 0 to 100% urbanization. Lefebvre argued, from his late 1960s perspective, that “society has been completely urbanized” (Lefebvre 2003[1970] p1), referring to the omnipresent germ of an emerging “urban society” that exists within industrial society. Schmid, a leading scholar of Lefebvre, clarifies that, in this context, the urban both represents an intermediate level of human organization - between the private and the global (which also receive close attention within Lefebvre’s entire oeuvre) - and a transhistorical force of concentration of people and resources (Schmid 2022 p234). As the urban becomes virtually universal at the present stage of human development, a major dialectical contradiction emerges between centralization and peripheralization; distinct from the former duality of city and countryside which existed prior to industrialization.

In his early sociological work, Lefebvre understands ongoing “rural” characteristics as “residual” social forms (Lefebvre 2003[1970] p3, Schmid 2022 p171). A Lefebvrian formulation of “the rural”, therefore, characterizes the concept as inherently archaic and corresponding to inherited cultural and economic practices as opposed to being a vital, evolving reality. Based upon trajectories of social development - particular to Lefebvre’s European lifeworld (as critics have pointed out) - “rural” ways of being have been superseded by the relations of production and

accompanying rationalities of industrial society. In this formulation, “the rural” represents a space defined by a particular, self-contained mode of production (e.g.. agricultural production based upon pre-wage-labour social relations such as sharecropping). An inherent seasonality to the rhythms of production and a distinctive social proximity - in many cases “relations of consanguinity” (Lefebvre 2022[1954] p80) among community members - are important features of the historical rural space. Lefebvre (2022[1949]) describes cultural phenomena as “equilibria” related to the material context of rural life:

“material equilibria, although not expressly and rationally planned by people, are not blindly and mechanically obtained, they arise from an awareness, which is difficult to grasp and even harder to define, a curious mixture of prudence, initiative, suspicion, credulousness, and routine: peasant wisdom” (p17).

The rural’s status as a “residue” makes it sociologically valuable object of study, however, as “agriculture drags along with it the remnants and residues of a distant past” (ibid p61). The relations of proximity that define rural communities endure beyond the economic practices that gave rise to them.

Lefebvre’s rural research offers a clear example of his use of the “analytic regressive method” in which social phenomena are identified and traced back to their origin, before being reintegrated into a broader structural analysis of social development. This approach will loosely inform analysis of some long standing socio-political features of North Hastings. From Lefebvre’s perspective, the study of residual rural social formations reflects an “integral history”, specific to a particular group, as opposed to an extrinsic history shaped by more dominant forces. As mentioned in the Introduction, however, the North American context inhabited by Bancroft and North Hastings embodies the essential characteristic of “colonization” for Lefebvre: “it represents only a degradation or slow assimilation of urban culture” (Lefebvre 2022 [1953] p63).

The notion of a “completely urbanized” society is used as a reference point in the dissertation without contradicting other context-specific arguments about “the rural”. For Lefebvre global urbanization is a tendency, or a “virtual object”. The extent to which a “100% urbanized” society has been realized is subject to debate. Thus, the term “rural” can remain an important heuristic in case studies, even if it falls short of having a universal, transhistorical meaning.

Lefebvre’s later ideas from “The Production of Space” (1991[1971]) feature heavily in Chapter Six of the dissertation. Through the famous spatial triad of “perceived”, “conceived” and “lived” spaces it is shown that places are simultaneously constituted by enduring material practices, dominated by the plans of powerful actors and institutions, and consistently (re)imagined by inhabitants. As seen in the work of Halfacree (2006) - referenced prominently in Chapter Six - the framework may be used to interpret the constitution of specific condensations of “urbanity” or “rurality”.

Space, in its totality, must be understood to exist in between and in combination of the three facets. As Schmid (2022) argues:

“Central to this concept is the simultaneity of the three moments: space is simultaneously conceived, perceived and lived. Although these three aspects should not be mixed together, they cannot be separated from one another. Each implies and hides the other, presupposes and assumes the other. The three moments of the production of space must therefore not be considered in isolation. They only make sense together” (p267).

For Lefebvre, space is a social product, therefore space can only be understood by analyzing the social relations behind its production. In given historic society, dominant modes of production correspond to distinct space-time norms by which a particular form of space is “secreted” (Schmid 2022 p270). The centrality of social *practice* in Lefebvre’s framework, separates it from phenomenological understandings

in which mental representations of the world are the primary object of analysis (Schmid 2022).

1.3. Neil Smith: Gentrification and Uneven Development

Lefebvre's notion of the Production of Space - similarly based in the tradition of historical materialism - complements Neil Smith's (1979, 2002) production-centred, or supply-side, framework for understanding gentrification, which informs interpretations of socio-spatial change throughout the dissertation. Smith argues for the primary importance of the structural dynamics of capital in shaping localities' divergent "fortunes". A "seesaw of capital" is instrumental regarding neighbourhoods' economic trajectory, as disinvested spaces become opportunities for accumulation by reinvestment under favourable "rent gap" conditions. In Smith's initial 1979 study of Philadelphia, the context of several decades of suburbanization produced a historical juncture in which the inner city was ripe for recapitalization. The consumer preferences of individual "gentrifiers", it is argued, seldom override economic logics on an individual or collective level, and are considered malleable within the superstructure of capitalism.

Within "rural gentrification" scholarship, Smith's ideas have been influential on a number of cases (Phillips 1993, Darling 2005, Nelson et al. 2015), contrasting with studies which offer a consumption-centred lens (Smith and Phillips 2001, Brown-Saracino 2009, Hines 2018). Scholars have used Smith's theory in the case of international rent gaps (Sigler and Wachsmuth 2015), while an influential literature exists exploring the role of the state (Hackworth and Smith 2001, Slater 2004) as an active participant in supply-side gentrification processes.

For Smith, gentrification is a manifestation of a larger process of uneven development in space, inherent to capitalist social relations under the prevailing logic of exchange value maximization (Smith 1984). Developing from Marx's theory of Capital (2001[1867]), uneven development is an inherent and necessary feature of capitalism in that it provides the kind of differentiated spatial landscape necessary for facilitating

relations of dependency and exploitation between places, which then can be harnessed to generate surplus value.

1.4. Planetary Urbanization, Ruralization and the Specificity of Urban Politics

The thesis of “planetary urbanization” (Brenner and Schmid 2015) presents a provocation to “rural” research, running with Lefebvre’s ideas to argue that a historical point has been arrived at where the reach of “the urban” - as an unfolding matrix of political, economic and technological relations - is planet-encompassing. In this view, traditional rural practices no longer represent a dominant mode of production within the totality of global political economic space.

Illustrating a historical foundation to the phenomena which Brenner and Schmid’s discuss, Sevilla-Buitrago (2013) analyzes the English enclosures - which took place between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries - demonstrating a qualitative transformation of political relations in erstwhile rural areas. Here, ostensibly “urban” economic transformations are accompanied by an aggressive reorganization of “rural” space. Sevilla-Buitrago (2013) shows that an “urbanized” space in England’s countryside was produced by:

“profound, spatially-driven alteration of property relations, spatial divisions of labor and forms of social reproduction that in turn hinged upon the concerted, systematic intervention of the state” (p238).

This model was imposed upon Britain’s colonies, including Canada and Ontario and, as such, Sevilla-Buitrago’s research identifies specifically “urban” political characteristics underpinning spatial production in the chosen research site.

Consistent with Sevilla-Buitrago’s locally situated argument - though critiquing Brenner and Schmid’s overarching thesis - Ananya Roy draws upon Castells (1979) and Magnusson (2011) to argue that “what is urban about critical urban theory is the urban

as a new political subject” (Roy 2016 p818). This political subject, a voter and private property owner, typically exists within a certain type of advanced capitalist nation state. For Castells, writing about cities in this context, urbanity arises from apprehension of the need for collective political interventions. Castells, famously argued that “urban problems are, in fact, an ideological problematic referring to what is really the process of collective consumption” (Castells 1979 p440). Similarly, Dunleavy (1980) has argued that from the point of view of formal political analysis, an “urban” politics encompasses the entirety of space governed by the British state:

“my usage of ‘urban’ applies to a collective consumption processes in any area of the country, without any specific spatial reference. In a pervasively urbanized society...spatial distinctions between urban and rural areas have no relevance to the study of urban politics” (p3).

Just as “the urban” reflects a particular way of being political within a given governmental and cultural context, Roy (2016) points out that enduring *rural* land tenures, social collectivities, and political subjectivities should not be denied in many parts of the world. Knowledge of particular “urban” or “rural” spaces should be rooted in local epistemologies; hubristic meta-theories of planetary processes obfuscate a plurality of complex, unique lifeworlds (Robinson 2006).

As a counterpoint to arguments regarding the all-encompassing pervasiveness of urban processes, a debate around “ruralization” has developed, picking up on Krause’s (2013) concept. Krause originally sought to provide a lens through which anthropocentric narratives of socio-spatial development could be challenged, by emphasizing “rural” (defined as an uncontrollable more-than-human variable) elements. Gillen et al. (2022) have recently used the term - with reference to Terry McGee’s theorization of *desakota* and *kota-desai* (McGee 1990) - to describe how traditionally rural practices of self-sustenance are intrinsic to ostensibly “urban” development processes, particularly in the peripheral spaces of global South cities. For these authors “subsistence and commodity production entrench people in the ‘rural’ yet also

act as bridges connecting and distinguishing rural and urban worlds” (Gillen et al. 2022 p188).

1.5. The “Chaotic Concept” of Rurality within Rural Studies

Since the early 1990s, rural geographers have discussed a putative “post-productivist transition” in the rural spaces of the Global North, as primary production industries - agriculture, forestry, mining, fishing - decline and are replaced by economies related to service provision, leisure and consumption (Shucksmith 1993, Halfacree 1997, Evans et al. 2002). Empirical research on incomplete, complex and contradictory rural transformations have led many scholars to discuss the emergence of “multifunctional” rural landscapes (McCarthy 2005, Argent 2011) in recent years.

While scholars concur that traditionally rural landscapes are changing radically, some, such as Hoggart (1990), have proposed “doing away with rural”, as a chaotic concept that hinders objective social scientific analysis of phenomena such as economic restructuring. The existence of a “post-productivist countryside” challenges a classic “materialist” definition of the rural, put forward by Gilbert’s (1982) who uses the term to define areas where productive economies based on direct contact with nature (agriculture, forestry, mining) predominate. In these terms, Halfacree has suggested that “continued belief in [the rural’s] inherent salience may be seen as ideological, in that it denies and confuses our picture of the spatiality of contemporary capitalism” (Halfacree 2006 p46).

In another contribution to a wide-ranging body of work seeking epistemological clarity around the concept, Halfacree (1993) has argued for the value of a “symbolic” notion of “rural”, based on its representative use, from a “lay narrative” point of view. More recently, meanwhile, Halfacree and Williams (2021) have evoked an argument that “the rural is not solely a human taxonomic creation but expresses a space that integrally and intimately involves the more-than-human” (p375).

Throughout the literature, the use of “urban” and “rural”, can be seen to be context specific, with definitions mediated by the disciplinary perspectives involved, and the scale and locale of particular inquiries. Conceptualization of the terms is influenced by scholars’ underlying motivations and objectives. It is important to question, and identify, what is at stake in particular debates over “rural” and “urban”. Roy, a scholar of planning practice in India, argues for recognition of enduring rural land tenures to avoid the erasure of crucially significant local factors. Brenner and Schmid, theorists oriented towards the global, want capture the totality of the “urban” processes they identify. This dissertation will articulate how the terms can be used meaningfully in the historic-geographic context of a rapidly changing Central Ontario. Claims to global significance, as pointed out by Roy and Robinson, are likely to be ill-advised.

In the next section I turn my attention to the local context, reviewing empirical material on Ontario’s governmental structures and changing rural economy.

1.6. Political Economy and Governance in Canada and Ontario

Harold Innis’ distinctly Canadian approach to political economy identifies key features of the economic context for governance in outlying, ostensibly rural settlements in Canada. Staples producing communities in the Canadian hinterland (including those, such as Bancroft, which existed initially for the primary purpose of harvesting lumber) have developed through exporting raw materials to distant metropolitan markets via intermediaries and, as a result, often demonstrate limited local economic diversification and limited institutional development at the local level (Hayter and Barnes 1990, Innis 2000[1956]).

In recent decades, a new range of economic forces have transformed the political economy of Ontario’s “near north” beyond the staples hinterland which Innis describes. Under globalization, economic managers of local industries are increasingly distant from rural communities (Norcliffe and Bates 2018, Norcliffe 2019). Production

processes that favour automation and relocation - to save on labour costs - and concentration and consolidation - to achieve economies of scale - have devastated traditional forms of employment (Michels 2017, Norcliffe 2019).

At the same time, the gravity of an increasingly influential “urban field” (Friedmann and Miller 1965/2017, Friedmann and Wolff 1982) - defined by the drive time within a single day from major metropolitan centres - generates what Friedmann and Wolff (1982) describe as an:

“ever-shifting topography of land values which quickly and efficiently excludes all potential users who are unable to meet the price of a given parcel of land” (p324).

In this context, a shift to service labour is evident, as long time rural residents become “contingent workers serving wealthy visitors from the prodigal city” (Norcliffe 2019 p55). Luka and Lister’s (2012) observe that the “Central Ontario Lakelands”, a less metro-centric term than the frequently-used “cottage country”, “are now more than ever pieces of the metropolitan puzzle” (Luka and Lister 2012 p188). As such, luxurious second homes in the countryside become a strategic place to park capital for urban elites (Norcliffe 2019), creating conflicts over land use and pricing out long-time locals.

Limitations to political power and autonomy compound challenges related to economic dependencies and vulnerabilities in rural Canada. Isin (1992) notes longstanding problems for municipalities related to being legislative “creatures of the Province”. At the point of their mid-nineteenth century inception, municipal governments were created as weak administrative units in order to produce subservient polities in the wake of the British colonists’ experience of rebellion in the United States. These limitations were particularly pronounced in rural areas.

Literature on rural local government in the present day identifies significant strands of continuity from these origins. Today, Canadian municipalities’ disempowered

status is significant by international comparison; Douglas (2023), a key contributor to a small body of literature on rural municipal governance in Ontario, points out how:

“Canada’s local government system is highly centralized, one of the most highly centralized and under-resourced in the entire Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)” (Douglas 2023 p139).

Elsewhere, Douglas describes a present-day milieu in which local government’s status as “junior dependent partner” (Douglas 2005 p242) to the Province has been reinforced since the “common sense revolution” programme of restructuring and downloading by Conservative Mike Harris’s provincial government in the late 1990s (see also Keil 2000, 2002 in an urban and suburban context). Douglas points to an institutional culture of “efficiency”, which derives from the fact municipalities were modelled on business corporations at the outset of local government roll-out in Ontario. These underlying conditions allowed the restructuring program of the Harris government to proceed smoothly. Douglas argues that a greater need for coordination of diverse local governance agencies is apparent, in which informed and objective mediators balance unequal power relations among actors (Douglas 2005).

In recent decades, processes of neoliberalization within political institutions are associated with the stripping back of higher-level governmental support in rural areas (though Kasabov [2020] has argued that the specific impact of the 2008/9 financial crisis on rural development and inequality has not yet received sufficient attention). A de-centring of rural settlements is apparent in the Twenty-First Century in Ontario; provincial funding for transit, infrastructure development, healthcare, education and small business at the local level has decreased since the Harris Conservatives’ program of municipal amalgamation (Norcliffe and Bates 2018, Norcliffe 2019). Regional development programs which were established under the Keynesian regulatory regime have been withdrawn. Small communities, many of which initially depended on resource companies to provide social infrastructure, face a new landscape of austerity in support of development objectives (Norcliffe and Bates 2018, Norcliffe 2019).

Gibson and Dale (2022) identify how the business-influenced “New Public Management” approach, which has emerged within the context of provincial restructuring, has resulted in Ontario’s rural municipalities “doing more with less”. The use of extra-governmental partnerships is increasingly necessary for small municipalities. A shift towards an entrepreneurial stance for local elites (as described by Harvey [1989]) is reflected in the rise of practitioners from the economic development industry in rural Ontario. Michels (2017) points to the use of experts who “may not know the *place* but know *development*” (p213), as a reflection of shifting institutional arrangements impacting local governance. In this case, external actors have become embedded in shaping the development of small municipalities.

Michels’ (2017) work on the “rural gentrification” of Ontario’s Almaguin Highlands also highlights the rising significance of ex-urban cottagers in local political networks, and indicates a trend towards land-use planning decisions which to appeal to the economic interests of wealthy in-migrants. Similarly, Hasleth (1998) - In a study which includes the Rideau Lakes near Ottawa and the Cultus Lakes in B.C. - has identified how planning processes have become a flashpoint for disputes between cottagers and long-time locals in increasingly divided cottage country communities. Four-season cottage conversions are a key part of a social and economic transition experienced in these places (Hasleth 1998).

In a B.C. case study, Markey (2005) offers a valuable analysis of small-town political agency responding to higher-level economic restructuring. Under these conditions, Markey identifies the benefits of coordinated action by local institutional actors pursuing shared objectives. Markey argues that:

“If local development processes and relationships do not deliver a degree of certainty, or mass awareness and participation, their impact on the economy will be random and minimal (although still meaningful at a micro scale)” (Markey 2005 p366).

Markey uses the concept “Mode of Social Reproduction” (MSR) - the “extra-economic institutions and the social norms that help to stabilize and codify the regime of accumulation” (ibid p366) - to describe how restructuring processes take place vis-a-vis a local political milieu.

Moving in a more practice and policy-oriented direction, Markey, Hasleth and Manson (2012) argue that prosperity within a traditional “space based economy” - producing staples at the margins of the global economy - is no longer achievable for many rural communities. Instead, “place-based” strategies - creating attractive places in which to live and work - are necessary for present day economic development. Similarly, Markey et al (2015) point out how, increasingly, “place becomes operational and assumes agency in the development process” (p878) in rural regions. The qualitative aspects of place bestow a *competitive* advantage for both local products and localities themselves. This contrasts with a prior norm wherein quantitative factors (e.g. abundance of local resources or convenient transportation distances) provided a *comparative* advantages for settlements within the space economy. Within this emerging paradigm of local economic development, discourses around encouraging the “creative economy” (Florida 2002) - promoting the arts, culture and social diversity in an effort to attract professional workers - are particularly influential (see Bell and Jayne 2010 with regard to a rural UK context).

This dissertation seeks to develop upon the material surmised above in a number of ways. The links between the (municipal and provincial) political structures described in the preceding review, and the agency of actors operating within them are under-explored in rural studies (Markey 2005, Pemberton and Goodwin 2010 represent exceptions). A critique of the present-day organization of local government in Ontario - as a historically contingent phenomena with significant structural biases - is thus far underdeveloped. Through-lines between the institutions of early settlement and current dynamics of governance could be more fully articulated. Making these connections more explicit will connect empirical research on rural Ontario to the aforementioned Lefebvre-inspired concepts in urban theory.

The conceptual framework offered by Jessop's "Strategic Relational Approach" alongside related theoretical and empirical endeavours, as elaborated upon in the next sections, will inform my approach with regard to addressing these gaps in scholarship. Following an exposition of the key features of Jessop's approach, the literature review will conclude by summarizing influential conceptualizations of the local state.

1.7. Structured Agency and the Strategic Relation Approach

An interconnected and recursive relationship between structure and agency is theorized by Jessop (2001) as part of a "Strategic Relational Approach" (SRA) to governance research. Jessop (2001) argues that:

"structures are thereby treated analytically as strategic in their form, content, and operation; and actions are thereby treated analytically as structured, more or less context sensitive, and structuring" (p1223).

Institutions, which arise from an articulation of structure and agency in local contexts, are described by Jessop as historically and geographically contingent phenomena. Their persistence is demanding of explanation. Jessop (2001) states that institutions are:

"complex emergent phenomena, whose reproduction is in-complete, provisional, and unstable, and which coevolve with a range of other complex emergent phenomena" (p1230).

Across the governance literature, institutions can be defined both as specific organizations and in a more general sense comprising, "more or less coherent, interconnected set of routines, organizational practices, conventions, rules, sanctioning mechanisms, and practices that govern more or less specific domains of action (Moulaert, Jessop, Mehmood 2016, para 8). I draw on Jessop's idea that "institutions select behaviours"; I am seeking to understand how the range of possible action for local actors is shaped by the channels of power available. Jessop also draws attention

to significance of “time horizons” for development strategies, shaped by the interests of dominant classes.

In an interview, Jessop clarifies the notion of the “strategic selectivity” of the state:

“states are not neutral terrains on which political forces struggle with equal chances to pursue their interests and objectives and with equal chances of realizing their goals, whatever they might be. Instead the organization of state apparatuses, state capacities, and state resources (and, more specifically, the overall articulation of forms of representation, the internal architecture of the state, the forms of state intervention, the distinctive social bases of the state, specific state projects, and the prevailing view of the nature and purposes of government for the wider society) all mean that state favours some forces, some interests, some identities, some spatiotemporal horizons of action, some projects more than others” (Jessop 2020 Section IV).

Methodologically, this framework encourages the researcher to identify specific actions, strategies, discourses or policies, and consider their “class orientation”, while ascertaining their relationship with their structural, institutional context.

In existing rural geography literature, a precedent exists for using Jessop’s approach to structure and agency in a case study on Wales by Pemberton and Goodwin (2010). Drawing on the Strategic Relational Approach, Pemberton and Goodwin identify how “the projects being pursued by dominant social and political interests” change as the “territorial structure of local government changes” (p276).

For Moulaert, Jessop and Mehmood (2016) a “structured coherence” refers to “institutionally mediated, agentially reproduced” social structures which hinge “on the extent of time-robust institutional flexibility and the time-and-place dependent (in)capacity to secure structural change through institutional transformation” (para 18). Jessop puts forward an “institutional” perspective regarding the concept, which highlights an ongoing evolution of the articulation between structure and agency in

maintaining social structures. Underpinning Jessop's approach, is the influence of regulation theory (after Aglietta 1979), in which characteristic social and political forms of a given period are conceptualized as "regulating" the tendency towards crisis inherent to the capitalist accumulation process (after Marx 2001[1867]).

The concept "structured coherence" will be drawn upon in a variety of formulations within the dissertation, to analyze locally significant forms of regulation in observable spatial formations. The range and diversity of social characteristics contributing to a structured coherence is emphasized by David Harvey's (1985) classic definition:

"At the heart of that coherence lies a particular technological mix - understood not simply as hardware but also as organizational forms - and a dominant set of social relations. Together these define models of consumption as well as the labor process. The coherence embraces the standard of living, the qualities and style of life, work satisfactions (or lack thereof), social hierarchies (authority structures in the workplace, status systems of consumption), and a whole set of sociological and psychological attitudes toward working, living, enjoying, entertaining and the like" (p140).

"Structured coherence" has also been used by Cloke and Goodwin (1992) in the context of rural UK, while Halfacree (2006) - as is expanded upon in Chapter Six - uses the term to denote a congruent relationship between the facets of rural space within his Lefebvre (1991[1971])-inspired "three-fold architecture". Bancroft and North Hastings - it is argued - exhibited a "coherent" regional form based upon forestry and mining economies, state regulation and prevailing social norms, in the second half of the twentieth century. The decline of this socio-economic space has allowed fresh opportunities for capital accumulation, while posing questions about the role of regulation in the contemporary regional economy.

1.8. Urban Development Trajectories Under Capitalism

The concept of “development trajectory”, used throughout the dissertation, is taken from Martinelli, Moulaert and Novy’s “DEMOLOGOS methodology for analysing urban and regional trajectories” (2013). Jessop has been closely involved with developing this approach, which builds on many of his foundational concepts. For the authors, an “ASID” (Agency, Structure, Institutions and Discourse) analysis of a given urban or regional space should take an inter-scalar approach, while also emphasizing distinctive place-bound features. In line with Jessop’s approach, described previously, a sub-national reading of regulation theory frequently guides analyses within this approach, while a normative orientation exists to assess governance arrangements in terms of fostering social inclusion and mitigating social polarization.

The methodology was developed for larger cities and regions; the book includes case studies of cities or sub-national regions from across the industrialized world (from London and Hong Kong to Southern Italy). The framework will be applicable to the development trajectory of a less populous “region” such as North Hastings; the case study of this dissertation also contains multi-scalar political dynamics and complex internal social and economic processes which have unfolded over a long period of time.

Martinelli et al. (2013) put forward a holistic framework, drawing from a wide range of social theories and methods. The DEMOLOGOS approach was developed to challenge dominant neoliberal approaches to the study of urban and regional development, in which conceptions of individual economic rationality - drawn from neoclassical economics - are instrumental. The phenomenon of uneven development, therefore, is not merely understood as a product of the differing success of localities’ strategic agency but as a complex outcome of capitalist dynamics, shaped by the state and “bottom up” forces. Decision-making emerges from specific contexts, not least the region’s own history. The authors characterize development as:

“an evolutionary process, i.e. largely path-dependent, although ‘creative destruction’ and innovative dynamics can contribute to change courses through conscious or unconscious path-shaping” (Martinelli et al. 2013 p12).

An overarching “story” - a necessary simplifying of complex social reality into a coherent narrative - of development should be produced which uses the methodological framework to emphasize valuable analytical inputs and identify significant context-specific features. The authors offer the following guidance for constructing stories:

“Stories must ‘name’ actors (individuals, groups, parties, etc.) and institutions, instead of just mentioning abstract bearers of social transformation; they must refer to behavioural motives, but contextualize them in specific regulatory dynamics and governance institutions” (Martinelli et al. 2013 p58).

Comparability to other DEMOLOGOS case studies is encouraged by adhering to methodological anchors. The authors encourage researchers to centre studies around a key theme (in my case: political tensions around Bancroft’s status as regional hub), feature a privileged entry point in terms of scale (the lower-tier municipal level within the county government and beneath the Province), and contain supplementary “thematic synthesis” to support the dominant ASID thematic (in the case of this dissertation “RRG – regulation, reproduction and governance” and “DPPF – development, past, present, future”).

The DEMOLOGOS approach recommends identifying particular “moments” within the given trajectory. “Turning moments”, “Conjunctural moments”, “Structural moments” and “Emblematic moments” are notable historic junctures which signify major shifts or continuities in “periods” of development (Martinelli et al. 2013 p53). These are highlighted in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

1.9. Theories of The Local State

Theoretical literature on the local state seeks to establish the location of power, assess the efficacy of state forms, and differentiate between idealized and actually-existing functions of governing institutions. In terms of the methodological underpinnings of this dissertation, deeper engagement with the *horizontal* and *vertical* dimensions of local states - how jurisdictions relate to their neighbours, and to the hierarchical structures in which they operate - and their function - as vessels of local democracy or for capital accumulation - are important considerations in assessing actors' structured agency.

Regarding the function of the local state, Cockburn's (1977) early use of the concept frames it as an instrument of the national state's overarching capital accumulation objectives. Leitner (1990), meanwhile, identifies growth-oriented entrepreneurialism as a notable emerging tendency in urban governments across the United States at the turn of the 1990s.

Magnusson (2015), on the other hand, seeks to reassert the local democratic function of the local state. He suggests that a conventional view of a, "locality organizing itself politically, exercising state power, and struggling for recognition as a distinct polity with its own government" (Magnusson 2015 p109), must supplement commonly proposed economistic theorizations of the local state as an instrument of class domination or a simple provider of indivisible "public economy" goods and services. Magnusson (2015) points out that, within his conception, the term "local state" is not synonymous with the local government in the form of the municipality. The municipality is just "one set of public agencies among many at the local level" (p88) and important, locally significant governmental functions in Canada like education and healthcare are non-municipal.

Kirby (1993) also seeks to centre local autonomy, arguing the the local state represents "resistance" to centralized power. For Kirby, the local state is frequently

captured by both local “growth machine” (Logan and Molotch 2007[1987]) actors and groups from civil society seeking to claim “use values”. This status, “both within and beyond the state” (Kirby 1993 p103) reflects the local state’s historical situatedness; it can be seen as an institutional remanent of local autonomy as power has been “displaced upwards” under large-scale bureaucratic capitalism.

Hierarchical “vertical” state relationships are central to Kirby’s analysis. Kirby urges the local state’s purported “weaknesses” to be viewed in more complex terms; benefits as well as dis-benefits flow from uneven inter-state relationships. Kirby writes:

“the complexity of relations within and between local units dictates that there is a very predictable relation between the state and local states...the state apparatus must try to maintain order out of chaos by setting narrow standards of control wherever possible” (idid p95).

This perspective identifies scope for local empowerment between neighbourly and networked localities, though it is noted that this is rarely in the interests of higher levels of the state apparatus. Similarly, Magnusson (2015), warns against the ideological reification of the municipality as a subordinate entity in the Canadian context, arguing that it denies the invaluable connection to the politics of everyday life present in local governments. While Magnusson strongly advocates a central role for “local self-government” in political structures, overlapping layers of jurisdiction - where shared responsibilities are concerned - are not necessarily viewed in negative terms.

The horizontal “form” of local states profoundly affects local democracy, governance actors’ strategic agency, and vertical inter-state relationships. Glass (2018) revisits the conflict between the normative frameworks of “public choice” (after Tiebout 1956) - in which local government fragmentation is argued to facilitate communities’ ability to tailor local service provision and planning agendas to their own needs - and “regionalism” - in which a coordinated overview of regional development is favoured. While criticizing the public choice perspective for enabling elite secession, Glass also identifies its inherent potential for fostering direct form of democracy, invoking Lefebvre’s (1991[1971]) ideal of self-produced political spaces based on lived reality of

citizens. Governance approaches from both a public choice and a regionalist perspective are prone to capture by stakeholders who are primarily interested in economic growth. While Glass offers an even-handed analysis of the relative merits of the public choice and regionalist perspectives, he calls for attention to social reality, over merely administrative considerations, in both cases. In Bancroft - a local hub for forestry and a regional rural recreation base - the “patterns of life” exist on various scales, suggesting complexities regarding the issue of political fragmentation across space in this context.

1.10. Research Questions

The following Research Questions - derived from initial observations and curiosities about the chosen case, as well as provocations from the academic literature - guided the research process from the outset. All the Research Questions seek, to varying degrees, both empirical knowledge about specific phenomena in the chosen case study area and more generalizable insights or theories regarding the overarching concerns of the research (structure-agency relationships, uneven development, epistemologies of “the urban” and “the rural”).

Research question one - containing terminology explicated in the literature review - addresses the institutions of governance and their relationship with social and economic change. “Governance”, for the purposes of this dissertation, includes broadly - in accordance with McCann’s (2016) definition - “the state, other public and private institutions, social movements, civil society and the practices of everyday life” (p313), though a particular focus will lie on local municipal government actors.

How does the structured agency of local governance actors shape the Bancroft-centred region’s development trajectory?

The methods available will sharpen the focus of the response towards the present day, though historical research and induction will help incorporate the full history of Bancroft and North Hastings since settlement into the analysis (See methodology section in Chapter Two). A second, strongly related, research question is concerned with the possibilities and limits of local political agency in steering economic restructuring processes and managing social inclusion:

Why is uneven development evident between political jurisdictions in the Central Ontario Lakelands?

This question addresses the Bancroft-centred region's specific challenges in achieving inclusive economic development. While the research is not comparative in nature, the outlying features of the case study will be useful in developing a response to this question.

A third research question is as follows:

How should the concepts “urban” and “rural” be used to most accurately describe the dynamics of change in this space?

The research question aims to engage on a conceptual level with theoretical debates on the epistemological basis of the concepts. Commonly understood notions of the “urban” and the “rural” - often reified both in everyday use and in the practice of governance - are frequently challenged by the political, economic and social processes exhibited by the case study, and these assumptions will be interrogated throughout the dissertation. With reference to the literature on this topic, an account of the active social process that might be captured by these terms, in the case study area, is developed as the dissertation proceeds. The response to this research question, given the diffuse usage of the terms in a variety of contexts, is anchored by the terms of inquiry of the research project; a social scientific study centred on political and economic structures and processes.

The next chapter will explain the methods used to answer the research questions and engage with the concepts and debates from the literature featured in the preceding reviews. Before this, an introductory profile of Bancroft and North Hastings will make clearer the characteristics that make the town and region an interesting and valuable case study with regard to better understanding the governance of rural restructuring in Ontario.

Chapter Two - Researching Bancroft and North Hastings: Details of the Case Study and Methodology

2.1. Introduction

This dissertation examines the practice of local governance in relation to social and economic change in a distinctive “rural” space: the Town of Bancroft, Ontario, and the surrounding municipalities of North Hastings County. Adjacent communities in Eastern Haliburton County - strongly integrated into a historic lumber economy - also feature in Chapter Six. This sub-region of Central Ontario will, henceforth, generally be described as a “region” for simplicity’s sake, though the municipalities’ historic interdependence, and shared social and economic features, justify use of the term.

In the opening sections of this chapter, a profile of the case study area will be put forward, beginning with details about Bancroft and North Hastings’ economic identity and historic development (2.2). Second, a basic outline of the system of municipal government, as it operates in the case study area, will be presented (2.3). Third, a summary of recent media reports on Bancroft and North Hastings will highlight how the region represents a distinctive case study with regard to economic restructuring tensions in the present day (2.4). Then, the rationale for the case study approach and the choice of case with regard to the goals of the dissertation, will be explained in Section 2.5. Section 2.6 and 2.7 will describe the methods used to conduct the research, before Section 2.8 breaks down the chapters of the dissertation by theme.

2.2. A Profile of Bancroft and North Hastings: Local Economy

In Ontario, the term “cottage country” - frequently ascribed to Bancroft and North Hastings - is used to describe a large region outside of the province’s major cities, which attracts predominantly lake-based recreation and second home ownership. Typically, the sparsely populated landscape of cottage country is

characterized by forests, lakes and low, rocky hills, as shaped by the underlying geological formation of the Canadian Shield, which contrasts with the open fields and densely settled lands of the southern and southwestern extremities of the province.

The region possesses a “near mythic” (Lister and Luka 2012 p170) status in the psyche of middle and upper class sections of Ontarian settler society, as a place to escape from the stresses of the city. Over the latter decades of the twentieth century - during which Toronto, Ottawa and their suburbs experienced significant growth - the modest recreational cabins of a burgeoning post-war middle class have frequently been replaced by “super cottages” and even condominium developments in population centres and on desirable lakes (Sherman 2018). Centering the region’s recreational functionality for city dwellers, however, the “cottage country” concept obscures a diversity of economic currents throughout its history.

Lister and Luka (2012) describe the “Central Ontario Lakelands” as a “liminal space, always becoming something else” (p181), and this is certainly true of Bancroft and North Hastings. Forestry has been the region’s most consistent economic base, and was present in the area before permanent settlement by European colonizers in the mid-nineteenth century (Reynolds 1979, Lyons 2012, Cameron n.d.). In recent decades, the local forest-based economy has suffered from the closure of major sawmills, and forest product manufacturing companies. Nevertheless, a Hastings County report identifies the particularly strong “location quotient” of forestry, reflecting a high level of specialization in the industry compared to Canada as a whole (Hastings County 2020).

In the late nineteenth century, North Hastings experienced a wave of prospecting and mining for various minerals. Following a particularly frenzied wave of speculation, the Bancroft area - in the mid-twentieth century - then became one of Canada’s major sites for uranium extraction, initially supplying the USA with raw materials for nuclear weapons at the height of the Cold War (Proulx 1997). Four local mines, operational in the late 1950s and early 1960s, provided a major boost to the local economy, transforming the town and ushering in growth and development. The

eventual closure of the mines, concluding with the cessation of production at Madawaska Mine in 1982, generated economic and social distress, and a legacy of environmental issues (Proulx 1997).

A shift towards an increasing reliance on services and tourism, typical of communities in the “cottage country” region, has, to a limited extent, compensated for the withdrawal of mining and decline of forestry. Recently, a reported change in Ontarians’ lifestyle preferences since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a wave of rural in-migration (Andrew-Gee and Bula 2020, Ingram 2020, Kalinowski 2020, Haider and Moranis 2021). New demand for the spacious surroundings and access to nature offered by small towns, helped Bancroft achieve the status of “Best Place to Buy Real Estate in Canada” in 2021 according to investment consulting website moneysense.ca (based upon a metric which aggregates expected returns on investment over 1, 3 and 5 years) (Zoocasa 2021).

Despite evidence of increased appeal to moneyed sections of Ontario society, the 2021 Canadian Census revealed low median household incomes across all census divisions in North Hastings County. This is particularly true of its hub settlement; Bancroft’s median household income, despite rising since the last census, remains very low within Ontario at \$57,200. The neighbouring Hastings Highlands and Faraday municipalities’ median household incomes, meanwhile, stand at \$69,000 and \$64,000 respectively. Nearby Dysart et al. (Haliburton Village and surrounding areas) is wealthier at \$78,000, while Bracebridge, in the District of Muskoka, is richer still at \$85,000. Median household income is significantly lower than Hastings County on the whole (\$75,000), the City of Toronto (\$84,000) and Ontario in general (\$91,000) (Government of Canada 2022).

2.3. A Profile of Bancroft and North Hastings: Local Government

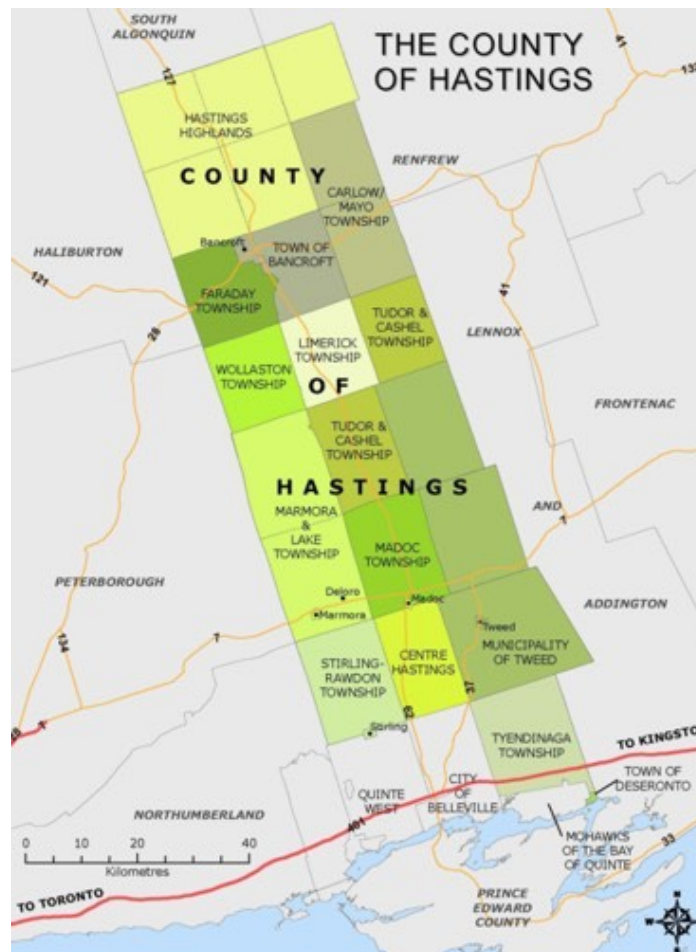


Figure 2: Map of Hastings County (hastingscounty.com)

The seven lower-tier municipalities of North Hastings County - the Town of Bancroft, Hastings Highlands, Faraday Township, Carlow/Mayo Township, Wollaston Township, Limerick Township and Tudor and Cashel Township - constitute a locally significant collective, based on common physical, cultural and economic characteristics. The six “Townships”, which surround the “Town” of Bancroft rely on the hub for services and retail functions. North Hastings is not, however, politically unified in any significant formal sense. The seven lower-tier municipalities are regional residents’ immediate local government, operating beneath the upper-tier Municipality of Hastings County.



Figure 3: Bancroft Municipal Office (Photograph by Author)

The Municipal Act of 2001 is the statute presently determining municipal powers in Ontario; it is the latest iteration of a series of legislative acts passed to empower local governments since the Baldwin Act of 1849. Within the context of an Ontario “county” (as opposed to another unit of regional governance such as a “district”, for example) lower-tier municipalities typically have the following responsibilities: developing Official Plans (though they must be approved by the upper-tier), making local planning decisions, managing water and wastewater systems, storm sewers, fire services, library services, animal services, municipal law enforcement, parks and recreation, arts and culture, economic development and tax collection (*Ontario Municipalities n.d.*).

While the lower-tier will demonstrate a strong concern for economic development throughout this dissertation, there is no formal Economic Development Officer or department at Bancroft, or any other lower-tier North Hastings Municipalities. Similarly, formal roles in arts and culture are absent from these particular lower-tier

municipal governments. Lower-tier Municipalities are largely funded by property taxes, which are supplemented by intergovernmental transfers, and local user fees and fines (see Chapter Seven for more details on municipal revenues).

Healthcare, social services, arterial roads and county-wide patterns of land use are governed by the upper-tier “county” (*Ontario Municipalities* n.d.). As a sub-division of political space, counties are a colonial inheritance. The Rural Ontario Institute (2017) identifies a valuable coherence to the county as a political structure, since they;

“remain useful aggregations of local governments that can be used for economic development purposes, because they are still fairly homogeneous internally” (p14).

A warden is chosen by the fourteen member municipalities of Hasting County to lead council. The warden represents the county within the Eastern Ontario Warden’s Caucus and in other external political arenas. County government is based in the City of Belleville, but operation of the City itself is “separated” from Hastings County, as are the local governments of the City of Quinte West and the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory.

2.4. A Profile of Bancroft and North Hastings: Bancroft in the News



Figure 4: Hastings Street, Downtown Bancroft (Photograph by Author)



Figure 5: Station Street, Downtown Bancroft (Photograph by Author)

For a small town, not widely known outside of its immediate vicinity, Bancroft has attracted notable media attention recently (which contributed significantly to its selection as case study for this research). The Town of Bancroft made the news in the late 2010s regarding a fiscal crisis which resulted from the mismanagement of water and wastewater infrastructure. In 2019, Huffington Post ran the story “Welcome To Bancroft, Ont. Where Residents Are Charged \$2,400 Water Bills”, detailing personal strife of residents and political dysfunction within the local government and the Province (Lum 2019). Direct community activism in response the crisis - with members of the local community taking to the streets and disrupting council meetings - was noteworthy in the usually politically tranquil environment of small town Ontario.

Also widely publicized - in the *Toronto Star* and by the CBC (Mills 2019, Riley 2020) - was a controversial planning decision made by Hastings County, as a rezoning application was approved to pave the way for development of a gravel quarry near a wellness retreat outside Bancroft. This story reflects the intensity of conflicts over economic restructuring in the local community. Freymond Lumber, the company proposing the quarry, promised that

“for the community it will provide over 50 years of jobs, taxes and levies and provide the county, township, residents and cottagers a local source of aggregate to reduce the cost of our infrastructure and construction projects” (Hendry 2019).

The “No Place for a Quarry” group opposed the decision, claiming that “tourism is the golden egg” and arguing that the development will impact county’s scenic driving routes, recreational trails and a popular yoga retreat located nearby (ibid). A majority of local governments in the county voted to approve the rezoning, contrasting with the vote of Bancroft’s own mayor, who had hoped to support the town’s growing wellness industry. Thus, recent media reports support the census data and real estate sales figures which indicate that Bancroft is a small town in transition, while also testifying to the contested nature of these social and economic shifts.

2.5. Case Study Research

The distinctive social, economic and political features of the Town of Bancroft and the wider North Hastings region, outlined in the preceding profile, are portrayed in depth in the chapters that follow. As is shown in this dissertation, the region is an interesting and fruitful case study through which to understand the relationship between local governance actors' agency and the structural circumstances they inhabit. Active tensions between the Town and the Province of Ontario, and evident challenges related to economic restructuring allow intergovernmental and intra-community relations to be clearly observed. With regard to conceptual questions on the "urban" and the "rural", the town offers an excellent representation of the changing Ontario countryside due to its significant heritage in forestry, while clearly possessing a growing recreational function and experiencing substantial in-migration pressures.

Restructuring tensions, rapidly rising property values and instances of political turbulence position Bancroft and North Hastings as an *outlier* of a case study choice "subject" (Thomas 2011) in the context of cottage country sub-regions. The subject, for Thomas (2011), "will be selected because it is an interesting or unusual or revealing example through which the lineaments of the object can be refracted" (p514).

To deploy Thomas' conceptual schema: the subject in the chosen case is the development trajectory of Bancroft and North Hastings County - as an example of a socially and economically "liminal" spatial unit - in both qualitative (the type of economic base and social structure) and quantitative (the "health" of the local economy and associated social dimensions) aspects. The object - as an "analytical frame within which the case is viewed and which the case exemplifies" (ibid p515) - is defined as follows:

The influence, on the given economic development trajectory, of the specific ways in which governance - as a contingent product of the historical-geography of Canadian as a settler colonial society - is organized. Particular horizontal and

vertical political structures, constellations of private and public actors and institutions, and specific discursive formations constitute the key dimensions of the mode of governance organization.

An “outlier” case choice, it is hoped, will “illuminate the object by virtue of its difference” (ibid p514). As a result, theories of more generally applicable patterns or principles for liminal political-economic spaces may be developed. For Thomas, “the development of theory, whether this be in ‘theory-testing’ or ‘theory-seeking,’ is central to the dynamic of the relation between subject and object in case study” (ibid p515). The proposed research is broadly “heuristic” according to Thomas’ schema in that it takes an exploratory approach and “seeks new causal paths” (p515), while engaging with, and seeking to develop, existing theories from appropriate literature areas.

2.6. Methods: Interviews

Interview Process

While not exhaustive of my conceptualization of “local governance”, a key objective was to recruit as many interview participants from within lower-tier local government as possible, to understand institutional characteristics of municipal government with regard to the “structured agency” shaping social and economic change in the region. The lower-tier local government is the chosen “scalar point of entry” with regard to Martinelli et al’s (2013) framework.

From the lower-tier local government, as many potential participants as possible - mayor, council, staff, advisors, technicians - were contacted for interview. It was important to recruit some participants with a long history in local politics, get a sense of change over time, and in order to understand key past events such as the municipal amalgamations of the millennial period, and the wastewater crisis (with roots dating back to the mid-2000s). Some veteran politicians recruited for interview, who were still active in governance circles, fulfilled this criteria.

Select participants from Hastings County government, related to planning, housing and economic development, as well as the warden and deputy warden, were contacted. Interviewees were sought from key local economic sectors: forestry, mining, real estate, retail, IT, tourism and recreation. Key figures in local charitable organizations, cottage associations, community groups and individuals who were knowledgeable in local history were contacted for participation.

Interviewees were recruited via publicly available email addresses or social media profiles. A snowball approach was carried out to recruiting participants. Interviewees were asked to recommend other participants, particularly regarding topics that had been discussed and would benefit from follow up. After completing a consent form, one-hour interviews were undertaken between Summer 2021 and late Spring 2022. The interviews took place over Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions. The conversations were recorded onto a personal laptop for transcription. 22 interviewees took part in total. Two Hastings County housing officials were interviewed together on the same Zoom call. In all other cases, individual interviews took place. The participants denoted as EDCT, MB and MA were interviewed twice. This was due to the fact that: a. they were influential actors with a lot to say about their role and the local community, and b. they were interviewed early in the process, so a repeat interview would enable the checking of facts and obtaining updates on fast-changing situations.

Via informed consent forms scripted by the researcher, interviewees were able to 1) consent to participation and, 2) waive anonymity. All participants cited in the dissertation consented to participation. A small number did not consent to waive anonymity. In these cases their name and job title is obscured and care has been taken to not include clearly identifying information in chosen quotes. Clear information on the storage of audio data and transcripts was outlined in the consent forms, and it was stated that data would be deleted by May 2027.

A detailed script of interview questions was drawn up for each interviewee. Interviews were then conducted in a semi-structured manner, with room to follow up

spontaneous directions that developed. The hope was that a wide selection of data would help create a multifaceted and in-depth study, while also allowing for flexibility of approach should data be insubstantial in particular areas (particularly owing to the small size of the community).

Question Design

The main objective in the interview process was to understand facts about local governance, and information about the local community with regard to economic change. Subjective data about participants' subjective feelings was gathered to add "colour" to accounts of particular dynamics, situations, events or relationships. "Concept-informed" questions, questions regarding "institutions and structures of governance", and questions concerned with "intriguing local stories" made up the majority of the interview scripts, which were written up individually for each participant.

With regard to the former - "concept-informed" questions - the objective was to develop an understanding of the following concepts in the local context:

- Key discourses, and their point of origin.
- Key projects, time horizons, their "class orientation" and their relationship with institutional structures (Jessop 2001).
- Significant "moments", how these relate to each other within coherent "periods" (Martinelli et al. 2013).
- Path-dependencies and path-shaping processes (Jessop 2001, Martinelli et al. 2013) in local governance history.
- Mode of regulation of patterns of capital accumulation. In a wider sense - also factoring in modes of societal behaviour - how was the structured coherence of the past maintained?

- Which top-down or bottom-up forces drive development? How do alternative development agendas relate to dominant forms of power?

Related to questions concerning “uneven development”, questions were drafted with consideration for the following issues:

- What evidence is there of processes of disinvestment and/or recapitalization?
- How do private capitalist interests and the state interact within these processes?
- How do state actors reflect particular kinds of “structured agency”?
- With regard to housing development, real estate market dynamics, and patterns of in-migration observed in the research, how do production-side forces (Smith 1979) relate to changing “consumption” preferences (Ley 1986, Caulfield 1994)?
- How is Bancroft and North Hastings articulated into relations of dependency or exploitation with other places? At which scale are these relations determined? This may have relevance for economies such as mining, forestry or real estate development.

Concerning the concepts “urban” and “rural”, questions sought to elicit responses that clarified how the concepts are used and understood by actors, details about particular “rural” or “urban” economies throughout local history, and how participants identify with the terms regarding their own identities and personal history. More generally, an important objective in developing questions was to understand participants’ personal history in the area and their conceptualization of the “place-based” characteristics of Bancroft and North Hastings.

The second main approach to developing research questions - particularly relevant with regard to local government interviewees - sought to clarify arrangements regarding the institutions and structures of local politics:

- Which organizations - private, public, non-profit etc - are influential in the local landscape? What are the social and economic conditions shaping their actions?

- How effective are local democratic structures in relation to provincial or federal directives? What are the scales that the significant actions are made at and what types of rescaling that might be at work?
- What interactions exist between actors in study and those beyond its edges (remaining reflexively engaged with presumptions of relevant scales and arenas of action)?
- What is the relationship of local democratic institutions and private capital?
- Is there a significant role for alternative modes of governance outside of official institutions? What channels do the local community have to exercise their democratic will? What agencies or spaces of interaction are missing in relation to goals of empowering and uniting community (after Magnusson 2015)?
- What can be understood about the historic foundations and lineage of local government institutions, with consideration of their settler colonial origins?

As a third approach, questions were developed regarding interesting local stories which were relevant to the themes of the dissertation. Questions on these stories sought to reveal participants' insights and opinions. Stories include: the Grail Springs vs Freymond dispute, the water and wastewater crisis, and the historic uranium industry and its legacy. Questions were drafted to consider other major narratives that may be perceived to be shaping the parameters of action (e.g. COVID-19, neoliberalism, deindustrialization, urbanization, environmental change) when appropriate.

List of Interviewees

I am greatly appreciative for the following participants' time and their valuable insights. The following abbreviations for participants (listed in the order they were interviewed) will be used throughout the dissertation:

EDCT = Executive Director NHCT

MB = Mayor of Bancroft

EDTM = Economic and Tourism Development Manger Hastings County

MA = Municipal Advisor

DMFM = Deputy Mayor and Former Mayor

PE = Politics Expert

FM = Former Mayor

RC = Realtor and Councillor

BMFM = Bancroft Minden Forest Manager

GM = Town of Bancroft General Manager

EE = Economic Expert

TPA = Town Water and Wastewater Technician and Policy Advisor

RE = Real Estate Expert

CH1 = County Housing Official 1

CH2 = County Housing Official 2

ITBIA = IT Professional and BIA member

AHB = Affordable Housing Builder

DGMLH = Daughter of Grenville Martin and Local History Expert

ACB = Arts and Crafts Businessperson

LB = LandEscapes Businessman

MM = Former Marketing Manager Hastings County

CRD = Canwel Regional Director

Influential figures from the mining industry were not available for interview; the heyday of mining was too long ago and many relevant actors have left. Several interviewees, recruited for other reasons, had useful memories of that era.

Unfortunately, potential participants from Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation, Freymond Lumber, Grail Springs/No Place for a Quarry, cottage association representatives, the Mayor of Hastings Highlands (as the other most populous Municipality in North Hastings) and Hastings County's Chief Planner, Warden and Deputy Warden were unavailable.

After transcription of interviews, key quotes were selected and organized by theme. The emerging groups of themes, to a significant extent, formed the basis of the eventual chapters of this dissertation. From there, the process of writing involved synthesizing the interview data sources those derived from document analysis, as will be described in the following section. An iterative process developed in which the main structural features of the case became identifiable and could be analyzed in relation to the key concepts described earlier in the literature review.

Highly satisfactory data saturation was achieved from interviews on topics concerning political leadership in Bancroft, with all but one of the Town's mayors since the late 1980s interviewed. Half of the council - and the Town's General Manager - who were serving during the period in which fieldwork was undertaken were spoken to. Clear narratives and discourses emerged from interviews with mayor and council which were not contradicted as the process proceeded, producing a satisfactory evidence base for arguments made about local government. A similarly strong evidence base is provided for arguments about economic development at the county, with all relevant actors who were available during the research period having been interviewed. Chapters in the dissertation about the forestry industry were evidenced by data provided by four key interviewees, backed up and verified by a review of documents published by forest management companies, the province, the county and local historians. Arguments about real estate trends were derived from two interviewees, and were corroborated by objectively verifiable published data and news sources.

Care has been taken in the presentation and discussion of quotes to distinguish quotes which contribute to well-corroborated arguments from individual subjective opinions. Interview data in general frequently reflects a snapshot of attitudes in late 2021 and early 2022 and some situations have evolved subsequently.

2.7. Methods: Document Analysis

The following kinds of documents provided excellent information sources for my research questions. Many of the question themes outlined in Section 2.6. were also relevant to the finding of information within these documents.

Local Histories and Academic Research

Recent history - i.e. the period of time accessible to present-day interviewees' experience - was necessarily in sharpest focus within the data gathered. As the research required understanding of the legacy of historical political structures and economic conditions, available historical texts - describing the period of time since settlement - were drawn upon significantly. Many locally-published records, while not always academic in tone, provided an excellent resource to begin understanding the contours of political, social and economic change. These include:

Boyce, G. E. (1967). *Historic Hastings*. Ontario Intelligencer.

French, O., & French, S. (2003). *North of 7 - and proud of it!: A parade of memories from North Hastings*. Bancroft Heritage Book Committee.

Reynolds, N. (1979). *Bancroft, a Bonanza of Memories*. Bancroft Centennial Committee.

Lyons, B. (2012). *Touring the past: A Guide to Old Mines, Ghost Towns and Historic Sites of North Hastings*. Kirby Books.

Cotton, L. D. (2019). *Whiskey & Wickedness – Hastings County North Gold Rush & Ghost Towns*. Larry D. Cotton Associates Limited.

Academic work with a local focus, where available, was invaluable, including:

Proulx, M. (1997) *The Uranium Mining Industry of the Bancroft Area: an Environmental History and Heritage Assessment*. National Library of Canada
(Master's Thesis)

Cameron, W. (n.d.) Nature Ignored: Promoting Agricultural Settlement in the Ottawa Huron Tract of Canada West/Ontario in the Confederation Era. NICHE. retrieved from: <https://niche-canada.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/DoN-1st-drafts-compiled-2-2014-06-27.pdf>

The resources listed in this section were particularly valuable in formulating responses to questions surrounding the concepts “urban” and “rural”. The historic development of agriculture, forestry and mining are fairly well documented within the above-mentioned records and provided material which could be interpreted through the Lefebvre-inspired conceptual framework outlined previously. Understanding the settler colonial origins of local institutions was a research objective which was also significantly aided by these resources.

Publications by Public and Private Organizations

The following material - plans, reports, studies - published from a variety of broadly-defined governance institutions was invaluable in understanding a range of analytical objectives of the research: from the financial, technical and political constraints of local government, to patterns of social and economic change, to dominant institutional discourses. These publications were found online or sent directly via email by interview participants.

Bancroft Minden Forest (2021) *Socio Economic Description*

Building Bancroft (2010) *Business Opportunity Assessment Residential Analysis*

Hastings County (2014a) *Opening the Right Door: A Ten Year Plan to Address Housing and Homelessness Issues in Hastings County*

Hastings County (2014b) *Communities with Opportunities*

Hastings County (2017) *Official Plan*

Hastings County (2020) *Wildly Authentic*

Hastings County (2021) *Homeless Enumeration Report*

Hastings County (2021) *Summary of 2021 Municipal Interviews & SMART Goals*

North Hastings Community Trust (2017) *Water Rates Town Hall Report*

North Hastings Community Trust (2019) *Water and Wastewater in Bancroft*

North Hastings Community Trust (2022) *Our Trusty Newsletter Issue 2*

OREA (2021) *Small Towns, Big Opportunities Unlocking Growth in Ontario's Rural and Northern Communities* https://www.orea.com/~media/Files/Downloads/OREA_WhitePaper_Small-Towns-Big-Opportunities

Town of Bancroft (2018) *Bancroft Waste Water Treatment Plant: Provincial Financial Support Justification Study*

Town of Bancroft (2019) *Making Our Future* <https://bancroft.civicweb.net/document/102834/>

Council Minutes and Public Comments

A thorough review of the available records of the Town of Bancroft and Hastings County aided the understanding of economic conditions, political processes and strategic directions of local governments.

Censuses

Censuses since 1951 were reviewed for quantitative data on population change, residential structures and income.

Visits to Archives, Museums and Other

A visit to the Archives of Hastings County in Belleville to review local government records helped me develop a sense of historic issues for small local governments. Unfortunately, records from the Town of Bancroft itself were absent from this archive. I visited North Hastings Heritage Museum, which offered a portrayal of the lifestyle of early settlers. As a resident of nearby Haliburton Village, informal personal conversations with locals about issues relevant to the dissertation - economic change, migration, local political systems and infrastructures - also informed aspects of the analysis herein.

2.8. Themes of the Dissertation by Chapter

The dissertation argues that municipal spaces Bancroft and North Hasting have experienced intensified *urban* transformations along political and economic axes in the Twenty-First Century. Set against the amplified political and economic dynamics inherent to municipal spaces, however, a struggling rural culture endures, sustained in significant ways by provincial regulatory measures. The contingent institutions of government serve to exacerbate local inequalities - strongly related to the growing rural-urban disjuncture - through their influence on the structured agency of key actors.

This argument will be advanced across the six main chapters of the dissertation, based on the empirical research methods outline above, which focus on the following topics:

- **Chapter Three** explores a population upswing evident in the last five years, through examination of recent census information. The phenomenon of in-migration is discussed in relation to wider economic and demographic processes and the strategic agency of local political actors. The exacerbation of the issues of homelessness and displacement is described. It is argued that the conditions for a “rent gap” (Smith 1979) existed in a previously economically and demographically stagnant region, which in recent years has been in the process of being “closed”.
- **Chapter Four** takes a wider look at the changing space of North Hastings County since the beginning of the Twenty-First Century. The reintroduction of the practice of economic development at the county level is the central focus. A wide network of actors and discursive currents are identified which have influenced this increasingly significant aspect of local governance. Developing a deeper explanation of the population growth described in Chapter Three, it is proposed that the ostensibly rural space of Bancroft and North Hastings is being radically transformed under the influence of the internet and prevailing approaches to economic development reflect this.
- **Chapter Five** explores the period from early settlement until the uranium boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s. A synopsis of the ongoing Algonquin land claim reveals the historical contingency of local state formations and addresses the implications of this process for future governance arrangements. “Urbanization” processes are described, across the first one hundred years of settlement, over which Bancroft consolidated its status as a regional centre. The development of an enduring disconnect between the political structures of the North Hastings region and the social and economic patterns of life is identified.

- **Chapter Six** examines North Hastings and Eastern Haliburton Counties' main industries of the post-war period - uranium mining and forestry - through the concept of a "structured coherence". The processes by which this coherent social and economic form has unravelled towards a more "chaotic" present day economy are described.
- **Chapter Seven** centres upon the politics surrounding water and wastewater systems in the Town of Bancroft. The development and management of water systems under the Fordist-Keynesianism mode of regulation and under the subsequent neoliberal revolution is described. The fiscal crisis at the Town of Bancroft in the late 2010s - precipitated by the upgrades to Bancroft's water and waste water system - provides a basis to analyze municipal-provincial dynamics and understand divergent currents within local politics.
- **Chapter Eight** focusses on the shift in recent years towards an entrepreneurial mode of governance at the level of the lower-tier municipality. The contradictory status of housing as an object of governance - precipitating an acute social emergency for a growing low income population, while being a lucrative revenue stream for local government actors - is explored in relation to the structural characteristics and agential capacity of the lower-tier municipality.

The conclusion - Chapter Nine - revisits the research questions set out in Chapter One. Here, I present a complete exposition of my findings in the terms provided by the guiding conceptual frameworks. Finally, I revisit the topic of a "structured coherence" in Bancroft and North Hastings, engaging with the hypothetical question of the future viability of such a formation.

Chapter Three - Lights on the Lake in Winter: A Snapshot of In-migration and Gentrification in Post-COVID-19 Cottage Country

Last year someone on the lakes said “in November and December, you could look down the lakes and see lights on the lake properties you only saw in the summer time”. People are coming out and living out the COVID time, the period of time they were isolating, they were doing it in their cottages. It certainly helps the local economy when you see that happening. FM

Bancroft seems to be the Muskokas now, like the Muskokas used to be. Sometimes that’s good, sometimes that’s not. Our traffic this summer was the worst we’ve ever seen it. DMFM

3.1. Introduction

Figure 6 (below), drawn from Canadian censuses, represents population growth in North Hastings County, and in Hastings County as a whole, since 1996.

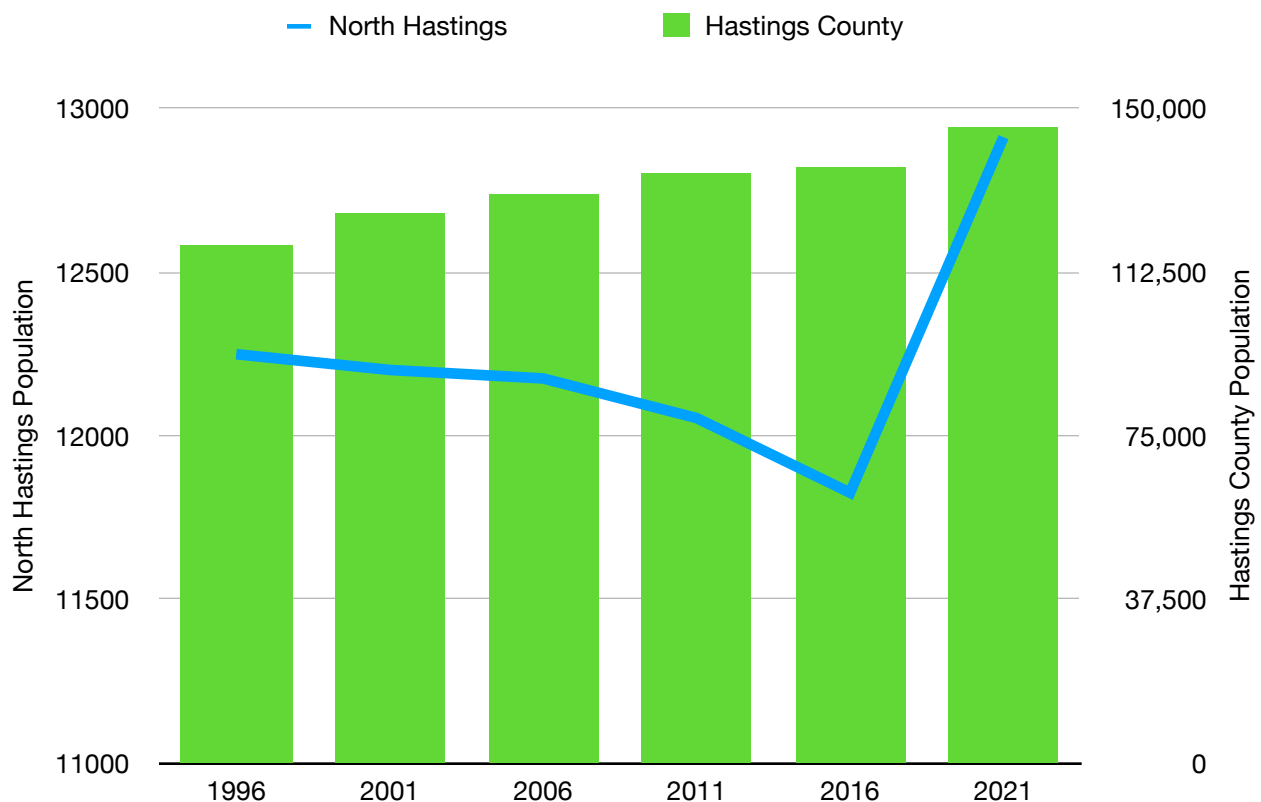


Figure 6: Population Growth in North Hastings County (Government of Canada 2022)

The primary goal of this chapter is to contextualize a small part of this history: the upswing in population evident since 2016, and the related changes to North Hastings life described in the introductory quotes. Via a description of the demographic features of in-migration in this period and a review of the factors shaping these trends, I argue that the population increase represents a new, intensified integration for North Hastings into the regional space economy of Southern Ontario. While COVID-19 - interconnected with phenomena such as remote work and changing lifestyle preferences - is shown to be a major catalyst for demographic changes, a range of factors indicate that the beginnings of the repopulation and economic valourization of North Hastings County predates the pandemic by a number of years.

In Sections 3.2 and 3.3, I describe recent in-migration and housing development trends with reference to census and interview data, before a summary of the related issues of displacement and homelessness takes place in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 . Sections 3.6 to 3.10 discuss various influences upon recent population trends and in Section 3.12 Smith's (1979) theory of gentrification will be drawn upon to provide a deeper theorization of the transformations the region is undergoing.

Many of the phenomena discussed in this chapter are explored in an introductory manner, and are unpacked more fully in later chapters. Questions regarding the articulation of structure and agency - i.e. the efficacy of the in-migration strategies of local governance actors vis-a-vis wider structural factors - are only introduced tentatively in this chapter. A more focused elaboration of the concept of *structured agency* - how action is affected by the cultures of institutions, particular articulations of intergovernmental relations, and the regulation of capitalism at the local scale - follows in later chapters.

3.2. Quantitative Census Data on Population Change

The following 2021 Census categories describe important quantitative features of recent demographic change: population change in North Hastings census division

areas (in relation to trends across Ontario and Canada), occupancy rates of dwellings, age profiles, and median incomes. These all are dynamic features of the region's social and economic profile since 2016. Important metrics such as the number of immigrants and “speakers of non-official languages as a mother tongue” in North Hastings have not changed significantly, so are not discussed in this section. The latest census releases reflect data as of May 11th 2021, thus capturing the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as a period of around four years prior to the outbreak in Canada.

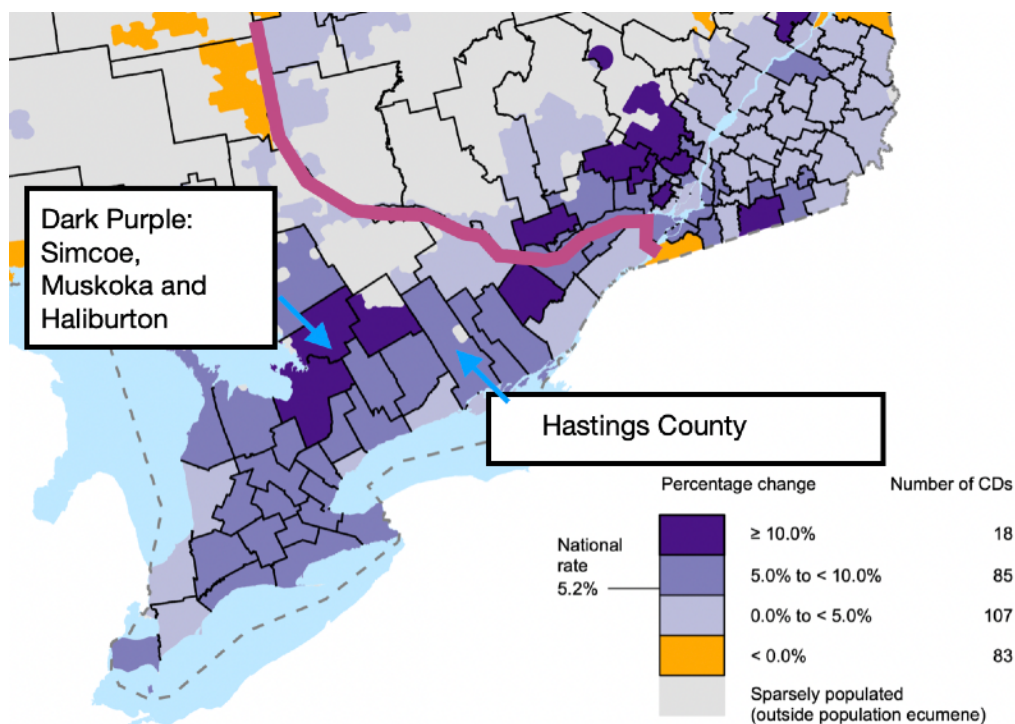


Figure 7: Population Growth in Central Canada (Government of Canada 2022)

1) North Hastings Population Trends

Figure 7, a StatCan image from the 2021 census, shows population change in Southern and Central Ontario, as well as Western and Southern parts of Quebec. This part of the country was featured by StatCan as a data product for its significance as population centre. At the given census division level (showing counties and upper-tier

regional municipalities) a dark purple colour code (representing StatCan's chosen highest level of growth: above 10 percent since the last census) is evident in Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka, Haliburton County and Lanark County. This high rate of growth is evident in only 18 of 293 census tracts nationwide.

The areas of highest growth rate share a common feature: all are outside of major conurbations. The popularity of these areas suggests they should be viewed as part of widely discussed counter-urbanization trend, driven by COVID-19, as city dwellers seek spacious and "green" surroundings (Andrew-Gee and Bula 2020, Ingram 2020, Kalinowski 2020, Haider and Moranis 2021). While Simcoe County is home to suburbanizing population centres - it has been described as the "Wild West" of Ontario development beyond the GTHA's greenbelt by the *Toronto Star* (*Sprawl Hits Above the Belt* 2007) - Haliburton is less developed, containing no settlements over 10,000 people and an absence of large scale infrastructure.

Hastings County, as a whole, demonstrates the second highest rate of growth in Statscan's schema. The North Hastings municipalities in isolation, however, exhibit a higher rate of growth (9.2 percent) than Hastings County (6.8 percent) and Canada as a whole (5.2 percent). Discounting Bancroft - at a 4.7 percent growth rate - North Hastings rate of growth is 11.4 percent, closer to the rate of neighbouring Haliburton County (13.9 percent), with which it shares many physical, social and economic features as a "cottage country" destination. While Bancroft has turned around the stagnant or declining population trend recorded in previous twenty-first century censuses, the surrounding municipalities have experienced repopulation at a nationally significant level. Since population growth occurs in relation to existing built environments, infrastructures and political resources, increases - while absolute numbers appear small - present significant challenges in a low population context.

	2016	2021	Percent Change
Hastings County	136,445	145,746	6.8
Bancroft	3881	4065	4.7
Tudor and Cashel	586	740	26.3
Limerick	346	436	26
Faraday	1401	1612	15.1
Carlow/Mayo	864	953	10.3
Hastings Highlands	4078	4385	7.5
Wollaston	670	721	7.6
Total North Hastings	11826	12912	9.2
North Hastings minus Bancroft	7945	8847	11.4

Figure 8: Population Growth by Municipality, North Hastings (Government of Canada 2022)

Figure 8 shows a breakdown of population growth in the period since the last census, by municipality. Other than Bancroft, all of North Hastings' municipalities are above Hastings County's overall rate of growth, with many smaller municipalities in the region showing dramatic percentage increases in population. This pertains to an important issue discussed throughout later sections of the dissertation: Bancroft's function as a service hub is being put under increasing pressure by demand from a growing number of regional residents.

An interviewee described a dramatic influx of remote workers to North Hastings in this period:

People are scattered and holed up all around Bancroft, trying to get work done. They'll go to the city maybe once a month as needed...Even though the town has grown two or three times the size in the last few years, add to that an extra 50,000 that are living on the fringes, add another 100 to 150,000 in the summer as tourists and then once you look at those dynamics, there's maybe 1000 businesses around here, there really is a need for more people up here with skilled trades like IT, like contracting all the rest of it. ITBIA

These unverified numbers point to a dramatically altered local politics and economy in the post-COVID period, potentially. The existence of “Zoom towns” (Sodja 2021) - new settlement patterns shaped by remote conferencing software - could have huge repercussions for local governance actors in small towns, with increasing numbers of residents residing outside the networked physical and social infrastructures of the traditional municipality. Chapter Six and Seven, in particular, explore further implications of this phenomenon.

2) Occupancy of Dwellings

	2006	2011	2016	2021
Total Private Dwellings	9355	8953	9616	9537
Total Private Dwellings occupied by usual residents	5161	5280	5316	5889
Percent of dwellings occupied	55.2	59	56	62

Figure 9: Private Dwellings In North Hastings County (Government of Canada 2022)

The long-term significance of seasonal residence in North Hastings is reflected by the consistently low level of occupancy of dwellings in the region. Figure 9 shows that more dwellings in North Hastings municipalities were in use than in the previous three censuses (this information was not available in the 2001 census). Therefore, an increase in occupancy of previously vacant dwellings has contributed to population intensification in the outlying rural areas of North Hastings in the early pandemic period.

An interesting feature of the table is a drop in the number of dwellings can be seen in 2011, which can be assumed to account for a rise in percentage occupancy in this period. By the next census in 2016, however, 663 new dwellings were counted in North Hastings. In an interview, Hastings County's Economic and Tourism Development Manager described how the number of dwellings across Hastings County had increased - according to the 2016 Census - while population dropped in the same period:

In the last Census the County dropped in population maybe just by about 200 or 300 people if you look at our fourteen member municipalities, but we had an increase of 1000 new dwellings...It's possible that those dwellings were cottages or lakefront properties that people were escaping the cities or weekend retreats. So that helps our tax base because - depending on what kind of dwellings - those are units for people that are building things, that are going to be taxed...So sometimes people get all up in arms and politicians see that and say "what's going on everybody's leaving?" then you look... actually building activity's gone up." ETDM

A wave of investment into the construction of new buildings in North Hastings - perhaps a spillover of personal capital from overheated urban economies (to expand upon ETDM's comments) - before they were more intensively occupied during the pandemic period may be apparent. This scenario points to the probability that trends recorded in the 2021 census are part of a longer-term process, one which cannot be limited to the pandemic-era. The renovation of North Hastings dwellings between 2011 and 2016 may have laid a foundation for the current moment of repopulation.

3) Age Profile

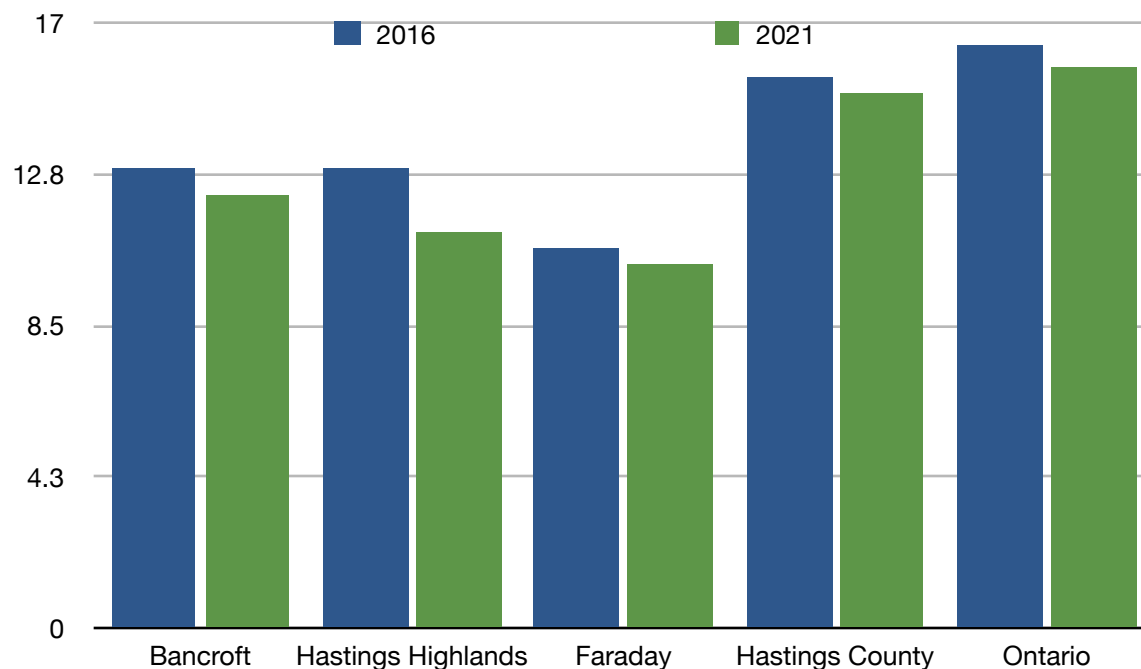


Figure 10: Percentage Of Population Aged 0-14 (Government of Canada 2022)

Figure 10, including data from Bancroft, Hastings Highlands and Faraday - the three largest North Hastings municipalities by population - shows that the number of children as a proportion of the overall population is significantly lower than Hastings County and Ontario. Following more general trends in the province, the number of 0-14 year olds has declined between 2016 and 2021, particularly in Hastings Highlands.

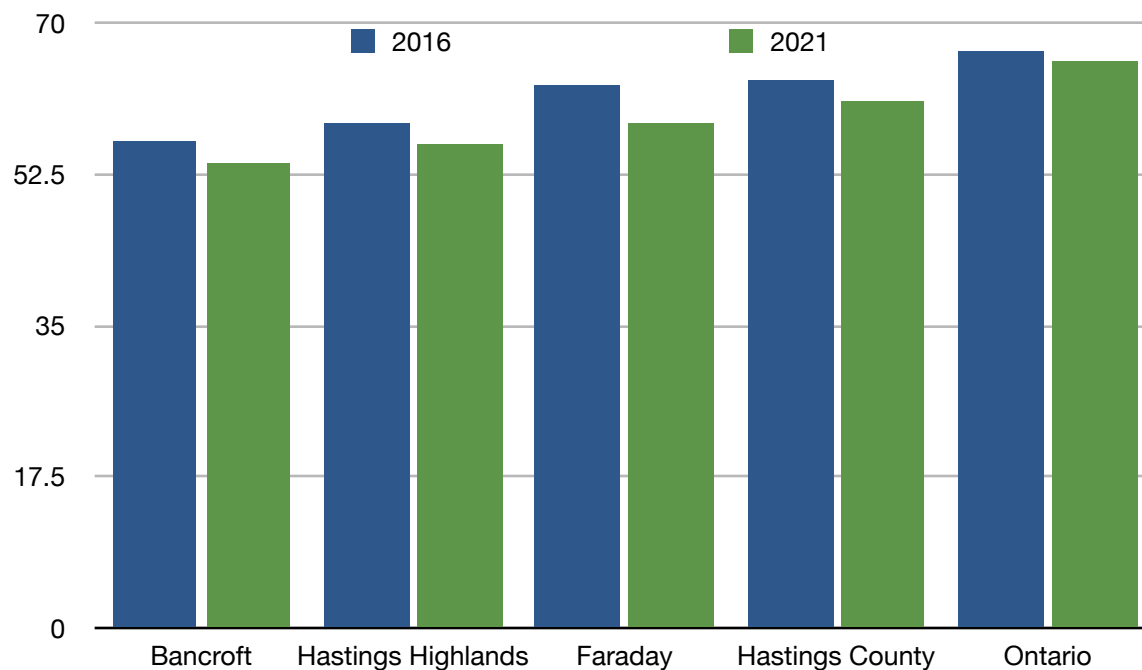


Figure 11: Percentage Of Population Aged 15-64 (Government of Canada 2022)

Figure 11 demonstrates that 15-64 year olds - older teenagers and economically active adults - constitute a smaller proportion of the population in North Hastings than in Hastings County and Ontario generally. This section of the population as a proportion of the whole, however, has declined in number at every census division level since 2016.



Figure 12: Percentage Of Population Aged 65+ (Government of Canada 2022)

Figure 12 shows that adults aged 65+ - traditional retirement age - are much more significant a demographic in North Hastings than in Hastings County and Ontario. Since 2016, the increase is significantly more pronounced than in larger census divisions. The natural aging of inhabitants not sufficient to account for the rise in numbers of adults aged 65 years and older, suggesting that in-migration of this age group to North Hastings is a notable phenomenon. Figure 13 also demonstrates a significant increase of the average age.

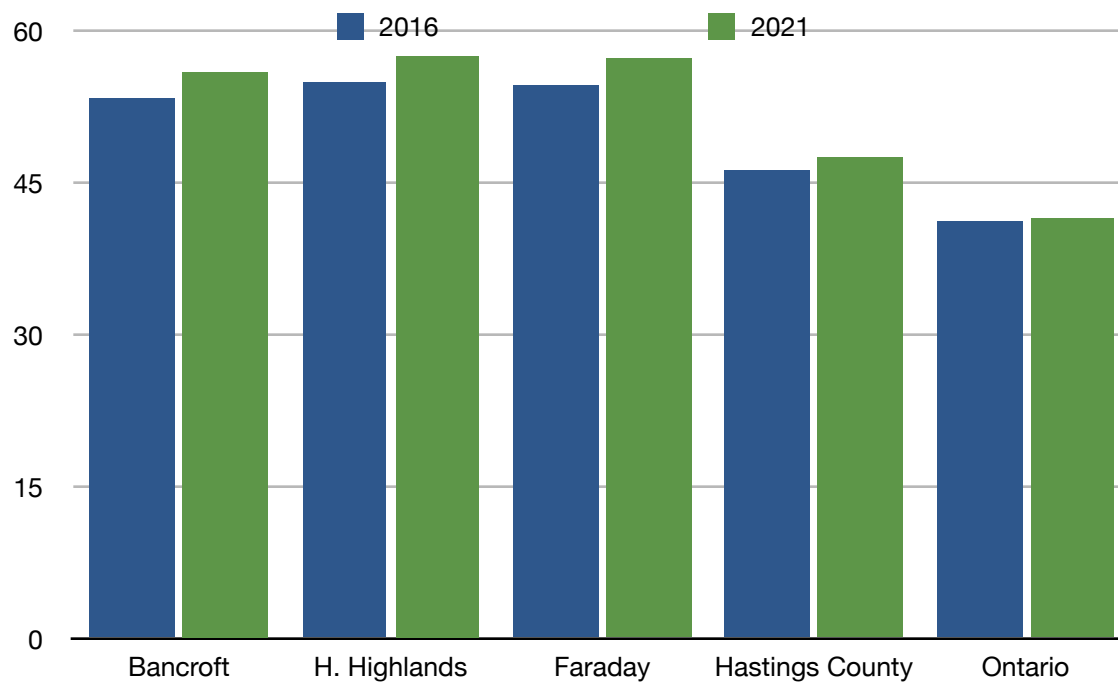


Figure 13: Median Age (Government of Canada 2022)

4) Median Incomes

	2016	2021	Percent Increase
Bancroft	46,336	57,200	23.4
Hastings Highlands	55,552	69,000	24.2
Faraday	53,632	64,000	19.3
Hastings County	61,109	75,000	22.7
Ontario	74,287	91,000	22.5
City of Toronto	65,829	84,000	27.6

Figure 14: Median Income (Government of Canada 2022)

Between the 2016 and 2021 censuses, Hastings Highlands and Bancroft's reported median income have grown at a faster rate than Ontario and Hastings County as a whole. It is likely that this statistic is boosted by the wealthier profile of in-migrants, as employment opportunities offered locally do not appear to have changed dramatically.¹ The growth in median income is lower in North Hastings than in the City of Toronto, however, suggesting - as is to be expected - that the central city is still an economic driver in the region. Hypothetically, North Hastings' growth in income may represent a manifestation of Toronto's economy, visible in the outlying municipalities of cottage country where residents have strong connections with the city.

3.3. Descriptions of Contemporary Development Trends

Parallel to the population growth evident in the Census data, interviewees reported unprecedented level of interest in real estate development in the region. This information is presented in order to paint a picture present-day economic opportunities for the Town of Bancroft, and suggest future possibilities regarding physical changes to the community. New development is not argued to be a major factor in driving presently observed population trends: at the time of writing, no development projects of any notable scale had been newly inhabited since the 2016 census.

Several housing development projects, however, were being seriously discussed or moving forward at the time of writing. The redevelopment of the old school downtown (108 units under construction by an Eganville, ON based developer) is closest to completion. A flagship library redevelopment project, the "North Hastings Inspiration Place" (see Chapter Eight) contains a proposed thirty units of affordable housing, while a site known as "Fountain Hill" will contain a mixed-use development close to downtown and this project is at the later stages of planning approval. A "Gardens" seniors' residence is coming to Bancroft, though the proposed location has changed, and there will be continuing construction of Guildcrest prefabricated houses

¹ COVID-era CERB payments from the federal government may complicate this metric.

on septic systems at Bancroft Ridge. The golf course on the north side of town has reportedly been purchased by owners who are interested in developing it for housing, providing a sewer trunk extension can be built to service the site.

While the optimistic tone of interviewee perspectives within local government may reflect an ongoing commitment to “selling the town”, new development opportunities are clearly arising. The Town of Bancroft’s General Manager claimed, “*to my knowledge we have never had as much interest in growth and development in this area as we have right now*” (GM). The Mayor of Bancroft, meanwhile, hypothesized that newly achievable “economies of scale” interested developers:

A lot of people, a lot of developers in the past, they’re shying away from small municipalities because they didn’t have the economies of scale to do a 1000 house subdivision. But now with land values so high in the larger urban centres and migration of people that we’ve identified for a long time but now accelerated through COVID, they’re now seeing the opportunities here. Almost every larger developable piece of land in our town has been purchased for somebody down the road to develop. MB

An interviewee speculated that development may have a transformative effect on the town, not just in the short term:

I can tell you in the last year and a half, like much of Ontario, the real estate market has just gone berserk here. It’s gone right off the charts and sale values are staggering, there has been a big push from the lakeshore area to look at investment opportunities. We’ve got a large tract of land right in the town capable of being serviced. A big developer from Kingston has tied up that property. I think the face of Bancroft is going to change significantly over the next decade. MA

A real estate informant argued that the perception of growth was creating a “snowball” of interest in development of both residential and commercial types:

People that are looking to invest, people that are thinking “well where’s this town going?”, “what’s happening here?”. So if anybody really comes by, sits down, and talks to somebody, and hears about the growth that’s coming: our town’s going to grow by thirty percent in five to ten years, that means lots of people and lots of growth in every other way, not only residential. That commercial end has some very, very good potential. RC

Another interviewee explained how changes in demand for housing - and new levels of profitability arising - also had smaller-scale impacts on physical development practices locally. According to a long-time Bancroft-area realtor, local entrepreneurs - aided by municipalities freeing up land and loosening zoning regulations - were producing small-scale housing developments in new ways, extracting greater monetary value from land through higher density development:

And so you’re seeing on a small scale, small investors buying properties and municipalities being a little more eager to allow more than one property in a lot. There’s examples down in Hastings Highlands and Bancroft where the townships have used their own lands, sold it to the developer and they’re putting on four units. Four single family detached units on this one acre lot. You never would have dreamed of that years ago. RE

Some interviewees, however, expressed the sentiment that current trends may be a false start for growth and development in the town:

For everyone that’s excited about that, I can name a person that will say to you “it will never happen”. Or “how are they going to do this?”, because theres a lot of excited talk about the projects that are coming up but there’s not a lot of talk about how they’re being funded, where that’s coming from. In the past, if you based expectation on past performance, no there’s not a lot of expectation. EE_

To summarize: interview perspectives, generally, revealed growing behind-the-scenes interest and positive word-of-mouth circulating about the town among developers. A trend towards intensification - stimulating potential commercial development - is being driven by a range actors in housing development, from small, local operations to larger regional players. Whether changes materialize to the extent speculated upon or not, the high level of interest from developers already represents a significant shift for the town.

3.4. Gentrification, Displacement and Homelessness

Within this dissertation, a definition of gentrification as a process of socio-spatial transformation in undercapitalized neighbourhoods, which is driven by rent-seeking actors (as per Smith 1979, 2002, see also Chapter One). This conceptualization encompasses new development (Davidson and Lees 2005) and commercial gentrification, within all manner of urban, rural and suburban spaces. A fundamental connection with “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2004) - as capitalist actors’ aggressive pursuit of exchange value supersedes residents’ ability to assert traditional use values - is identified by Lees, Shin, Lopez-Morales (2016) when viewing the phenomenon from a global perspective. These dynamics are clearly apparent in the case of Bancroft and North Hastings, and will be reflected in some of the forthcoming interview perspectives.

The concept “displacement” is frequently evoked as a related phenomenon to gentrification, commonly being used to describe neighbourhood residents becoming unable to afford continued residence in their long-time lifeworld. The disruption of social and economic networks is an important aspect of this complex phenomenon (Marcuse 1985). Emotional displacement (Valli 2015) or cultural displacement (Zukin 2010, Hyra 2014) emphasize the affective disconnection from particular places undergoing gentrification. Emotional and cultural displacement, of course, may also precede physical displacement.



Figure 15: Informal Shack Next To House (Photograph by Author)

The dynamics of gentrification - defined in the terms outlined above - have benefitted realtors, developers and municipalities (from the viewpoint of revenue generation). Displacement, on the other hand, has negatively affected groups such as long-time property owners, renters, and the unhoused population.

An interviewee described the insecurity of multi-generational local families facing prospective displacement:

People who have had their family homestead, on the waterfront for two hundred years, all of a sudden they can't pay those taxes... the predominant historical families here have serious concerns for the future of their families. The prices here for real estate are beyond anyone's imagination._EE

The Executive Director of North Hastings Community Trust pointed out how the “hot” real estate market was responsible for depleting an already low supply of rental housing:

Probably once a day we hear from somebody who is being evicted because the landlord is selling the building, because it's such a hot market. EDCT

The interviewee argued that absentee landlords, cashing-in on rising real estate values and emerging rent gaps, were driving a wave of gentrification:

I think a lot of the homes in and around the area are actually owned by people who don't live here. There's a lot of landlords who have invested and now they're selling. I don't have the percentage or the numbers on that. This is just anecdotal. A lot of people who come to see us, they've never met their landlord and the landlord lives in another city. There's a couple of big apartment complexes and the owners don't live here. I would guess it's actually a high percentage, where the owners don't live here and now they're cashing in. EDCT

Hastings County Housing officials told a similar story, describing a major influence from the pandemic on an already-existing trend of displacement:

Places that were previously used as rental accommodations for persons in North Hastings were sold to single family dwelling units and so participants who might have been living four or five persons together sharing an accommodation, all of a sudden had nowhere to go once that real estate property was sold. That started happening just before the pandemic and then with the actual rise in real estate, whether that's pandemic related or not. Persons putting their places up for sale were seeing much higher returns for their property... that increases [the number of] others putting their place up for sale, based on how the real estate market works. So we did start seeing an increase in homelessness just prior to but then during the pandemic... the numbers increased exponentially. CH2

Another Housing Official at the County expanded upon the connection between the pandemic and growing housing precarity; cruelly ironic at a time when people were urged to be “at home”:

I think that whole hidden homelessness and couch surfers, with the pandemic we start to see more people out on the streets. They really had nowhere to live, they couldn't stay in other people's houses because people - I'm going to make an assumption - were probably uncomfortable with having people in their homes...With job loss with the pandemic I think that resulted in more people being visibly homeless and suffering through the pandemic with increased addictions and mental health also during that time. CH1

The Executive Director of North Hastings Community Trust reported hard-line policing practices, placing them within the context of an image improvement agenda for Town officials. These observations adhere to Smith's (1996) notion that "revanchist" methods of social control comprise a key facet of gentrification:

Because people are without a home, many of them are drug users, this is why I say "gentrification". People walking around on the streets it doesn't look good for the town's economic growth. So people are being picked up. So last week a woman we work with was put in jail. She was walking around in the rain barefoot and she was screaming in public, they handcuffed her and took her to jail. EDCT

While physical displacements from existing housing arrangements within the North Hastings region were described in the above-mentioned perspectives, an interviewee from the local BIA also mentioned a potential connection between local homelessness and urban displacements happening further afield:

Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo kicking the homeless out of their cities doesn't help either, cos guess where they are now? They're here, Belleville and up. They just shifted the problem and nobody is addressing the root causes of the problem...I'll say to someone [who appears to be homeless] "where are you from?"... and then we'll strike up a conversation, "yeah I'm from Toronto, didn't have anywhere to go so I thought I'd try my luck up here because we've got a lot of Crown Land and at least I can squat for a while, try that. Try to grow some food or catch some food, have a little bit of shelter ITBIA

From this point of view, the less built up space of North Hastings - and the less regulated expanses of Crown Land - provides respite from the city and allows for a greater degree of self-reliance. These "rural" characteristics - threatened by in-migration and recapitalization - are argued to be important to the historic identity of the region later in the dissertation (See Chapter Four Section 4.10).

3.5. A Report on Local Homelessness

Hastings County's "Homeless Enumeration Report" (2021), provides a count of unhoused people by Hastings County staff, community agencies, and volunteers on the date November 15th 2021. In the report, the definition of homelessness includes a number of situations: from residence in shelters and transitional housing to the "hidden homelessness" of couch surfing, previously described in interview quotes by Hastings County Housing Officers.² "Unsheltered" forms of homelessness in the count include the inhabitation of public spaces, encampments and vehicles (Hastings County 2021). On this particular day in 2021, 48 homeless people were identified in Bancroft (of 237 persons across the County), as opposed to 10 in a similar 2018 count.³ Bancroft is named as the site of a particularly chronic homelessness problem. A "key finding" is that "respondents in Bancroft were nearly twice as likely to have been homeless all year compared to other communities" (Hastings County 2021 p4).

In the report, highlighting county-wide issues, "landlord/tenant conflict" was the number one reason homeless people left existing housing arrangements (cited by 24 percent of respondents). Second in this regard - reflecting a societal lack of housing affordability as well as individualized cases of poverty - was "not enough income for housing" (19 percent). Nearly 80 percent of respondents claimed that unaffordability prevented them from getting back into a stable housing situation. Nineteen respondents (12 percent), meanwhile, cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the main reason for losing recent housing arrangements (Hastings County 2021). The fact that 51 percent of respondents were on a social housing waitlist, according to the report, speaks to the inability of various tiers of government to counter the problem of homelessness. At the local level, the rising revenues generated by a buoyant housing market create an unrealized opportunity for strengthening governmental support for the

² No emergency shelter or transitional housing currently exists in Bancroft; these services only exist in Belleville within Hastings County.

³ This earlier statistic is considered somewhat unreliable though, according to the 2021 report.

vulnerable. Entrenched issues around homelessness are all the more unjust in a region with, typically, a little over 60 percent occupancy of dwellings (see Figure 9).

While census data shows that North Hastings County has become, on average, wealthier since the 2016 census, large sections of the population are living in economic precarity, affordable housing is vanishingly scarce and homelessness has risen. While the region has traditionally been poor in relation to Ontario on the whole, today North Hastings is increasingly polarized as wealthy in-migrants live in close proximity to populations experiencing exacerbated conditions of poverty.

What follows, from Section 3.6 to 3.10, is a tentative exploration of factors shaping patterns of in-migration. The intent is to describe wider cultural and economic conditions - i.e. COVID-19, remote working, dynamics of the housing market - shaping contemporary transformations of North Hastings, before introducing key forms of political agency seeking to guide the process.

3.6. Factors influencing in-migration: Remote Working and New Lifestyle Sensibilities

City-dwellers vacating “gentrified neighborhoods for upscale suburbs and nearby small towns” (Florida, Rodriguez-Pose and Storper 2021 p13) has been a well-documented feature of the pandemic period. Rural migration scholars Nelson and Frost (2022), for example, identify a boost for small cities and rural communities in New England during the pandemic. From a perspective not far beyond the peak of COVID-19, the permanence of these shifts remains to be seen, though some reports cite evidence that relocation to small towns is likely to be an ongoing phenomenon (Ahasan and Korte 2023). Questions remain on the enduring features of migration patterns, regarding a potential permanent relocation of workers, or the possible establishment of more cyclical migration patterns.

As an interviewee remarked, general uncertainties about the legacy of COVID-era migrations, apply to the particular case of North Hastings:

We have seen a huge influx of people coming to live or work from their seasonal residence and determining “hey maybe this is a full time gig”. The marketplace and the companies you work for will determine whether thats a long term thing or not. CRD

Several COVID-related factors were catalysts for in-migration. Interviewees commented on the impulse among sections of the public to escape infection by moving away from high population density areas:

People [are] feeling perhaps afraid of being in an urban environment during a pandemic and wanting to feel more safe in a country environment. EDCT

Drawing, perhaps, on longstanding cultural tendencies to pathologize dense city spaces (Ekers, Hamel and Keil [2012], for example, have argued that this is a contributing factor to the appeal of suburban gated communities), small towns have gained an allure of safety in this period. Bancroft’s General Manager spoke about how prevalent perceptions of North Hastings as a low-COVID area helped promote in-migration:

One of the COVID challenges here, and we’re constantly reiterating this on our Facebook page is “don’t let the numbers fool you”, [is that] for the longest time we had two active cases or no active cases in North Hastings and people are “we gotta go there, there’s no COVID there”. The problem was there was tonnes of COVID here but none of them had Bancroft addresses so it showed we were fine, but we really weren’t. That wasn’t for us to manage, it was public health thing. But it did allow us to build on that [idea that] “everybody wants to come to Bancroft there’s no COVID here”. And you know, people came here who wouldn’t have come [otherwise] and they fell in love with the area and they started buying houses and putting deposits on development properties and that kind of thing. GM

In-migration has been strongly associated with the emergence of remote work, and the arrival of platforms like Zoom, which rely on high-speed internet infrastructures established in the 2010s. A Real Estate Expert interviewee cited an individual example of this causal link:

All the time [I hear that remote working has precipitated a move]. There's one lady...She said I told my boss "if he wants me back he can go F off, I'm never going back to that hell hole". There's a lot of people who feel that way. RE

Bancroft's mayor described a sense that the pandemic had precipitated more profound shifts regarding lifestyle preferences:

I think the pandemic has served as a tipping point for so many things. Not just where people move to and that. The way people go about their jobs, whether they want to go back to the office, whether they don't want to go. I hear about people quitting all the time, they're told they have to go and they say "no". So I think the pandemic has been a tipping point and not just directly related to people moving away, just changing their priorities, changing their lifestyles. For some people part of that is moving away [from urban centres]. MB

Similarly, Bancroft's Municipal Advisor commented on a new cultural valuation of the space and "nature" offered by rural areas:

I do think that what this COVID period has done, it has actually changed the sensibilities of people in Ontario, a different value set has crept in and there's a good section of the population that is looking for a change of lifestyle and have found with - and employers have found - that remote work is not only possible, it has worked, and so I think there's a new dynamic out there in the economy and that is going to allow more and more people to be connected with a more rural lifestyle than simply a city lifestyle. I think that is permanent. MA

The pandemic also boosted the popularity of places like North Hastings due to the closing down of alternative options for vacations or retirement. A realtor described this in the following terms:

Well you can't go to Europe and you don't know when you're going to be able to go back, so let's buy a cottage, let's do that with our family. I think people looked at re-insulating during COVID and drew together. If we gotta be together and we got to be this close why [shouldn't] we be outside, so let's go and buy a cottage. The lack of inventory has driven markets everywhere. That's a very, very integral piece in all the price increases...I think that the boomers, the boom bust echo is still driving a lot of the market. If you retired in 2019 or 2020 and your plan was to buy a house in Florida or Texas or Arizona I think you kinda went "maybe not", maybe I'm going to shift my focus a bit. Maybe I won't buy in the United States

but stay in my own country. It doesn't mean I'm never going to travel again but instead of investing down there maybe I'll keep my money here. CR

International travel, by late 2023, has rebounded an approximately pre-pandemic level, but a legacy of investments - and experiences - within North Hastings from the pandemic-era remains.

3.7. Factors influencing in-migration: Affordable Real Estate as a Positional Good for Consumers

Linked to changing lifestyle preferences and remote working possibilities, demand for real estate and the particular “product” offered by Bancroft and North Hastings shape the region’s recent transformations. Interview material provided evidence that housing consumers were drawn to North Hastings for its low price of real estate, at least during the early stages of the pandemic. A local Arts and Crafts Business Owner stated:

We started going a little farther east to Bancroft, at the time it was more affordable compared to Muskoka area or even Haliburton, now it [the real estate market] is so outrageous that we pushed ourselves a little further and ended up in this weirdo tiny town. ACB

Importantly, Bancroft offered relative affordability combined with desirable characteristics associated with “rural” living. In this sense it represents a “positional good”, valued for its short supply in a given geographic area. Many of the same natural amenities found in archetypal cottage country locations such as Muskoka can be found in North Hastings.

No industry, no mono-cropping. what that means is that we have a really beautiful landscape. I'm here to be on the [Canadian] Shield, grow food, be surrounded by trees and water. I mean, if you've been here it's a really beautiful geography and lots of space. Housing prices, compared to other parts of the province and the country, still would seem relatively cheap. EDCT

A recent in-migrant cited proximity to the lake, for recreation purposes, as a fundamental factor in their relocation choice. Furthermore, the area offered a pleasing lack of suburban sameness from the interviewee's point of view:

I think everyone's kind of aware of the housing market in Toronto and for a lot of people it will be unrealistic to ever buy a home. Condos always seemed like a very odd thing to me. I grew up in London and we had a house with a yard and garage and all these things, so just the thought of buying a piece of the sky never made sense to me. Still doesn't make sense to me. So that might have influenced me a little. I can't afford a house in Toronto and don't necessarily want my neighbours on top of me. That might have had a little bit to do with it... The suburbs just have no appeal to them whatsoever. Cookie cutter houses, fenced in, postage stamp back yard, you can see your neighbours behind you and your neighbours here, and your neighbours here and here and here. Why? ACB

David Ley (1986, 2003) has argued that the revalorization of historic central city spaces by middle class professionals reflects a sensibility forged by way of contrast with widespread suburbanization in the mid-twentieth century. Here, despite their intense debate over the driving forces of gentrification, the prominence of the suburbs in Ley's "demand-side" account echoes Smith's (1979) "supply-side" argument.

Certainly, demand for particular housing options and preferences for particular lifeworlds are shaped within, and sometimes against, a dominant cultural milieu. In the case of 2020s counterurbanization movements, city-dwelling Ontarians may react against the preponderance of condos as a residential option (Lehrer and Weiditz 2009) by developing a taste for spacious rural environs. Presently, residential preferences are not only shaped associations between urban density and COVID but, as identified by Scott, Gkartzios and Halfacree (2024), by a "bundle" of factors - from practical concerns around the ongoing viability of city living, to a "back to the land" realignment of public values - related to the climate crisis.

The slight decline in population at the time of the 2016 census (see Figure 6) implies that properties were more widely available in North Hastings a period of time. In-migration based on cheap, available properties was short-lived, however. Supply

has diminished and most of the new (market rate) housing is still in the pipeline at the time of writing. A local realtor summarized Bancroft and North Hastings' ephemeral status as an affordable:

I think we were always considered to be cheap. And so I think that drove people, right? But it changed quickly. I mean it changed in a year. It changed. The whole theory. Nothing's cheap anymore. RE

This point is illustrated by the fact that:

You could buy a cottage on Paudash Lake for \$200,000 back then [before the pandemic], \$250,000. Now you're a million. RE

The same interviewee pointed out the contrast with a distinct lack of demand for the region in the late twentieth century. As such, the popularity of North Hastings real estate should be considered to be at an all time high:

I moved here when I was a young man, that was in the '80s you could buy a piece of real estate for nothing. It stayed that way, pretty much. We had some ups and downs, we had a bit of a boom in the late '80s and then the '90s hit and the '90s were terrible for rural real estate here. RE

Demand remains strong despite the high water and tax rates in Bancroft (as will be explained in Chapter Seven):

There's so much demand now we're even seeing houses in Bancroft on municipal water and sewer selling upwards of \$900,000. This is not waterfront, I'm talking residential in Bancroft. New development selling upwards of \$1million. That's unheard of...the tax rate in Bancroft, 2021, is 1.767 percent. Let me give you another one, close by, Faraday Township 1.1 percent. RE

Articles in the regional media have helped promote the popularity of Bancroft and North Hastings:

Bancroft was featured in a few magazines as the best place to live in and move to. Followed by headlines like “this is the next Muskoka” and people hear words like “Muskoka” and think “I want part of that”._ITBIA

The announcement of Bancroft’s status as “the best place in Canada to buy real estate” (Zoocasa 2021), constituted a major profile boost for the town, and was met with interest and amusement by several interviewees. In 2023, Bancroft dropped down to seventh on the same list (Zoocasa 2023), but remained the second best location in Ontario for returns on investment behind North Bay. A local Realtor and Councillor argued, however, that the major boom in local house prices had preceded the 2021 announcement:

The trend [best real estate investment location] was there before [the announcement]. that was a stat that was presented after eight or nine months of the crazy ass real estate market everywhere in Canada. By the time they looked at all the numbers they were like, “Holy cow! Look at this little town”. RC

On a more individualized level, the Real Estate Expert argued that the practices of local realtors were argued by to have played a role driving property price increases:

So I think realtors have done the job well. They’ve certainly promoted the higher prices, sellers have benefitted, buyers are paying the price, they’re willing to. RE

The interviewee went on to describe a frenzied situation in Bancroft that resembled scenes from the Toronto real estate market:

We’ve had bidding wars, let me tell you it this way. Back in the last six months of 2020, first six or seven or eight months of 2021 it was normal, waterfront or non-waterfront, it was normal to have a property listed on Monday, offer presentations on Wednesday, Thursday, fifteen offers and \$200,000 over list price. More so on the waterfront, the bigger numbers than non-waterfront. They’re bidding, so we’re seeing, that was something we were seeing in the cities, you never saw it in cottage country, you never saw it in rural Ontario, you never saw it in Bancroft. So it’s a real change. RE

While this culture has since “cooled off”, this intense moment of synchronization between North Hastings and overheated urban real estate markets speaks to an unprecedented unity between the two spaces.



Figure 16: “Cottage Wars” *Toronto Life* (June 2021)

3.8. Factors influencing in-migration: Structural Influences on Real Estate Markets

While COVID-19 has been shown to be transformative for Bancroft and North Hastings’ social and economic profile over recent history, again, deeper roots to this trajectory are evident. Comments from a realtor describe a continuity to the growth of the real estate market since the Great Recession of 2008/9.

Since about 2016, 17, 18, the markets started to heat again - the recovery from the recession of 2008, 2009 - and we sort of got more of a footing and you started to see three percent annual, four percent annual, five percent annual, I would say we started to see in 2018/19 when the markets were coming through and so the fire was already lit, COVID just threw a big pile of wood on it. So we were already moving to being, still a very affordable market in the province, when many others were becoming unaffordable, and because we had that big lag it sort of appeared like all of a sudden we had the biggest growth, cos we had the room to move, that's why. You could buy a single house for \$150,000 you could hardly do that anywhere in the province seven or eight years ago. We just had a bigger gap, it built up quickly because people were coming everywhere and because people wanted to get out of the city. RC

The 2008/9 moment has been identified as a critical juncture in the hastening of economic inequality (Kuhn, Schularick, and Steins 2018). Due to the relative wealth increase of affluent city dwellers, this moment may be associated with a trajectory of gentrification across Ontario's cottage country - reflected in the renovation of Hastings County dwellings between 2011 and 2016 shown in Section 3.2 - but insufficient evidence exists to make conclusive claims in this regard.

Interviewees speculated on other global or nationwide structural economic factors that appear to have influenced the local real estate market in the 2010s. According to a local Real Estate Expert, the low interest rate and the advent of technologies like Airbnb have been affecting the market for, *"I would say six years... Maybe up to ten but really noticing it in the last five years"* (RE). Young people, it was argued, have recently internalized the sensibility of making long-term investments in real estate in a more difficult labour market:

Younger people are smarter today than what we were. I think that goes back to having more opportunities [in the housing market]... available, they've had the low interest rate environment for such a long time. In the early years it made things affordable not so much the case now... rental incomes, Airbnb, cottage market rentals...this is putting income into people's pockets, the banks are using that income to qualify people. RE

Indeed, media reports of long-distance commutes from cottage country to Toronto, or young adults buying cottages as starter homes, precede the pandemic by several years (e.g. Kalinowski 2018). While the in-migration of younger people to cottage country has been a featured topic in the media (particularly with regard to the wider region, including Muskoka, Haliburton etc.), and was mentioned by some interviewees, mature adults or retirees were most frequently discussed as the driver of real estate trends (as is backed up by the census statistics):

[There have been] significantly more people selling up in the cities and buying here. They're close to or of retirement age and sort of cashing in. Which is another reason why we've seen the property values go up. EE

A demographic explanation of socio-spatial change, therefore, is a significant part of the story in the case of North Hastings, as affluent boomers approach retirement. The Town's General Manager cited economic gains *and* quality of life as drivers of these individuals' migration decisions:

A lot of it is driven towards older adults, I don't want to say seniors, that's a different demographic. Older mature adults who want to escape the city. They want that million dollars for their house in Toronto so they can buy an equivalent house for half that money here and have a nice nest egg and hook up to high speed internet and still work for the last five or six years before they draw their pension without the hustle and bustle of the city. GM

The structural economic, demographic and technological factors discussed in this section show substantively intensified forms of integration with the major cities of Southern Ontario over the past fifteen years. The area possesses a new role as a base for remote workers, as well as commuters and retirees. Property in the area has become a worthy trade-in for expensive houses in the city, a source of viable starter homes, and an opportunity for Airbnb ventures. On the other hand, an intensified enmeshment with city property markets has had a large influence on the displacement phenomena discussed earlier. These structural conditions also shape new challenges and opportunities for local governments, as will be discussed in the next two sections on lower and upper-tier municipal governments, respectively.

3.9. Factors influencing in-migration: Planning at the Lower-Tier Level

A former long-time mayor of Bancroft commented, with regarding to pro-active in-migration strategies at the lower-tier level:

I was never part of it neither do I recall ... any strong movement to try and induce movement to the North Hastings area or to our town. FM

Bancroft's current mayor, however - reflecting an increased strategic awareness and entrepreneurial attitude (as will be the focus of Chapter Eight) - spoke confidently of an informal strategy to attract new residents, primarily among the "active retirees" demographic. This growing cohort within the demographics of Canada, discussed as a "structural factor" previously, represent an opportunity for growth and revenue for communities like Bancroft.

The Mayor of Bancroft described the post-2018 council's outlook on in-migration in the following terms:

This has been a multi-year process to get our debt down, get our house in order, and go after what we saw as an evolving portion of the economy, being what I refer to as "active retirees", people who were relocating from the bigger cities, [who want to] take advantage of their house values, have space, be outdoors and actually be able to be build a property of much greater value - personal value - than what they had in the city and still have money in the bank. We actually embarked on this informal strategy many years ago and COVID has accelerated that. MB

The Town's General Manager told a similar story, while illustrating the role of infrastructure as a necessary material foundation to growth strategies (see Chapter Seven):

We had already started laying the foundation to really promote this, and COVID made it a lot easier for us. If you look back at our council meetings from two or three years ago we were already putting in long-term wastewater plans so we could expand our wastewater system to offer more services to encourage development on the edges of town and all those kind of things. To some extent COVID has accelerated some of those longer term plans because people are here now wanting to do that as the mass exodus from the city continues even as we all start to learn to live with COVID a little bit more. We're already on that path but COVID has allowed us to really focus on and ramp up those conversations and put those things in place. GM

Interviewees at the lower-tier municipality, galvanized by difficult financial circumstances and false starts on economic development projects (as will be described more extensively in Chapters Seven and Eight), demonstrated a pragmatic commitment to turning around existing negative perceptions of the town. The present council's attitude is embodied and institutionalized by the "Making Our Future" (Town of Bancroft 2019) plan, an unusually comprehensive document for a lower-tier municipality of 4000 people.

"Making Our Future" was authored by Bancroft's Municipal Advisor, the former Chief Planner of Peterborough. The ethos of the plan - pro-active self-improvement, while recognizing the limitations of the lower-tier municipal corporation - is reflected in the following excerpt:

"The community itself is its own agent of change. There really is no practical purpose in pointing at past actions especially if those actions were based on circumstances beyond the community's control. There is no point lamenting about historical decisions that were made with good intentions but simply did not pan out. What is relevant is a community's frame of mind starting now. No government is going to rescue Bancroft. Bancroft is going to have to do it itself. The challenge to Bancroft is to establish a resolve to dig deep, and start a process of incremental change that Bancroft has control of. *Making Our Future* captures the spirit of that resolve." (Town of Bancroft 2019 p3)

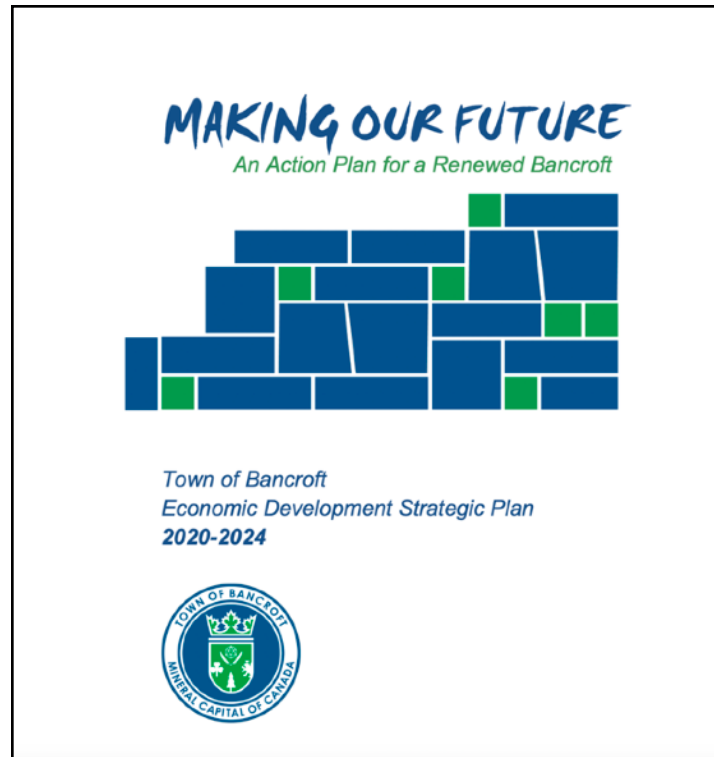


Figure 17: Cover of “Making Our Future” (Town of Bancroft 2019)

A firmly pro-growth attitude was recurrent among interviews from within the Town Council, in line with “inclusive growth”, expressed as a core value of the plan. The document states that:

“The focus of the Strategic Plan needs to explore creative ways to enhance municipal revenues, especially public and private investment that will stimulate growth in the tax base, non-tax revenues, and enhanced economic activity within the community. These are tactics that are within Bancroft’s control.”
(Town of Bancroft 2019 p7)

In an interview, the mayor articulated a proactive role for the local government in facilitating inward investment from developers:

I don't care what you do today you've got to sell. Sell it. Sell your area, sell your town, sell the future, because these folks can go anywhere to develop, so you've got to give them a good reason why they're coming to your town. We work pretty closely and pretty hard with developers to try to minimize, help them get through the red tape as much as possible. MB

While development brings crucial revenue, the growth of Bancroft also generates particular service obligations for the local government. The mayor and council demonstrated a keen awareness that a pressure to improve service provision to an “urban quality” was a consequence of in-migration. This goal emerged as an important current objective from a number of interviews. The mayor stated:

The big thing is, maybe not all of the services, but we need to provide some semblance of what people had back where they came from be it from Toronto or Oshawa or wherever. MB

Evolving as a community in this regard would not only benefit ex-urbanites but long-time locals, as Hastings County's Marketing Manager identified:

In the long term even those [forest-based] industries will benefit from the infrastructure that is created by attracting more people. Even people who work in forestry, if they don't have a school to send their kids to, guess what? They're not going to come and work there. MM

Becoming a central place as opposed to depending on nearby cities was an active goal for the General Manager:

I think Bancroft, the people who live here and come here are ready for us to move forward as much as we do. They want convenience, they want one stop shopping, they want access to all that stuff that not that long ago you'd hop in the car and go to Peterborough or Belleville for, now we're almost able to provide the same level of service right here without those trips to the city. GM

These key objectives - facilitating development, and improving the Town's service and commercial offers - are ongoing. The Town's ambitions in this respect have not profoundly shaped the population changes witnessed in the last few years, but they will continue to exert an influence on the community going forward. The lower-tier

government may come to be seen as a key player regarding socio-economic transformation of the town in the future, when key projects are realized, and longer term processes shaping the current period are viewed retrospectively.

3.10. Factors influencing In-Migration: Planning at the Upper-Tier Level

Hastings County, the upper-tier municipality, has also demonstrated a commitment to attracting in-migrants, through the “Wildly Authentic” Economic Development plan (Hastings County 2020) and the associated “I Left the City” marketing campaign. Central to these strategies is a mission to attract skilled “lone eagles” to drive growth, provide social benefits, and remain competitive with other rural areas also seeking in-migration.

The County’s approach seeks subtle and long-term change regarding the perception of place and the local culture. As such, reporting on the efficacy of the campaign is difficult. The County’s Former Marketing Manager felt results had been achieved:

I am inclined to say there has been a great change that has impacted the community in a positive way. That has created more opportunity for an increased amount of services, amenities, restaurants and things like that. Which the locals enjoy too. MM

Bancroft’s mayor, on the other hand, was less certain:

It’s interesting, I really liked their [Hastings County’s] ads and I liked what they’re trying to sell etc. How effective it is, I don’t know how you can answer that one. There has been some of that [“lone eagles” i.e. skilled individual entrepreneurs] and if they came because of that, I haven’t spoke to them and said “hey did you see these ads and is that why you came?”, you know? So, it’s a nice campaign I’m not sure of the direct correlation between them. MB

The “soft” nature of this economic development strategy was exacerbated by its release. The campaign was, to an extent, stifled by the outbreak of COVID-19. Seeking to attract tourism from other places suddenly became perceived as dangerous:

We were going to launch it in the spring of 2020 with the big grand event but COVID [was destructive], stuff got delayed or we did a more soft launch. The pressure here was to be careful with any sort of marketing. People in the cities were being told not to come out or stay within your health unit area. ETDM

Ultimately:

Instead of launching it loudly, doing lots of campaigns and programatic ads it was more like a soft launch. But it was there so when people search “moving to a rural area” it just came up. I think the timing couldn’t have been more perfect. MM

Thus, the actions at the county level could be seen to prepare the ground for COVID-era in-migrations, however difficult it may be to verify direct correlations. The County’s strategy represents a commodification of space in the form of a “symbolic countryside” (in line with Hopkins’ [1998] analysis of Ontario’s Lake Huron communities), seeking to attract urbanites with a “sophisticated” image rebrand. In the next chapter, these themes will continue; it will be argued place-branding represents a significant artefact of the internet age.

3.11. Closing the Cottage Country Rent Gap

The chapter will conclude by highlighting the relevance of the rent gap theory - and some implications of these dynamics - with regard to the above-mentioned phenomena in the North Hastings region. The rent gap theory explains instances of gentrification by arguing that a “see saw of capital” flows, tendentially, towards under-capitalized spaces, in search of readily available profits. North Hastings’ proximity to nearby cottage areas such as Muskoka and Haliburton - which generate more lucrative ground rents - has, for a long time, provided a precondition for “rent gaps” (Smith 1979) to emerge. In the last decade, conditions for capitalizing on rent gaps have been particularly fertile due to the fact North Hastings had experienced demographic (and economic) stagnancy in the two decades following the 1996 census, while proximate cities and suburbs had continued to grow significantly (see Figure 6).

In North Hastings, an important role for “marginal gentrifiers” (Rose 1984, Phillips 1993) - modestly wealthy individuals undertaking renovations for their own sake - has clearly existed in the period under analysis. For Smith, however, the “return of capital” - the defining feature of gentrification - is marked by coordinated, large scale investment into a given built environment. Though homeowners and landlords may invest capital to a degree, the most decisive interventions in changing the socio-economic characteristics of a neighbourhood (or region in the case of North Hastings) come from the “collective action” (Smith 1979 p541) of financial institutions and developers. Evidence exists that a wider process of recapitalization is underway in North Hastings.

Banks covering an increasing number of substantial mortgages for home buyers in North Hastings constitutes a process of recapitalization, while - as described in Section 3.3. - evidence suggests that developers are presently preparing the ground for a wave of new construction. The Town, working closely with developers and offering development incentives (see also Chapter Eight), plays an important role in facilitating recapitalization, through development processes. At the county level, meanwhile, a public sector campaign to drive rural place consumption can be seen to be closely bound up with the interests of capital to direct strategic flows of investment into the built environment (see also Chapter Four).

Smith argues, with regard to the driving forces of gentrification, that consumer preferences “are not prerequisites since they can be socially created” (Smith 1979 p541). “Socially created” preferences, can be seen to exist with regard to Bancroft and North Hastings’ higher profile in media and online platforms which feature and promote the real estate industry. Bancroft’s announcement as “the best place in Canada to buy real estate” (Zoocasa 2021) may be seen as particularly significant in this regard. An agenda to promote and capitalize on non-city spaces, reflected in “Small Towns Big Opportunities” (2021) by the Ontario Real Estate Association, also represents the kind of “collective action” of capital referred to by Smith.

By identifying rent gap dynamics in the North Hastings context, a deeper understanding of the region's transformations can be achieved in several ways. The theory can be drawn upon to emphasize the specificities of the present historical moment which are conducive to "gentrifying" transformations in North Hastings: rent gaps have become more lucrative, and/or realizable, under emerging technological and cultural norms and have elevated the locality into being a more viable candidate for recapitalization.

Societal shifts regarding the spatiality of work - transformed through Zoom, or the normalization of "super commutes" - are influential in intensifying the "pull" of rent gaps for capital investment. At the same time, a rising cultural valourization of non-city spaces - due to a variety of factors from COVID-19 to condo proliferation - raises the "highest and best use" for local real estate. A burgeoning cohort of mature adults looking to trade-in expensive real estate in the city, alongside younger adults looking for alternative financial trajectories (perhaps via use of the Airbnb platform to subsidize real estate opportunities) has both expanded existing rent gaps and created the conditions for them to be more easily "closed".

Additionally, the theory helps support the thesis of a deepening integration into the wider metropolitan space of Southern and Central Ontario, as an implicit regionalism underpins the relational social and economic processes that drive North Hastings' gentrification. While the dynamics evident in North Hastings are typical of the "see saw of capital" in any number of geographic spaces, the speed and intensity of observable gentrification is distinctive, which reflects the region's rapid absorption into a wider metropolitan space.

Factors contributing to a relative historic under-investment, and making Bancroft and North Hastings particularly viable for gentrification, are discussed regularly in upcoming chapters. Arguments in Chapter Six (Section 6.5), citing diminishing returns in the lumber economy - thus creating enhanced opportunities for recapitalization - are

particularly notable. Other factors mentioned throughout the dissertation include: North Hastings occupying a relatively “out of the way” position in relation to historic transportation infrastructures (Chapter Four), and the region falling behind in the development of the tourist industry with its attendant strong market for recreational real estate (Chapter Five). Low prices on land and real estate in North Hastings have resulted from stigma and high taxes in Bancroft as a result of political dysfunction (Chapter Seven), and the social, economic and environmental fall out from the withdrawal of the uranium mining industry (Chapter Six).

3.12. Conclusion

This chapter has identified and discussed key demographic changes to Bancroft and North Hastings in recent history. The region has been shown to have become older, wealthier and more unequal, with a sharply exacerbated problems regarding displacement and homelessness. Growth has been particularly significant in the outlying municipalities of North Hastings, related to the intensified occupation of usually-vacant buildings. Bancroft has reversed a stagnant population trend in the period since 2016, and is now experiencing a notable wave of interest from developers. Identification of rent gap dynamics in the region has supported the thesis that Bancroft and North Hastings have experienced an intensified integration into the regional space economy of Southern Ontario in recent years. Due to the significance of place-based attractions in-migration trends, demographic changes of the kind experienced by North Hastings are described, henceforth, as part of a growing “residential recreational economy” in the region.

Over the course of the chapter, I have shown a range of factors which have driven the in-migration trend. Evidence has been presented to argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has supercharged transformations which have been emerging over the course the last fifteen years. This includes: interviewee comments regarding the trajectory of the real estate market since the 2008/9 recession, the refurbishment of properties evident in the 2016 census, and observable trends regarding Airbnb and

long distance commuting which were underway long before the pandemic period. Further evidence for the deeper roots of the region's transformation are provided in the next chapter, which connects a putative rural revalorization in Ontario with the arrival of the digital age.

Chapter Four - Rural Authenticity and Urban Connectivity: Economic Development in the Age of the “Creative Countryside”

I think there are some folks that have used ... the, sort of, current marketing strategy version of “authenticity” and there’s those of us that understand the authenticity of the historical background of the area... So there were some that jumped on the bandwagon that felt like, “oh yes we’re going to be ... authentically wild” - and then there was the other group that want to hold on to the authenticity is innate in them, not a sort of a plan, you know. EE

4.1. Introduction

The empirical focus of this chapter centres upon changes to the practice of economic development at the upper-tier level in Hastings County since the early Twenty-First Century. The germination of the “Wildly Authentic” (Hastings County 2020) economic development plan, and the concomitant development of the county’s first place-branding initiatives will be described. On a more theoretical level, the chapter identifies ideational and technological dimensions of the intensifying metropolitan space which, increasingly, incorporates the North Hastings region, situating local governance practices within this context.

Sections 4.2 to 4.6 of the chapter describe and analyze discursive and institutional shifts at the County level related to new directions in municipal economic development practice. County strategies are shown to have evolved under the influence of discourses about the “creative economy” (Florida 2003), through interaction with private consultants, and by comparison with existing models of economic development, particularly those evidenced in nearby Prince Edward County. I argue that the rising influence of the Internet has shaped a new valourization of “the rural”, both among economic development practitioners and within the general public.

Sections 4.7 and 4.8 present locally-rooted perspectives on the “Wildly Authentic” campaign, first from the forestry industry and, second, from lower-tier municipal actors. The Bancroft BIA’s perspective is then put forward in Section 4.9, as a local voice advocating for a more high-tech vision of economic development. Finally, in Section 4.10, I describe the features of a longstanding “authentic” rural culture in North Hastings by way of comparison with the County’s “official” representation. I introduce the notion of a “rural economic culture”, to capture enduring sociological features of this space as it undergoes significant transformations.

Over the course of the chapter an account develops of how multi-level governance actors’ agency, endogenous “rural” cultures, and technological changes have interacted to impact the socio-economic space of North Hastings within recent history.

4.2. Hastings County: “An Identity Crisis”

Place-branding has become a fairly ubiquitous practice within a competitive environment in which, “cities of all sizes and regions try to distinguish themselves by establishing a unique place-identity” (Zukin 2012 p17). Attempts at influencing place perceptions and associations are increasingly undertaken by public agencies through the strategic production and dissemination of media. Brenner and Schmid (2015) identify “the worldwide diffusion of placemarketing campaigns and locational policies intended to attract inward capital investment into subnational zones” (p153) as a feature of planetary urbanization. Thus, a revived awareness of the commercial potential of distinctive place characteristics in Hastings County, is argued here to be fundamentally connected to an emerging status as a metropolitan space.

A key motivation for Hastings County’s own engagement with strategies that aim to emphasize unique place-based characteristics was its relative obscurity within the Province of Ontario, according to a local real estate expert:

*So yes, we're always the - mind my language, shouldn't swear - a**hole of Ontario. Very little economic activity, very little growth. RE*

The Mayor of Bancroft identified the lack of name recognition for Hastings County, but questioned whether a unitary brand could capture its diversity:

I still think there is an identity crisis with Hastings County because you have places like Haliburton which is recognized by the name, Muskoka which is recognized by the name. Or Rideau Lakes which is recognized by the name. Yeah, we're sort of sandwiched in between a lot of these. I think the marketing campaign was to try and drive an identity. But Hastings County has two different, many different, personalities between north and south. MB

The Economic and Tourism Development Manager (ETDM) of the County also acknowledged the absence of a clear identity in the wider public consciousness:

Nobody really understood where Hastings was, it was all Bancroft, Madoc there was no Hastings. Like kinda, Haliburton it's on the map or Renfrew or Prince Edward County or Northumberland but you'd say Hastings and people would say "oh is that that village over by Campbellford?" or I'd say "I'm from Hastings County" at things in Toronto, "Oh Prince Edward County?", "No, Hastings County", "where's that?", "just to the north". ETDM

An interviewee connected Bancroft's low profile to the historical development of transportation routes:

In the cities ... people had never heard of Bancroft. They would look at you blankly and I have some theories about that, talked to people for years about it. Part of it is that the area was central to the military organization of the province in the very early days and we have those roadways going through. We were sort of like the back way to get from one major city to the other. EE

According to this perspective, the spatial configuration of transportation infrastructures in Southern and Central Ontario shaped Bancroft's peripheral status in relation to major population centres. Due to these patterns becoming established over time, the area has retained a degree of obscurity, as subsequent rounds of physical development have clustered in the vicinity of Lake Ontario.

The lack of awareness of Hastings County, and locations within it, was highlighted in a 2014 Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus Report (EOWC 2014) mentioning "image" and "isolation and uncertainty [for investors]" as challenges regarding economic development in Eastern Ontario. Related issues such as "critical mass" of talent (i.e. lack thereof), markets and economies of scale, "loss of community assets", "no longer selling what the world is buying" and "capacity" (EOWC 2014 p6-7) are also listed as problems for small Eastern Ontarian municipalities to overcome. According to the report, Eastern Ontario - in an increasingly global economy - is perceived to be:

"Not just competing with Mississauga or Syracuse - [but] competing with Mumbai and Shenzhen and Sao Paulo" (EOWC 2014 p6).

The report cites this competitive environment as a rationale for pursuing the twin goals of image improvement and increased technological connectivity. At the same time, places like Bancroft - in a restructured Provincial political landscape (which will be described in greater depth in Chapter Seven) - are increasingly alone facing the global economy. Place-branding and marketing not only represent an effort to "get ahead" of a competitive pack, but are frequently be perceived as necessary for economic survival.

4.3. The Re-institutionalization of Economic Development in Hastings County

Despite the apparent need to put the region "on the map" for stakeholders in local economic development, place-based economic development practices were comparatively slow to become institutionalized in Hastings County. As described by the Hastings County ETDM, this was partly due to the fact that an economic development department was absent from the county government in the early 2000s:

Back in the 1990s [there was] an Economic Development Department and there was some politics, some other issues, some of it I was told was because of poor reporting on successes and outcomes [which is] always a challenge. They eventually dropped Economic Development and went with tourism for a bit and then that got dropped. Other counties and cities were getting into Economic Development around the area and Hastings County wasn't because they had eliminated it. ETDM

On the advice of consultant Paul Blais of MDB Insight - an organization providing expertise in “workforce development, corporate strategy, and market research” (*Deloitte Canada Acquires...* 2022) for public and private organizations - an Economic Development Manager was appointed. Blais was hired to prepare a Strategic Plan and review operations at the County. The ETDM described their initial experience of the role in the following terms:

I came in and all I had was a rickety table and an empty office, nothing in the filing cabinet, laptop and a phone and I was told “here you go, go and do economic development”. ETDM

The Hastings County Economic Development Advisory Committee convened in late 2007 with representation from sectors such as forestry, tourism, agriculture, education, alongside municipal officials (Hastings County Civic Web 2007). At first, economic development officials pursued something resembling a traditional “smokestack chasing” approach (pursuing the development of factories and other large employers):

When I look back at the report that Paul Blais put together it was, maybe a bit more not necessarily smokestack chasing, but more traditional economic development in some ways...But over time it just became reality that if somebody's going to want to invest, they're going to look at Belleville because they have the industrial parks, Quinte West, Trenton, they have the 401. ETDM

According to a previously cited interview quote, Bancroft's relative obscurity, derives in part from a historic disconnection from major transportation routes. Certainly, patterns of economic development in Southern Ontario are strongly associated with physical development close to the 400 series highways. Economic Development

thinking more recently, however, has pivoted towards “softer”, “place-based” strategies. Economic development approaches that nurture and emphasize local “rural” characteristics appeal to actors such as the ETDM (responsible for 14 small member municipalities outside of the separated cities of Belleville, Quinte West and Tyendinaga First Nation) due to the fact they offer a new set of principles, less reliant on access to large-scale infrastructure, but tightly bound-up with the possibilities unlocked by high speed Internet connectivity.

4.4. The Emerging Idea of the Rural Creative Economy

Planning and policy circles at the time of Hastings County’s foray into economic development were enthralled by Richard Florida’s notion of “the creative economy”. According to Florida, the “raw resource” of this economy is the “formulation of new ideas and the application of these ideas to scientific inventions and technological innovations and works of art” (Florida and Stolarick 2009 p5). Seeking to foster a “cosmopolitan” and “tolerant” milieu, with the goal of attracting mobile skilled workers and associated growth, had become a widespread goal among entrepreneurial municipalities (Florida 2003). Creative economy strategies are frequently perceived as a means to induce rural in-migration. A 2013 review of the creative economy by the Nova Scotian and Canadian federal governments, for example, highlighted how, “strategies focused on attracting the creative class to the region can further leverage regional amenities to attract new residents and their families to the region” (Government of Canada 2013 p9).

Florida, a professor at the University of Toronto, lived in relative proximity to Eastern Ontario and was personally involved in promoting the region. Alongside colleague Kevin Stolarick, Florida co-authored the 2009 report “Canada’s Creative Corridor...”, proposing a “creative economy” vision for Eastern Ontario, with a particular focus on smaller urban centres and rural areas. The aforementioned MDB Insight were part of the project team, as was Dan Taylor, Prince Edward County’s Economic Development Officer. Prince Edward County (PEC) has been dubbed

“Canada’s first rural creative economy” (Government of Canada 2013 p9) for its perceived early successes based on Florida’s theory. As will be discussed later, PEC represents an important model of what is possible in the wider region.



Figure 18: Cover of “Canada’s Creative Corridor” (Florida and Stolarick 2009)

Florida and Stolarick describe their approach to economic development in the following terms:

“Just as infrastructure and taxes are a competitive advantage for classic industrial development, quality of place and lifestyle amenities are competitive advantages to develop the creative economy. Eastern Ontario’s great outdoors, small town and rural charm and its warm people offers wonderful lifestyle qualities the creative class desires.” (Florida and Stolarick 2009 p14).

Urban connectivity still features heavily within Florida and Stolarick’s arguments, however. The authors suggest strengthening rural ties with the urban areas “right next

door”: namely Ottawa, Toronto and Kingston. Independent initiatives by lone rural municipalities are not considered sufficient in themselves:

“Creative rural economic development cannot be undertaken in isolation, but rather must be seen in the context of larger regional perspectives and strategies that connect rural and urban areas” (Florida and Stolarick 2009 p24).

The success of this approach is dependent, for Florida and Stolarick, on the rural municipalities of Eastern Ontario’s harnessing their position within an economic “mega region” sprawling from London, ON to Quebec City, and also encompassing upstate New York. While they may be considered “rural” areas by stereotypical physical characteristics, Eastern Ontarian municipalities are promoted as potential creative economies by virtue of their proximity to cities, thus embodying a candidacy for an incipient type of rural economic development not appropriate for all “rural” locales.

Due to a relative lack of connectivity within the context of the “mega-region”, Hastings County - not identified by name - is described as being Eastern Ontario’s “least creative” area:

“The area north of Belleville to Algonquin Park appears to be the part of Eastern Ontario with the lowest level of creative workers. This area is the most distant from any of the major urban centres and may suffer from a lower degree of connectivity to the wider mega-region.” (Florida and Stolarick 2009 p61).

Elsewhere, the authors opine that economic benefits accrue from “creatives” networking in high density environments (ibid p51). Spatial proximity and a diversity of interactions remain important in the proposed rural creative economy, albeit with a bucolic backdrop.

Prince Edward County succeeds by this formula as, “a rural area with above average levels of creative economic activity. This may be attributed to their proximity to the GTA and the effort that has gone into promoting quality of place and lifestyle” (ibid p66). While the immediate presence of Highway 401 is a turn off for creative economy boosters, the transportation-based connectivity offered by “space-annihilating” (Harvey 1990) infrastructures are still an important component of the argument put forward in the 2009 report, when reading between the lines.

Not all the arguments put forward in the report are wholly convincing (see critiques of Florida’s approach from critical urban scholars, e.g. Peck 2005, Wilson and Keil 2008). While arguing that “creative” jobs will bring high incomes (a self-evident fact since in many cases “creative” is broadly defined to encompass all manner of high-earning professional roles), rural Eastern Ontario has significantly low wages by provincial standards despite a cited higher than average number of creative workers (Florida and Stolarick 2009 p60). It is possible this is due to a preponderance of more traditional creative workers - those making a living in the arts - in Eastern Ontario. A plausible alternative to Florida’s theory is that “creative” workers - principally the statistically significant affluent, professional kind - emerge from, and settle in, places with an existing firm foundation of a diverse economy, often supported by a history of public investments. That these places are also able to nurture “quality of place and lifestyle” does not mean that quality of place and lifestyle is the initial driver of change. Nevertheless, ideas around “the creative countryside” formed a foundation for new approaches to economic development. Cultural planning appears firmly on the agendas of County and lower-tier municipalities following 2009.

4.5. The Internet and the Consolidation of a New Economic Development Strategy

The re-institutionalization of Economic Development in Hastings County arrived at a historical moment in which norms in media and communications were being reshaped through the Internet. In the late 2000s, social media became an important new arena for the County’s Economic Development Department. In 2009, for example,

the County passed a - now quaint seeming - resolution to create Facebook and Twitter profiles. County records state:

“it was imperative to stay in touch with young adults who have migrated out of Hastings County and keep them aware of local employment and investment opportunities...These two websites [Facebook and Twitter] are viewed as methods to stay in touch with this targeted market.” (Hastings County Civic Web 2009b)

Ultimately, this technology would present much more transformative possibilities, heightening North Hastings’ social and economic connectivity significantly.⁴

In recent years, upgrading digital infrastructure across Canada has been a high priority for the federal government (Government of Canada 2023a). Government subsidy, in the rural and remote regions of Canada, is given to private Internet Service Providers (ISPs) who manage and maintain service for customers. In the case of rural Eastern Ontario, the public-private partnership “Eastern Ontario Regional Network” (EORN) promoted and oversaw the installation of fibre optic cable (Pant and Odame 2017).

Hastings County’s warden - a leadership position which represents the County’s 14 smaller, non-separated municipalities - played an important role advocating for local high speed Internet, alongside regional counterparts. An interviewee, who formerly held the position of warden explained:

⁴ It should be noted, however, that at the time of writing the quality of service remains unsatisfactory in the region according to interviewees: *“Bell’s trying to fix that, putting in fibre now. No other company has initialized anything like that. A lot of people are still on wireless, which is point to point, maybe top speed 25 down. And when it snows you may get no signal at all. So Internet’s pretty bad up here. A lot of people are using big data plans on their phones and tethering their computer just to work from home.”* ITBIA

A little town like Bancroft, a little township like Dungannon, Mayo/Carlow. They don't listen to the little place... when you've got fourteen municipalities that's a pretty good board that he's chairing in the warden's office... so they ... push to get things done. DMFM

The Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus (*"Those folks have done a great deal of work for us in our area and our county for getting high speed Internet here"* DMFM) produced a report in 2014 reflecting the most important considerations of municipal actors at that time. The wider importance of the Internet was reflected in the fact that "technology integration and innovation" was one of three priorities listed in the report (alongside "workforce development + Deployment", and "integrated and intelligent transportation systems"). Here, a material underpinning to Florida's culture-based approach can be seen.

The Hasting County Economic Development Action Plan of 2014-2018, "Communities with Opportunities" - (Hastings County 2014) - a precursor of the more fully realized "Wildly Authentic" plans - contains reference to "lone eagles" and "working from home"; a foreshadowing of the in-migration trends seen during the pandemic period. At this point in time, ideas that had emerged since the re-institutionalization of Economic Development in 2007, coalesced into a strategy which included the goal of attracting skilled newcomers to a new rural economy facilitated by the Internet.

We sort of looked at the focus being those creative workers, creative entrepreneurs, the lone eagle soaring... that was in the report that Paul Blais came back and helped us with. We did an investment marketing strategy. Paul really did focus more, then, on lone eagles, those with transferable skills, those living in the cities. ETDM

Consultant Paul Blais has been involved in efforts to bring an entrepreneurial culture to a number of rural municipalities in Ontario; in addition to Hastings County, for example, Blais proposed developing local tourism and culture sectors to drive prosperity in Ontario's United Counties of Prescott and Russell in the late 2010s (Morgan 2019). Blais' company - MDB insight - was recently acquired by Deloitte, the

global professional services conglomerate, demonstrating that place-marketing consultancies are a profitable trade in the present moment. Here, the increasing role for intermediaries - from academics like Florida to professional services corporations like Deloitte - in shaping strategic governance approaches is reflective of wider trends as identified in the local politics literature (see Temenos and McCann 2013).

While lower-tier municipalities are firmly involved with straightforward economic development measures - attracting residential and commercial development (See Chapter Eight) - the upper-tier municipality of Hastings County oversees economic development as a specialized government department, and is able to undertake wider-ranging and more long-term strategic action. Since its re-introduction in the late 2000s, Economic Development at the county level has sought to introduce “soft” economic development measures, and has attempted to induce qualitative place-based change. This approach has developed through interactions with other municipal government actors within regional economic development bodies such as Eastern Ontario Warden’s Caucus (EOWC) and the Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN). It has been influenced by consultancy organizations linked to international conglomerates and globally influential academics.

These influential networks offer policy prescriptions that are popular with local governments, though their methods are not proven to be universally effective. This popularity may be shaped by the fear of missing out on innovative approaches or the relational power of high profile urban professionals vis-a-vis rural governmental actors. Dependency on consultants, however, can be seen to stifle governments’ ability to operate with autonomy, typically resulting in the pursuit of a narrow set of neoliberal solutions to a complex range of problems (Mazzucato and Collington 2023).

By 2017, informed by the ideas of consultant Michael Rowland - also heavily involved in the 2014 EOWC meeting - branding had become a major concern for the County. The intention was to unite Economic Development Planning, Tourism Planning, and Cultural Planning under a coherent brand that would serve the diverse fourteen

member municipalities (Hastings County Civic Web 2017) in order to raise the prominence of Hastings County in the minds of tourists, investors and those looking to leave the city.

Hastings County's newly-hired Marketing Director for the "Wildly Authentic" campaign expressed incredulity that the County was introducing these practices as late as 2017:

Basically they've never had anyone - at that point - in marketing. An organization like Hastings County with 900 employees, never had anyone [prior to the "Wildly Authentic" campaign]. MM

While the strategy to pursue branding has been influenced by a wide range of external influences, the content of the brand itself was arrived at in relation to consultations with local people, and through the Economic Development Department's awareness of outcomes in a particularly significant local place: Prince Edward County.



Figure 19: Baseball Hat With Branding (hastingscounty.com)



Figure 20: I Left The City (hastingscounty.com)

4.6. Prince Edward County and the Content of the Brand

As mentioned with regard Florida and Stolarick’s “creative countryside” vision, neighbouring Prince Edward County stands as a particularly significant model for rural economic development in Ontario in the Twenty-First Century. In an interview, Dan Taylor - Prince Edward County’s Economic Development Officer (EDO) - reflects the idea that the creative economy allows for the imposition of development strategies upon spaces that were hitherto resistant to more “bricks and mortar”-style approaches. In a media interview - discussing his introduction to the job in the early 2000s - Taylor emphasized the importance of “place-based” development:

“Back then we had agriculture and tourism and beyond that it was a bit foggy... if I knew if my job was to deliver factories I wouldn’t have a job... Today we’re a modern, digital, creative rural economy. We’ve always had quality of place and quality of life here. Now we also have the technology, the people, the entrepreneurs. Not everybody understands the creative economy but it’s working.” (County Live 2011)

Hastings County's ETDM described Dan Taylor's professional influences in the following terms:

Dan Taylor...was the Economic Development Officer for Prince Edward County for ten years. He was a few years ahead of me. He really embraced the Richard Florida's creative economy model. He branded Prince Edward County as "Canada's creative rural economy". He connected a lot with Richard Florida and the University of Toronto...[and] Kevin Stolarick...He really embraced that, I followed that a little bit too. ETDM

A disconnect with local political representatives was notable in the early part of Taylor's tenure:

It wasn't always a fan's favourite with the politicians, they didn't really understand it, some of them. Also Dan had a challenge with that too. They wanted him chasing after smokestacks I think. They didn't understand the higher wages that can come with a creative worker. Someone who might be an engineer or an architect. There was the odd one sometimes who wondered "what are we really doing?" if they don't see you ribbon cutting with a new factory with one hundred employees, what are you really doing? But Dan, he would say in Prince Edward County for example...if I go around Prince Edward County and count up all the places that have somebody working remote, might be a sole entrepreneur and count up all their salaries, that's more than what you get from a factory building and the blue collar jobs. ETDM

Initiatives in PEC helped Dan Taylor earn a reputation as an economic development pioneer and the county was held up as an example of the power of Florida's ideas. This new model, oriented towards attracting affluent professionals, contrasts fundamentally with traditional "smokestack" strategies to build an economy from the ground up by providing working-class jobs. A new institutional culture, initially disfavoured in traditional political circles, both shapes and reflects patterns of socio-economic polarization - between those able to participate in a new "creative economy" and those unable to participate - as experienced in places like PEC.

Fundamental changes in local character were cited as a drawback of the economic development approach pursued by PEC. According to Hastings County's former Marketing Director:

Prince Edward County in the last twenty years has exploded to a point where the locals have been basically pushed away from their own town. And they were not willing. They did not like it, they were not consulted it was not a process that has allowed to be sustainable, gradually ...It has brought great economic development to the area. But I can tell you that the vibe is not what it used to be. It used to be this bucolic place where people would come from the city and experience the countryside, and there is a beach. So it allowed for people to unwind, disconnect from the city and connect with it and it's just not the same now. There are lines for everything, and it's a small community. MM

The over-saturation of Prince Edward County, due the very elements of “urban” connectivity identified as an asset by Florida and Stolarick, was an influence on the naming of the “Wildly Authentic” brand. The relatively underdeveloped nature of Hastings County - argued, conversely, to be an historic weakness by Florida and Stolarick, the Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus reports, and interview participants - creates “authenticity” in an economic development environment wherein places seek to differentiate themselves in an increasingly homogenous landscape. The Marketing Director described the county in the following terms:

I wanted to stay real. Hasting County is rustic. We don't have high end facilities. We're not going to pretend we're something different from what we are. MM

I argued in Chapter Three that a rent gap existed in North Hastings, describing the ways in which a “seesaw of capital” (Smith 1990) has flowed towards the undercapitalized spaces of the region. Here we see that the aesthetic features of this rent gap - perceived as rustic, undeveloped - are “flavouring” official attempts to brand the region. The “Wildly Authentic” campaign sought to highlight Hastings County's more simple attractions as a conscious strategy:

If my DNA is, OK I am “wildly authentic” I have a lot of forests, a lot of lakes, I don't have a lot of luxury items, I don't have a lot of high end restaurants, I don't

have resorts, I don't have hotels. Do you think that someone who has a lot of disposable income wants to go to a cabin in the woods, off the grid? Without all the amenities that you can have maybe in Muskoka, other places where it's been commercialized. Prince Edward County where there are 5 star restaurants, things like that. MM

In contrast to the way that the people of PEC were “not consulted”, as suggested by the interviewee, the “Wildly Authentic” brand was created through consultation with the councils of fourteen member municipalities and other stakeholders:

[On “Authenticity”] That was a term that kept coming back and coming back and coming back when we were doing the branding process for Hastings County, it was nine months so we did a ton of workshops. 1200 interviews and surveys and all of that. It just kept coming back. MM

From the Marketing Manager’s point of view, the content of the brand was driven by the people of Hastings County:

Let's consult with the people of Hastings County, what do they think? Who are they? What's the DNA of the place? I feel authentic, let's be who we are. Build the community from the ground up. MM

Contrasting perspectives abound, however, with regard to the reception of the brand identity proposed by Hastings County. Sections 4.7 and 4.8 will explore diverse local perspectives on the branding, and the move towards what is described, herein, as a “post-productivist digital economy” more generally, while highlighting some challenges it presents for traditional governance structures.

Thus far this chapter has expanded upon the argument that the repopulation and economic valourization of North Hastings County is part of a “period” within its development trajectory that predates COVID-19 by a number of years. During this period, the idea of the “creative rural economy”, among economic development professionals, has accompanied a significant shift in the perception of rural areas in

Ontario by the public: they are increasingly regarded as viable places for long-term residence by a more “urbane” population (CBC Radio Canada 2014, Reid 2015).

Prince Edward County offered an early model of economic development based on place-based rural characteristics. This image has been promoted widely in the local media of Toronto and Southern Ontario. The success of PEC benefitted the sellers of the “creative countryside” policy prescription and offered municipalities a relatively low-cost vision of economic renewal. A supply of affluent urban retirees and younger people seeking opportunities outside challenging urban land-economies (as identified in Chapter Three) - alongside the mainstreaming of remote working - have legitimized the approach.

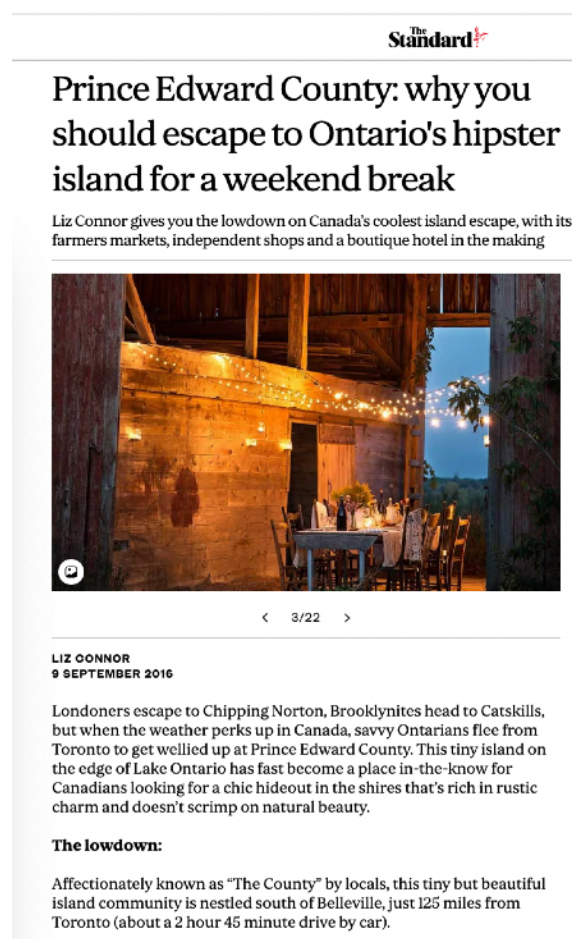


Figure 21: P.E.C. In The London Evening Standard (Connor 2016)

The next section describes the reaction of the forestry industry - a pillar of the traditional local economy - to the “Wildly Authentic” place-branding initiatives.

4.7. Reception to County Branding from the Forestry Industry

Branding is a means by which rural space can be “revitalized through processes of construction and re-construction” rather than being “doomed to decline” (Galani-Moutafi 2013 p104). It is also a process that carries the risk of “flattening” the diverse characteristics of a given space. Julier (2005) identifies the homogenizing tendencies of place-branding:

“a place is not a primary, singular product, but an agglomeration of identities and activities... Internally to a location - for its population, that is - these values may not necessarily reflect or promote their reality. Externally, to the rest of the world, they appear bland and undifferentiating” (p872).

While a rigorous process of local consultation was described by County Economic Development officials, many local stakeholders still felt unrepresented by the County’s vision. Skepticism towards the “Wildly Authentic” campaign on the part of the forestry industry was reported by the County’s former Marketing Director:

[Response from forestry professionals consulted:] *“No, we don’t want to be part of this and we think it’s a horrible idea you should not be doing this, we don’t want people to come here, we don’t want you to do this”*. MM

The perception of the County’s “wilderness”-themed marketing vision being unfavourable to productivist economic interests was expressed by another interviewee: a businessman who had raised eyebrows by purchasing a 67,000 acre forestry property. He argued that his plan to create an exclusive recreational wilderness park on the lands fit well with the “Wildly Authentic” vision:

[ETDM] actually reached out to us the day I bought the property, or the day it became public that I bought the property. He and I have had a nice exchange he's recommended us some local suppliers, local this and local that. We don't have a lot of need for them. For them its a relief because their County strategy they are trying to use for the County is to develop natural, ecological tourism and that kind of thing. That's pretty much exactly what we're doing. LB

According to an interview, the position of the County's Economic Development department, given their "Wildly Authentic" approach, became politically difficult during the contentious local planning dispute between Freymond Lumber and Grail Springs Wellness retreat over the development of a new quarry near Bancroft:

They [Grail Springs] were trying to get our Economic Development office staff... to side with them because... Hastings County had focussed on the wellness side of things, the outdoors the wilderness, "Wildly Authentic", and then we are approving a quarry so, it was very challenging, basically had to stay neutral. That's one of the kind of things you find, conflicts. ETDM

While the ETDM claimed that the forestry industry generally, "*kinda do their own thing. They just chug along*" ETDM), County Economic Development have, increasingly, found ways to be useful to the forestry sector. The ETDM recalled how their services - drawing on image-making and public relations techniques - were useful in helping the forestry sector promote an "environmentally sustainable" image in the digital age ("*we've provided them with some assistance to help build the new website*" ETDM). Just as municipalities feel pressure to promote a positive image in the current economy, so do forestry sector actors.⁵ Relations between Hastings County Economic Development and the forestry sector were described as follows:

⁵ In a broader comparison from another interviewee, Bancroft Area Forestry Industry Association [BAFIA] was described as, "*almost akin to a municipality in terms of things they need as an association or as a sector*" PE

I have a really good rapport with them [the forestry sector], I connect with them all the time. There's times when I say "what do you guys need, what bothers you, what could we do with the County?" they tell me what they need help with is advocacy, they get a lot of protesters that are showing up at some of their sites that are opposed to using trees for anything whatsoever and they're entitled to their opinion on that. What the forestry sector says is "we're following sustainable practices, we're not just going in and cutting down trees and disappearing, we have to have a forest management plan in place". ETDM

A forestry professional also recounted the importance of public relations for the sector and spoke of how County Economic Development had assisted them in this regard:

We do get a bit of money from [Hastings County Economic Development]. We used to, before COVID, [do] a biannual forestry day [which the County assisted with]...because it's not part of people's education I find theres a lot of misconception around forestry...I think the industry too has not done the greatest job of advocating for ourselves and telling people what we do. Its also why we get a lot of pressure from environmental groups and cottage groups - that I deal with all the time - especially in this area, because half of Canada's population and the GTA can drive there in a few hours. So we're so visible and you have all of cottage country driving down their cottage road through our forest. They see logging equipment they get really upset sometimes. We're dealing with a lot of that. A lot of public misunderstanding I guess. That's what I think BAFIA is trying to do. More proactive communication to people to get the information out. BMFM

The forestry industry operates in a different kind of political space to the municipal governments of Hastings County and the Town of Bancroft, being primarily regulated at the provincial level and being influenced, correspondingly, by different regulations and political and economic networks (See Chapter Six). Through the physical spaces of Hastings County, land-use conflicts arise and the Economic Development Department may - according to some perspectives herein - have some difficulty convincing foresters they are on their side. Nevertheless, the County's Economic Development Department recognize the importance of the industry - they highlight forestry's significant "location quotient" (how place-specific a given economic activity is) in the "Wildly Authentic" plan - and have found ways to help. It cannot be

claimed, therefore, that the Economic Development campaign - modest in budget and “manpower” - might override existing economic activities and drive a wholesale restructuring of the economy. It can be seen to help existing industries modernize at the same time as promoting economic diversification.

4.8. Reception to County Branding from the Lower-Tier Municipality

From interview data, the lower-tier government’s approach to growth appeared to owe little to the “creative economy”-informed perspective of the County. The profile of the “active retiree” - cited in Chapter Three as a target demographic within the Town’s informal development strategy since the election of the 2018 council - differs from the creative entrepreneur, or “lone eagle”. While a shared interest in encouraging in-migration is evident, the lower-tier’s approach can be seen as being motivated by a much more immediate connection to the benefits of boosting the property tax base (See Chapters Seven and Eight) than the upper-tier. At the Town, growth is conceived of in more quantitative terms - the raw number of property tax payers, customers for local businesses, drivers of construction - over the particular qualities sought from entrepreneurial and “creative” individuals by County-level Economic Development visions.

Local government actors, however, were not ignorant of place-branding practices. In an interview, a Councillor acknowledged that Bancroft’s downtown environment might be lacking in walkable spaces for consumption and opportunities to acquire topophilic local merchandise:

I just want the quality of what's here already to be enhanced, with new storefronts , kinda cool looking buildings, kinda foot traffic items... walking down the streets with your partner and ducking in and maybe buy a T-shirt and sweater, ducking in and have a little coffee somewhere, buy real cool shoes from the neighbourhood, buy something that says "Bancroft" on it. That sense of, that flow, that downtown flow but it still feels like its Bancroft, but it's modern. RC

The symbolism of the "Wildly Authentic" brand, however, was widely questioned within local government circles. The Municipal Advisor described how the "Wildly Authentic" branding was an awkward fit with Bancroft's perception of itself:

Without having done this plan I think the County would have been continuing to pursue very general "explore the wilderness" themes. That's not what we're about as a municipality and we're one of the largest municipalities in the County system. MA



Figure 22: "Back Roads" of Hasting County, Wildly Authentic Campaign (hastingscounty.com)

A distinction between Bancroft and the rest of North Hastings in terms of an “urban” function - not represented in the Belleville-based Economic Development team’s vision - was clear in the mind of the Municipal Advisor:

The regional focus well beyond the limits of Bancroft is still “wild and authentic” and having those outdoor amenities ... that are available. That’s still very much a part of Hastings County’s role and we’ll be very supportive of it. But there’s no question that the Town of Bancroft needs to be the urban centre of choice. MA

The Advisor implied that Bancroft’s initiative regarding comprehensive strategic planning, demonstrating a strong intentionality regarding a vision for its future, was unexpected among county-level actors:

I think the County Economic Development staff may have been a little intrigued at what I was doing [in developing the “Making Our Future” plan]. For them it may have seemed, what I was doing was invading their responsibility to some degree, but as time went on I think they saw the conclusion of what was done in Bancroft being highly informative for the work that they do... it crystallized where their focus should be and so with the Town being one of the larger urban municipalities within the county structure they saw that we were putting a great emphasis on trying to facilitate responsible development happening in this municipality. MA

The “Wildly Authentic” campaign, arguably, has made clear Bancroft’s sense of itself as an urban centre (the mayor frequently referred to Bancroft as a “rural-urban” municipality), as well as influencing county-level actors’ perception of the spatial structure of their jurisdiction. Here, “urban” refers to the concentration of commerce and services that the town offers to surrounding areas - “*downtown for 40 miles around town*” (TPA) - and the water and waste water systems that support these functions (see Chapter Seven). The need to organize diverse land uses, and distribute scarce resources across the community make “wild” - associated with simplicity and a lack of sophistication - an inappropriate descriptor for the lower-tier. By contrast, the major library construction project “The North Hastings Inspiration Place” (see Chapter Eight), can be seen to represent Evans’ (2003) notion of “hard branding” - physical

development projects that signify regeneration and reflect claims to centrality - deployed in service of lower-tier actors' own vision of a more "urban" Bancroft.

Furthermore, Bancroft owes its existence to industry in the form of mines, sawmills and factories. A persistent openness towards the "smokestack" approaches described earlier by Hastings County's ETDM, centred on large-scale infrastructure was expressed by many Bancroft-area interviewees. It can be concluded that, broadly speaking, the materialist outlook embodied by the lower-tier - found in working class people, and leaders operating in constrained fiscal realities - contrasts with the idealist outlook - which centres "rural" as an aesthetic and an imaginary forged by way of contrast with the environment of large cities. The re-presentation of rurality in present-day place marketing campaigns - driven by city-based actors, catering to a city-based audience - echoes a longstanding tradition: from the idealization of complex rural social relations at the time of the industrial revolution in the field of cultural production (Williams 1973), to the emergence of a widespread twentieth-century rural "tourist gaze" within the advanced capitalist nation state (Urry 1995).

An interviewee pointed out how the composition of council in Bancroft - regarding a prevailing "urban" or "rural" sensibility - reflects a good blend of long-time locals and engaged in-migrants:

So council has sort of arrived at a mix, we have a council now that there's a number of local folks, there's some that are still considered newcomers. EE

The General Manager at the Town of Bancroft described a contrast between the personnel at Bancroft and the small Township of Limerick, where she had previously worked:

Everybody on our council right now, as is always supposed to be the case, has a very long term vested interest in the council and the health and wellbeing of the town... unlike many of the neighbouring municipalities where there are a lot of cottagers who are only here for three or four months of the year sitting as representatives on those councils. All of our representatives are year-round

residents who made their living here, raised their families here. There's a little bit of a different dynamic than what I experienced in Limerick where I was the only local person on council. Everyone else was a cottager. It does change the dynamic of the conversations and the relationships a little bit. GM

While a council full of “cottagers” may aim to maintain a “rural idyll” by resisting development, this is far from the case among Bancroft’s development-minded local government, as will be expanded upon in Chapter Eight.

4.9. The BIA and the Digital Economy

A BIA member - an IT business owner - advocated more comprehensively for a modern, digitally-literate economic development vision. They argued that the Business Association had to take matters into its own hands in developing the “digital footprint” of the town due to resistance from the local government. While Town Council members past and present emphasized discovery of Bancroft through its heavily-trafficked cottage-adjacent roads, insufficient attention - it was claimed by the interviewee - was being paid to forms of digital discovery. Here the BIA member was firmly in line with the best practices advocated by the likes of County-collaborators MDB Insight, operating under a broad “creative economy” aegis. The interviewee highlighted a lack of digital awareness at the Town as a generational issue, impacting younger remote workers:

I've been siding with the BIA because I think its the right direction to go in terms of growing the town digitally because everybody my generation and below seems to be coming here. _ITBIA

It was argued that the website *discoverbancroft.com* possessed unrealized potential in integrating digital information with the physical discovery of commercial and recreational spaces downtown:

Because the council are composed of older people they don't entirely understand the direction we're going... [regarding] discoverbancroft.com... the Town seems excited about it but is very reserved to a digital identity. ITBIA

The BIA member claimed that the Town pursued an old-fashioned approach to economic development:

I haven't really seen much in terms of growing the city for future-proofing [from the Town Council], and they don't have the time or resources, council doesn't have the time or resources to address that, they're just trying to keep up with what they've got. So I personally feel that maybe a different mindset is required for Bancroft to really flourish. ITBIA

Bancroft Council, meanwhile, were reportedly unhappy with the perceived overreach of the BIA:

They felt that the BIA had taken far too heavy a hand in economic development and [they wanted the BIA to] back off and look at the Municipal Act for our definition of how we were to operate. EE

The Mayor of Bancroft's commented on the role of the BIA in the following manner:

The BIA works for its members, they don't work for the Town, they still need approvals if they want to do something...They're important, the business community is extremely important here. In lieu of an individual business owner giving an opinion we take what they say as representative of the business community. MB

Zukin (2010) has argued, with reference to New York City, that the rise of BIAs as a form of neighbourhood governance represents a “defeat” of an ideal form of local democracy in which publicly accountable power should preside over public spaces. On the other hand, it is arguable that the official spaces of the local government lack capacity for innovation. The BIA and private economic development consultants - both criticized for contributing to a diminished role for local democracy (Zukin 2010, Mazzucato and Collington 2023) - are both participants in an alternative vision of economic development, emerging in tandem with the unconstrained influence of new technologies.

In the final section before the conclusion of this chapter, I formulate details of a local “rural economic culture” which is challenged by the “post-productivist digital economy” emerging under the influence of diverse governance actors .

4.10. The “Authentic” Rural Culture of Bancroft and North Hastings

Drawing on Lefebvre’s (2022) rural scholarship, I now develop notion of an “rural economic culture”. “Economic culture” reflects the fact that local economies are embedded in particular ways of life which, in many cases, are sustained by an intergenerational cultural milieu as much as by immediate demand for particular goods on the open market. The concept of a rural economic culture defines rurality in a way that is distinct from the “symbolic imaginaries” deployed by place marketers, or by the presence of intensive *ongoing* “productivist” practices - “direct, daily interaction with the natural environment [by] the labor of primary production” for Gilbert (1982 p625) - but in a way that is sociologically valuable in describing the cultural constitution of the community. Quotations reflecting features of this culture provide context for aspects of the “official” representations presented by the County.

Lefebvre’s (2022) conceptualizations guide the use of “rural” in my notion of a “rural economic culture”. Despite Lefebvre’s own misgivings that colonial societies exhibited true “rural” characteristics, I argue that - as in mid-twentieth century France - the “present rural world” in North Hastings “offers to observation and analysis the coexistence of formations and of different ages and dates” (Lefebvre 2022[1953] p62). As is reflected in interview quotes, inherited economic-cultural characteristics from the time of early settlement adhere to Lefebvre’s conceptualization of rural, as does a significant “lag” (Lefebvre 2022[1954] p79) in relation to the economic culture of the North American cities. Cultural “equilibria” (Lefebvre 2022[1949] p17), moreover - traits which reflect and help sustain a social groups’ inhabitation of a given landscape - are evident in the long-time locals of North Hastings. Later, in Chapter Six, it is shown how the culture of small-scale logging, while still socially useful, is not easily subsumed within the reshaped and rescaled relations of production under modern capitalism, thus

resembling the “peasant problem” (ibid p60) endemic to rural societies,. Also in Chapter Six, the important role of Crown Land, as a key feature of Ontario’s rural milieu, in sustaining traditional productivism is described.

North Hastings settler culture - established primarily by British and Irish immigrants - became dominant through the widespread displacement, erasure and assimilation of local Indigenous cultures. Interview participants spoke of the historic cultural assimilation of local Algonquin people, describing how they often hid their identity from the wider community (EDCT). In a local media outlet, an Elder corroborated this history:

“When we were their age [i.e. children], we weren't allowed to let anyone know that we were Algonquin, let alone practice our culture. But, my mom used to take us out in the field and teach us things about the medicines. We would all go berry picking together and she would talk to us about our culture. So, we did learn quite a bit, but we weren't really allowed to let people know it.” (Smelle 2018)

In the mid-to-late twentieth century this cultural assimilation was accompanied by hiring practices - in the forestry industry at least - that were reportedly “blind” to Indigenous workers’ ancestral heritage (DGMLH). A present-day forest manager, however, spoke of great allyship between their organization - an institution promoting and regulating the industry - and local Algonquins who whose communities had been deeply entwined with the culture and economy of forestry for generations (BMFM). Historically, the success of an influential family with Algonquin roots - the Baptistes (after whom one of the region’s prime cottaging lakes is named) - reflects how settler-Indigenous interactions, and manifestations of cultural hybridity, have been important in shaping North Hastings’ identity today.

A distinctively rural embeddedness influences the sensibilities of a multi-generational North Hastings population. The Town of Bancroft's General Manager pointed to relatively static demographics in the region over time:

So the south [of Hastings County] has a much more transient population people move in and out of the cities, ebb and flow. Quinte West has the military base which is constantly in flux with people coming and going with all the assignments. So their population, while the numbers are relatively stable, who actually lives there changes quite a bit. Whereas the people who are here have been here for multiple generations... So our population tends to be a lot more rooted and deeply invested in the community. GM

Looked at from another perspective, "embeddedness" can equate to being trapped by economic limitations:

People that are in the city can afford to drop ... \$100,000 for a few acres. People locally cannot. So there's this sense of being stuck. Not being able to go anywhere ... is frustrating the local population. ITBIA

While Bancroft has attracted an "eclectic" community in the present day ("You have every faith based group you've ever heard of here, every type of medicine you've ever heard of is being practiced here. It's an unbelievably eclectic kind of community." EE), a diversity of deep-rooted rural cultures can be found in and around North Hastings:

There is a culture that is unique to the area...[in other parts of the region] there is a totally different culture. You can be there in less than an hour but its a totally different vibe and different culture. But at the same time what they share in common is they don't need, they're not stupid people, they may not be as sophisticated but they're not stupid. There's a real resentment about city folk coming and telling them about how to do things better. It's different. It's not necessarily better. EE

A local BIA member commented on how relative isolation - perhaps, as previously discussed, derived in part from North Hastings' lack of physical connectivity to other parts of the province - influences the local culture and economy:

A lot of people up here don't want to be found. ..., they don't want to be bothered with "the real world", they want the world that they've built here in Bancroft. It's a very local economy as opposed to a global economy. ITBIA

Similarly, another interviewee reported a general suspicion of outsiders:

It is a very different social vibe here. And I think that the people here have had to be resourceful and they've not been very trusting. EE

The BIA member claimed that cultural continuity from the time of settlement accounted for particular dominant customs:

You know it kind of boils down to the early settlers here are set in their ways. They do things a certain way. ITBIA

As such, Lefebvre's view of the rural as a "residual" culture with regard to the cultural traces of previous economic lifeworlds, holds relevance to the sedimented layers of economy and society in North Hastings County. Cultural practices associated with the foundational economies of forestry and agriculture constitute this "residue" (Lefebvre 2022[1953] p61, Schmid 2022 p171).

A forest industry professional suggested that the traditional economic base of the region was sustained primarily by cultural factors:

The loggers I was talking to yesterday said "we know we're not really making money doing this, but it's in your blood, and once it's in your blood that's all you know"...It's more of a cultural thing I think. People don't get into logging because they think they're going to become very wealthy from it. BMFM

Reflecting its fundamental historical importance, logging is inscribed into the local landscape through place names:

It's very much a strong local history, deep roots, pretty much all of our logging companies they have a road or a lake named after them. They're old family names that have been here forever. BMFM

An aspect of the rural economic culture - connected to Lefebvre's notion of rural "equilibria" (Lefebvre 2022[1949] p17) - is the practice of a degree of self-sufficiency, in contrast with cottagers and in-migrants who are more fully reliant on market transactions. This aspect of the culture was commented upon by an interviewee in the following terms:

There is a very skewed economy here where a lot of people will grow things and hunt for things and so forth, so you've got a town of hunter gatherers that are trying to survive._ITBIA

An IT professional trading their cutting-edge expertise for a delicious local resource illustrates the sometimes fuzzy edges to the economy in this space:

The one thing I have to get used to is the barter system is well and alive up here like most small towns... I've done jobs for maple syrup._ITBIA

Historical accounts testify to the longstanding significance of non-market transactions in the area. French and French (2003) describe the foundational role of agriculture as a means of subsistence:

"Before the mid-20th Century, Bancroft and the surrounding area was a small and scattered but close knit community. In the rural areas, nearly everyone had some sort of garden, some chickens and a couple of cows. These farms did not generate an income for the family but were chiefly for sustenance" (p71)

Non-market transactions can be seen as a residual feature of rural lifestyles dating back to the early settlers: ostensibly agriculturalists who, due to challenging conditions, often pragmatically turned to widely available forest products to make a living (see Chapter Five). Today, non-market transactions help long-time locals survive

the affordability crisis of the early 2020s, which encompasses all manner of essential items, from gas and groceries to housing.

We learned in Chapter Three that accelerating urban displacements were driving some unhoused people towards North Hastings, seeking alternative forms of land tenure which draw on “rural” qualities of self-sufficiency. Conversely to the “rural” practices that constitute peripheral spaces of Global South cities (McGee 1990, Gillen et al. 2022), a particular conception of “rural” habitation in this context offers a survival strategy for many inhabitants of the “urbanizing” region. The encroachment of metropolitan land values increases this need for “rural” self sufficiency, not just for those facing an immediate personal housing crisis.

Anecdotally (recounted in a personal communication to the author), the experiences of a self-described Haliburton County “redneck” - a term intended to express a family history in the area dating back to settlement - resemble those of many North Hastings locals with connections to the rural economic culture. This individual described, regrettably, a forthcoming move north to an area “between Sudbury and Timmins”. Their preferred recreational activities were becoming difficult to practice in Haliburton County, as in-migrants made claims to informal land that previously had been used for hunting. This general formalization of land use can be seen to be a key feature of the metropolitanization of areas like Haliburton and North Hastings. Expensive housing in Haliburton was a major factor in the individual’s move, while they also positively identified with a traditional lifestyle and culture which remained strong “seven hours north” of Haliburton.

As various visions of the locality compete, the “early settlers” (ITBIA) face the threat of displacement from their multi-generational home under significant pressures. Relationships with the land - as the foundation of a deep-seated identity or as a much valorized recreational commodity - shape a growing tension between long-time locals and cottagers or in-migrants which will be explored more fully in Chapter Six. The topic of the dispossession of the Indigenous peoples of the land is returned to Chapter Five,

when describing the period in which municipal governments - a governing structure which will be shown to profoundly shape today's patterns socio-spatial change - were imposed.

4.11. Conclusion

The economic development strategies discussed in this chapter are not argued to be a prime cause of the in-migration trends described in Chapter Three. They remain, however, a significant artefact in that they represent a new way of doing business for local governments (even those far down the urban hierarchy) in the Internet age. A homogenizing vision of "the rural" in place-marketing material has been argued to represent a city dweller's imaginary, created in the hope of attracting mobile entrepreneurs, retirees and remote workers to North Hastings. Marketing and branding-centred approaches to economic development eschew building an economy from the ground up by providing working class jobs, and therefore contribute to the increasing inequalities evident across the region. Despite the transformative potential of these shifts, and emerging trends that are clearly evident, many aspects of the economic culture are firmly anchored in place. The deep-rooted economy of forestry has been shown to stand up, for the time being, to the shift towards a post-productivist digital economy described in this chapter.

The chapter has described a shift from "smokestack" economic development approaches, to "soft" place-based methods, a transition reflecting the influence of technological change. While the message associated with this shift - "Wildly Authentic" - has been shown to have fallen flat among some groups in North Hastings County, the medium of the Internet - through which North Hastings has been re-presented and remote work has been facilitated - is profoundly implicated in a new public perception and economic function for rural areas. The Internet, and the material infrastructures that sustain it, facilitated the discursive and institutional shifts described herein, thus representing a powerful "structuring" influence on the agency of present day governance actors.

In Lefebvre's (1991[1971], 2003[1970]) terms, the economic development approaches discussed in this chapter reflect an intensification of the global "abstract space" of contemporary capitalism. In this space - with regard to local government strategies - homogeneity rises among similarly well-branded and Internet-friendly jurisdictions while, at the same time, they fragment in terms of their competitive orientation. The expansion of the "urban fabric" in the form of high-speed Internet infrastructure provides a material foundation for the emerging space, counteracting the traditional geographic obscurity which has stifled economic growth in the North Hastings region. Moreover, it may be hypothesized that "rurality" - as expressed by the "Wildly Authentic" plans - *becomes* valorized in this period of time, due to areas like North Hastings becoming newly available for city dwellers to live and work in under a new technological paradigm.

The historic conditions which established the local rural economic culture are explored in the next chapter, alongside a description of the foundational structures of local government which determine the parameters of action available to Ontarian municipalities to this day.

Chapter Five - A Central Place in a Peripheral Space: European Colonization and Early Rounds of Political and Economic Restructuring

There's a real disconnect people here refer to south of [Highway] Seven and north of Seven because the county is huge right and Hastings County [government] is in Belleville and their head office and North Hastings has a history of feeling left out. The resources don't flow here. EDCT

5.1. Introduction

This chapter recounts the early history of Bancroft and North Hastings, from Indigenous treaties with European settlers, to the uranium boom of the 1950s and 60s. Here, I sketch the key features of the production of space in the region; describing interrelations between local economies, political structures, material infrastructures, and dominant conceptions of the space, as these elements co-develop upon the terrain. Through historical analysis the chapter explains North Hastings' enduring peripheral political and economic status - represented by the locally significant divide of Highway Seven, referred to in the introductory quote - and describes how Bancroft ascended to central place status within the region.

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 will outline the political arrangements which shape historic and contemporary relations between Indigenous people and settlers in the region. Then, from Sections 5.4 to 5.9, a focus lies on early European settlement from the 1850s. Widespread industrialization - and its manifestation in the form of railroads, highways, cottaging, and uranium mining - is described from Section 5.10 to 5.14, as the historical timeline moves into the twentieth century. Regarding the overarching objectives of the dissertation, the chapter reveals important structural economic and political factors shaping later rounds of decision-making by governance actors. At the same time, foundational influences on a "rural" identity in North Hastings County are identified. Moreover, a number of explanations for the uneven political and economic

development of North Hastings - by comparison with surrounding areas - emerge over the course of this description of the region's early history.

5.2. Historic Indigenous-Settler Treaties and the Present Day Algonquin Land-Claim

The account of the structured agency of local governance actors that will develop through the dissertation must begin with the legislative foundation of territorial sovereignty claimed by settler society: historic treaties with Indigenous Nations. Indigenous-settler treaties, however, represent not only the foundation to present-day colonial political structures in the lands now known as Hastings County but, as will be shown, they also provide the basis for a reassertion of Algonquin claims to the land.

Treaties between First Nations and the British (and later, the Canadian) government originally mirrored the format of treaties between different Indigenous Nations (Davidson 2022). Southern and Central Ontario, for example, were contained within “Gdoo-naaganinaa”, or the “Dish with One Spoon” Treaty, between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee (Sellers 2021). Gradually, according to planning scholar Jenna Davidson - who draws significantly upon the work of Indigenous writers John Borrows and Lynn Gehl - “treaties of a more European format became a tool for the Crown to secure land” (Davidson 2022 p120). An evolving relationship characterized, variously, by “curiosity, friendship, conflict and oppression” (ibid p118) developed alongside the political-legislative framework of present-day Canada. Eventually, complimenting a wider roll out of federal, provincial and municipal state spaces - described later in this chapter - “Indians and Lands Reserved for Indians” were designated a federal responsibility in the Constitution Act of 1867. In 1873, The Golden Lake Reserve, near Eganville, became the land base for the Ontario Algonquins, a group within the wider Anishinaabe people, as the political geography of the new nation of Canada began to take shape (ibid).

Indigenous scholars Starblanket and Coburn (2020) point to contradictions inherent in the treaties which complicate notions of total sovereignty for the settler colonial state:

“The foundations of the Canadian state rely on the simultaneous continuity and containment of Indigenous relationships to the land – that is, continuity of Indigenous “consent” to share the land and containment of forms of relationship that interfere with the state’s exercise of perfect territorial sovereignty.” (Starblanket and Coburn 2020 p88)

An ongoing land claim by the Ontario Algonquins - encompassing, in part, the land North Hastings now occupies - has called into question assumed nation-to-nation consent at the time of European settlement. The claim rests upon the fact that a treaty was never negotiated for the Algonquin lands in Ontario, west of the Ottawa River.⁶ Following the *Calder vs A.G.B.C* (1973) case in British Columbia - which set a precedent for establishing Aboriginal title in places without treaties - the Algonquin Claim gained momentum (Davidson 2022). In 1974, Don Tennisco, Chief of the Golden Lake Reserve, discovered a history of petitions to the British requesting the establishment of a treaty in the region. These requests were never granted, thus obliging the Canadian government to negotiate a new settlement, a process that was initiated in 1991 with the Government of Ontario, and in 1992 with the Canadian federal government (Davidson 2022).

⁶ Prior to colonization and an accompanying cultural bifurcation, the Ottawa River was geographically central to a united Algonquin people in present-day Ontario and Quebec (Davidson 2022).

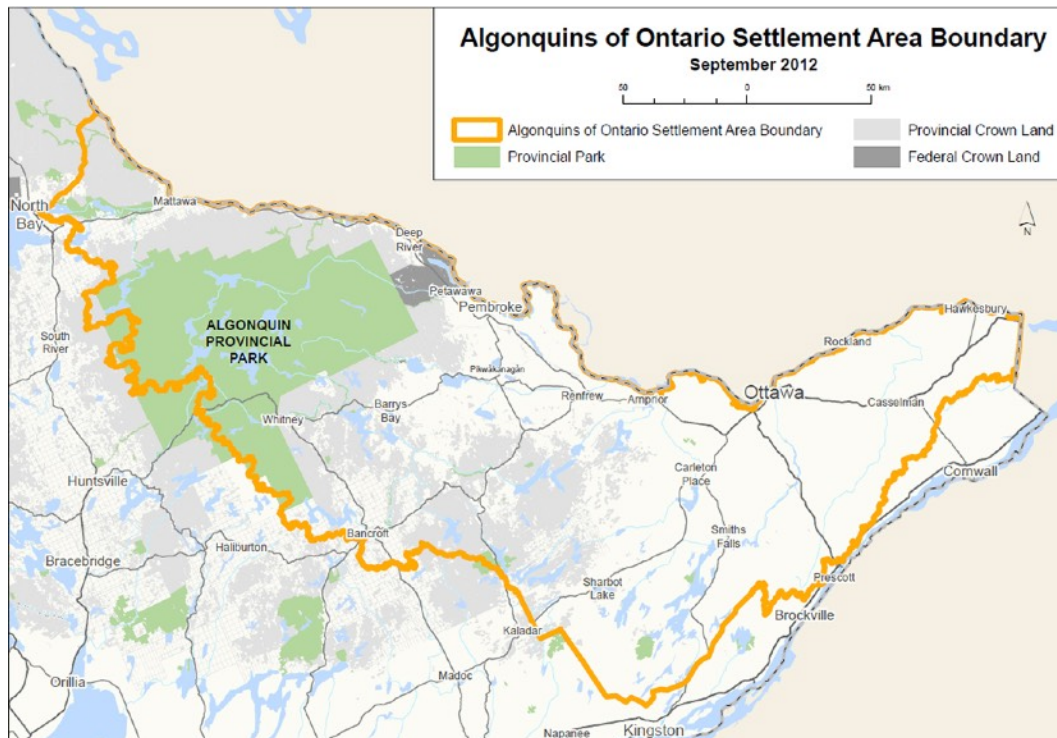


Figure 23: Algonquin Settlement Area (Source: Government of Canada 2023b)

Bancroft-Area Algonquin Negotiation Representative Robert Hunter has claimed, “we are pretty close to that treaty line, where we are going to sign something” (Smelle 2023). When settled, the claim will establish Aboriginal title in a land area of 36,000km², which is home to 1.2 million people - including the City of Ottawa - and 84 municipalities in total (Government of Ontario n.d.). The current stage of negotiations is “Agreement-in-principle”: step five of a seven stage process of trilateral negotiations between the provincial and federal governments, and the Algonquins of Ontario (comprising ten local groups, including the Bancroft area’s Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini) (ibid).

Once the treaty is settled, land will not be expropriated from current owners, and access to property and navigable waterways will not be denied. No new reserves will be created (ibid). With regard to the Land Claim Area’s quotient of Crown Land - a public land use designation established in England in 1066 (Whiteside 2019), which dominates the land mass of the province and the nation - only 4 percent is proposed to be directly transferred to Aboriginal title holders (Government of Ontario n.d.).

Algonquin lands will be subject to “municipal jurisdiction” after transfer and will operate as such, with regard to land-use planning powers. Where land transfers take place, they are oriented towards “restoring historically significant sites to the Algonquins”, “contributing to social and cultural objectives of Algonquin communities” and ensuring they “provide a foundation for economic development for the region” (ibid).

Political economist Heather Whiteside (2021) points to problematic aspects of particular treaty resolutions in the case of Vancouver-area disputes. According to Whiteside, mortgage-repayment stipulations from the government on returned Crown Lands have incentivized the maximization of profit-making, by way of major new development projects. While this process stands to greatly benefit both parties financially, the scenario advances the socially deleterious processes of privatization and runaway property-value escalation in the Vancouver area.

Robert Hunter, however, has put forward a positive view of the process in Eastern Ontario - at its current stage - describing the Land Claim negotiations in the following terms:

“I am not negating all of the racism... It did happen, but this is part of moving past it...There’s never been a better time in history, to do this kind of thing. You’ve got the public more or less behind you. The government is more or less behind you, or at least their public face says they’re behind you. That’s new!” (Smelle 2023 para 11)

The Ontario Land Claim, therefore, carries potential for greater empowerment of the Algonquin people, and may provide a precedent for other First Nations groups to assert claims to sovereignty within Canada.

5.3. Present-Day Municipal-First Nations Relationships

Davidson identifies several challenges and opportunities regarding land use planning in Ontario once the Treaty is settled. In rural and urban municipalities throughout the Land Claim Settlement Area, municipalities will be obliged to develop plans and policies with regard to the interests of Indigenous peoples. Algonquin voices will be permanently represented within those municipal institutions which are subject to land claim settlements. Collaborations, it is stated by Davidson (2022) “represent meaningful opportunities for municipalities within the claim area to engage in reconciliation and relationship-building at a very local and tangible level” (p130). The Town of Bancroft should be subject to institutional changes along these lines in the coming years.

Presently, Bancroft Council members recounted good relations with the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation. Describing consultations surrounding the Town’s flagship “North Hastings Inspiration Place” project - the mayor stated:

I think most people really do feel that there are a lot of injustices through treaties that were not handled properly etc. I just think there’s a general feeling that it needs to be fair for everybody. We support our local Algonquin community. We’ve engaged them in our new Community Hub. We want to reflect their history in our new Hub building. Everywhere we can, we want to reflect their heritage. There’s their heritage and there’s other heritages as well, the first settlers etc. MB

The North Hastings Community Trust - described by an affiliated researcher as “a registered charity organization with a community-led mandate to provide emergency and sustainable solutions to poverty and injustice” (Sellers 2021 p7) - put forward a different perspective on municipal-First Nations relations locally. The Trust - displaying a kinship with Indigenous values and the politics of decolonization - reported a disagreement with the Town over a proposed land acknowledgment on their premises:

We asked to put a land acknowledgement up in our Community Gardens which is owned by the Town and they told us we could not put the land acknowledgement up...They said we were duplicating other signs in the community which is B.S. so we did it anyway. We put up land acknowledgement signs anyway. EDCT

The NHCT has a conflictual relationship with the present-day municipal government (as will be elaborated upon more fully in Chapters Seven and Eight). An oppositional dynamic is reflected in the statement, by the organization's Executive Director, that the NHCT "report to" the local First Nations group as opposed to organizations operating under "the Crown":

I say we report to the community, and we report to Algonquin Nation and those are the folk who its most important for us to report to. EDCT

Issues regarding Indigenous representation and reconciliation are an increasingly important issue for the local municipal government. Davidson (2022) cites, however, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's (AMO) argument that municipalities lack the knowledge and resources (see Chapter Seven for a discussion of the human resources limitations of small municipalities) to stand in for the Crown and assume a major role in Canada's move towards reconciliation. Certainly, the Town will face major challenges - for which higher level guidance may be necessary - in adjusting to a new reality.

Next, Sections 5.4 to 5.9 will describe the development of the early colonial political and economic space in North Hastings, upon the land secured through contested treaties over the course of the nineteenth century.

5.4. Early Economic Tensions at the Time of European Settlement

Initially, in the early 1800s, pine was European colonizers' most valued resource in the North of Hastings County. Local historian Bob Lyons (2012) notes that by 1850, just prior to the arrival of the transformative colonization roads, the best of the region's

pine had been cut. Lumber barons such as John Egan had been granted huge limits by the Crown (Lyons 2012 p3) to supply the United Kingdom with timber and had taken full advantage of their allowance. Little in the way of permanent settlement had taken place on the Canadian Shield by the middle of the Century: the region remained a resource periphery from a European perspective, while the Algonquin people were nomadic, establishing small, temporary hunting camps (Lyons 2012 p48). Prior to the construction of roads and rail roads later in the nineteenth century, rivers were essential for the transportation of harvested logs. The York River, around which Bancroft eventually developed, allowed for transportation to Ottawa via the Madawaska and Ottawa rivers, for eventual shipping down the St Lawrence and across the Atlantic.

Colonization roads, proposed in the 1850s to “open up” the Shield country, represented something of a double-edged sword for lumber interests. Historian Wendy Cameron (n.d.) claims:

“Prominent lumber barons with very good political connections lobbied hard when they wanted a colonization road to serve their ever larger operations pushing north and west into new stands of timber” (p6).

Despite the value of the roads as a means of access, the primary public justification for the roads was facilitating permanent settlement. This presented problems for lumbermen. As Reynolds (1979) writes:

“Although the powerful lumber interests favoured surveys, they exerted pressure to keep settlers out by arguing that the land was unsuited to agriculture and that homesteaders impeded their operations” (p11).

Thus, at this early point in North Hastings’ history a tension between settlement (through agricultural development) and resource extraction was already present (see Chapter Six for an account of these tensions in the area today). Managing broad patterns of land use in the region was the duty of the “Province of Canada”, as Upper

Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec) were then known (after unification in 1841, and before nationwide federation in 1867). Cameron (n.d.) describes the legislative process behind major land-use decisions regarding the dividing of the land between agricultural settlement and use for lumber harvesting:

“In the session of 1854-5, a select committee of the House of Assembly [of the Province of Canada] on the management of public lands raised, and discussed without resolution, the question of how much land in the Ottawa Huron tract [many present day “cottage country” lands between Ottawa and Lake Huron] should be designated for agriculture and how much was best left to lumbermen” (p6).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, therefore, an agricultural economy, founded on the fertile soils between Lake Ontario and the Canadian Shield, shaped settlement patterns for Europeans, while North Hastings and beyond remained a resource hinterland. This was to change with the development of the colonization roads.

5.5. The Colonization Roads and the Imposition of Colonial Space-Time Norms

Local historian Gerry Boyce (1967) describes how government intervention encouraged a “looking northward among county farmers and businessmen” (p108), The “wilderness” of the Canadian Shield at this point can be seen to have been opened up in a “spatial fix” (Harvey 1982) - a reshaping or expansion of existing spatial networks in order to sustain capital accumulation - for the Southern Ontario economy. Boyce (1967) writes:

“up until 1850 Madoc and Marmora townships [presently approximately one hour south of Bancroft by car] were on the fringe of settlement. The country

lying to the north was a veritable ‘terra incognita’ and the government decided this should not remain the case” (p120).

By 1856, the Hastings Colonization Road, created by the Province of Canada, was ready to settle. The settlement process was organized from an office in Madoc (Boyce 1967 p121). 500 free lots were offered by the government to settlers on the condition that a certain amount of the land would be cultivated within four years. Settlement continued until 1864 when there were no new locations available on the Colonization Road (Boyce 1967).

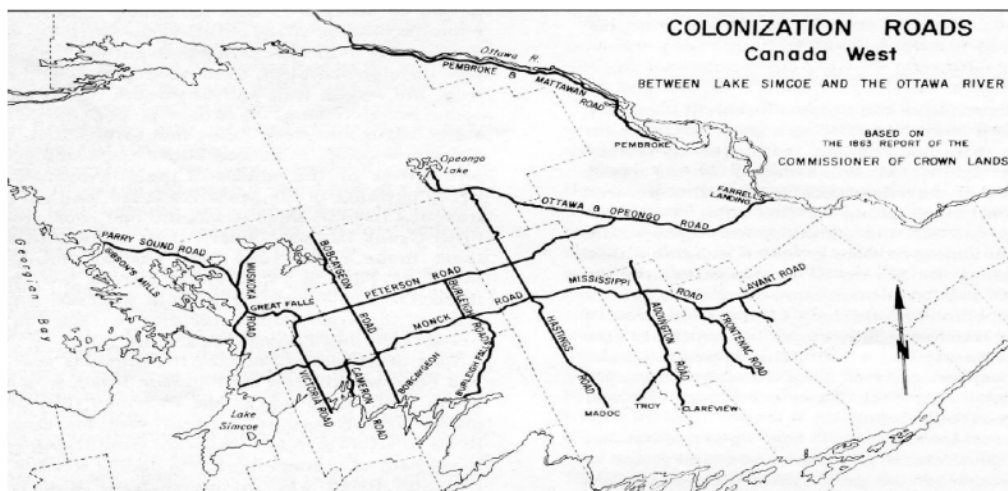


Figure 24: Map of Colonization Roads (Lake of Bays Lane 2012)

The Hastings Road was part of a series of colonization roads developed to open up the Canadian Shield (See Figure 24). According to Reynolds (1979): “If the colonization road was the key to the Canadian Shield Country, the Monck Road was the last turn of the lock” (p35). The “Monck Road” and the “Hastings Road”, which intersect around present-day Bancroft, still provide important routes through the terrain of North Hastings County. Recognition of the stark realities of Indigenous dispossession, however, are often lost in their everyday use.

In the context of colonial BC, historian Cole Harris (1997) has theorized transportation and communication infrastructures, such as the colonization roads, as “capillaries of colonial appropriation” (p184). As such, they function to bring peripheral

spaces of the world economy into a temporally predictable economic system. Similar arguments are made by David Harvey, who emphasizes space-time compression as a central aspect of colonization within a globalizing capitalist system (Harvey 1996 p222). Within this view, newly imposed colonial space-times are fundamentally conflictual with those upon which Indigenous lifeworlds are dependent.

By the time the Golden Lake Reserve was established in 1873, the Algonquin peoples' traditional territories were in the process of being "rapidly transformed as a result of resource-intensive industrial expansion, settler encroachment and land dispossession" (Davidson 2022 p122). Local historian Nila Reynolds (1979), meanwhile, gives a cursory mention to the effects the colonization roads in displacing Indigenous populations, stating; "When the Hastings Road was built and whitemen [sic] began arriving in numbers, the Indians [sic] moved elsewhere" (Reynolds 1979 p76). Recently, historian Heidi Bohaker has described this displacement more fully. Her account recognizes the profound disruption by colonial infrastructures to the interconnected cultural and ecological norms of indigenous life. Bohaker writes:

"Logging also increased run-off and silted up rivers, affecting fishing on which the Anishinaabeg also depended. And the newcomers also hunted and fished, so there was increase predation on deer, beaver, and other species" (Bohaker in Dargicevic n.d.).

Indigenous dispossession and European settlement through the colonization roads represents a foundational moment to the recurrent "restructuring" of this space. New economic practices were introduced, and the way was paved for the imposition of municipal political powers and land-use regulation onto a landscape previously regarded as an undifferentiated wilderness by Europeans.

5.6. New Political Structures

The construction of the Hastings Road and the creation of the 500 Free Lots were accompanied by a reorganization of the political map at the lower-tier level, as a familiar cartographic structure of North Hastings emerged in the second half of the 1800s (though amalgamations around the year 2000 have subsequently changed the picture somewhat). The Province of Canada added twelve townships to the County in 1858, namely; McClure, Hershel, Faraday, Wollaston, Wicklow, Monteagle, Dungannon, Limerick, Bangor, Carlow, Mayo and Cashel. “Bancroft” was known as “York River” and was located just inside the municipality of Faraday Township, near the Dungannon boundary. Until the early twentieth century, York River was no more prominent than other villages like L’Amable, Maynooth and Coe Hill. The growth in population and importance of “York River”, and the creation of “Bancroft” as a municipality, will be described from Section 5.10 onwards.

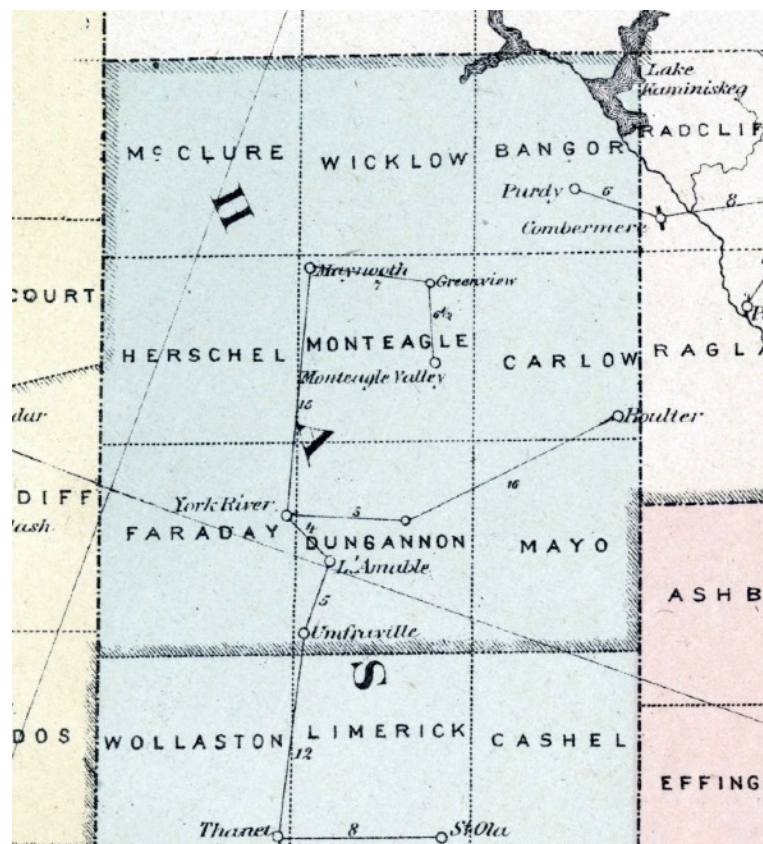


Figure 25: Map Of The New North Hastings Municipalities (Hastings County Ontario Pioneer History. n.d.)

Reynolds (1979), notably, describes the existence of poorly organized municipal boundaries from the early days of settlement. Political boundaries corresponded poorly to the social and economic patterns of life, which will be shown to be a recurring issue for Bancroft. Reynolds writes:

“One of Faraday Townships peculiarities was that most of its settlements, even York River [former name of Bancroft], seemed to develop close to its boundaries and thus relate to ratepayers living in adjoining townships, Wollaston to the south, Cardiff to the west, Dungannon to the east and Herschel to the north” (Reynolds 1979 p52)

The state structures governing North Hastings County had undergone significant evolution since the year 1800, under the rationale of improving local democracy (see Boyce 1967 Ch.10 and 14). Shortly before the creation of the northern townships, Baldwin’s Municipal Act of 1850 had, to a large extent, introduced the institutional structures that political actors in Ontario inhabit to this day. The Act established municipal corporations as local governments throughout the rural areas of the Province of Canada, including the southern parts of Hastings County. New rural townships had similar, but more limited, powers than those that had already bestowed upon Towns and Cities (Isin 1992 p169) earlier in the Century. Townships, therefore, became the default unit of local governance at this point in time.

In a significant boost to local autonomy, local governments - for the first time - had no restrictions to the amount of property taxes that could be raised (Pelton-Stokes 2018). This established property taxes as a prime concern for local councils, as will be shown to be increasingly significant in the present day in Chapters Seven and Eight (given the withdrawal of provincial support for local services and infrastructure, the ever more lucrative status of real estate taxation as a revenue stream).

Several municipal powers were introduced in the 1850 Act which remain key functions of local government today. Municipalities gained an ability to own real

property for public use within their boundaries, were able to make by-laws and apply public health regulations regarding local water sources, and were able to protect inhabitants' property rights in particular ways (e.g. inhabitants were allowed to cut down woods on property) (Pelton-Stokes 2018). Local education was introduced via semi-autonomous boards. At the outset of the Act no express powers were granted for townships regarding relief of the poor. The ability to levy a poor rate was introduced in 1853, if approved by most inhabitants (ibid). Local government scholars Marshall and Douglas identify how, over time, municipalities responded to local demand as the “front line of government”, by increasing their role as a service provider (Marshall and Douglas 1997) beyond an initially basic function in this regard.

Large-scale “districts”, representing a more centralized distribution of power, were largely replaced by counties through the Baldwin Act. Counties were granted powers to be able to build roads, bridges, county buildings, schools, and pay councillors. They gained a supervisory role with respect to the lower-tiers of government. Around this time towns and cities also saw the introduction proto-zoning laws, which were initially managed by affected citizens themselves (Pelton Stokes 2018 p47-64).

By formalizing local government, the Baldwin Act was seen in many ways, to empower local communities. Journalist and Historian Stephen Thorning claims:

“With the reforms...local politics became extremely local, with intense involvement when contentious issues were under consideration” (Thorning n.d.).

Under the previous “districts” system, localized, informal town meetings had become common, as communities sought assert a degree of local autonomy (Boyce 1967). Political scientist Warren Magnusson, however, laments the replacement of small-scale, accessible citizen assemblies by governments solely inhabited by managerial and professional classes. Magnusson (2015) argues that implicit in this trend “was a certain idea of class rule” (p10), and an economistic, bureaucratic culture

of government was institutionalized that has endured - while evolving under particular cultural and economic influences (see Chapter Eight) - to this day. For Magnusson, a “bourgeois conception” of local government - shared by left and right wing proponents - has existed since its inception; the state architecture must provide services in an organized and efficient manner by employing the technical expertise of the professional class. The idea that ordinary people could self organize effective local governments has traditionally been given “short shrift” by influential decision-makers (Magnusson 2015 p11).

On the motivations underpinning localist political reforms, Canadian governance scholars Tindal et al. (1990) write:

“where provincial authorities did encourage or ultimately impose municipal governments on their populace, it was not because of any apparent belief in the values of local democracy - rather, it was motivated by a desire on the part of the provincial administrations to shift at least some of the growing burden of expenditures to the local level.” (Tindal et al. 1990 cited in Marshall and Douglas 1997 p6)

Political sociologist Engin Isin also puts forward a critical perspective on the motivating factors behind the Baldwin Act. Isin (1992) argues that the beginnings of “self government” in British North America were initiated by colonial authorities primarily in order to legitimize sovereignty for provincial elites (p167). The process of introducing local government, according to Isin, was carefully managed to *limit* local autonomy in the wake of British authorities’ experience of the American revolution, and the fear of localist rebellions that it aroused. For Isin, the municipality - a spatial unit for public administration, produced under the legal norms of capitalist modernity to resemble private business corporations - is a fundamentally different entity to the historic autonomous cities of Europe which, as described by Weber, were established as a “sworn association of citizens” (ibid p175). In British North America (as was true of Britain itself) “a new franchise relationship was being articulated between the city and

the State” (Isin 1992 p57) under the rise of the modern nation state. In a political sense, the disjuncture between the “rural” and the “urban” was transformed at the moment when a universal system of municipal corporations replaced autonomous cities within the national territories of advanced capitalist nations.

Lefebvre associates the rise of “urban society” with an intermediary level between the global (Level G) and the private (Level P). If Level G consists of the order by which society as a whole is organized - e.g. institutions of religion, law and the state - and Level P comprises the more intimate codes - that determine family life, dwelling and relations in the workplace - Level M encompasses individual’s life worlds and the means of organizing space on a more city-sized or regional scale. The roll out of municipal institutions - as seen in mid-nineteenth century Ontario - exists at this “mediating” level. Here, urban theorist Christian Schmid connects Lefebvre’s concept of “Level M” to concrete features of advanced capitalist societies’ political apparatus:

“the urban level in the true sense...oriented around certain institutions, such as the municipal authorities with their services, information channels, distribution networks and decision making power” (Schmid 2022 p195).

While, by this reading, all places were created “urban” at this point in time, it can be seen that some places were made “more urban” - regarding their powers and autonomy - than others.

5.7. An Enduring Peripheral Space

A peripheral status, in political terms, was apparent in the early days of the “rather unorganized Townships to the rear of this county” (Boyce 1967 p124). This was reflected by the fact that, later in the nineteenth century, problems arose regarding the repair of local roads, damaged due to high levels of traffic. Here we see echoes of present-day concerns among Bancroft councillors regarding wear and tear on the

roads due to the town's status as a place for "passing through" to cottages in surrounding municipalities.

A nineteenth century observer remarked on the lack of taxation powers for local authorities:

"it is a great injustice to the united Townships of Tudor Wollaston and Limerick, and the County generally, to allow so many settled Townships as there are in North Hastings to lay so long unorganized, and untaxed for the repair of the roads which as yet has cost the settlers therein nothing, and without which they could not get our or in to their settlements" (Cited in Boyce 1967 p124).

Interview participants still referred to challenges mobilizing power and resources in the 1858 townships, north of present-day Highway Seven. North Hastings' enduring peripheral status - first remarked upon in the late nineteenth century - relates, in part, to its distance from Belleville. A concomitant lack of influential political voices locally has endured throughout the region's history ("*There's no decision makers that are empowered locally*" EDCT). For the Executive Director of NHCT, this plays out most significantly in the arena of housing and social support for the vulnerable. The deficit of social services described reflects a discrepancy between Bancroft's status as a de facto service hub, and a lack of recognition as a political centre:

The situation [in terms of unaffordable housing] is the same across the country. I think the difference here [regarding housing] is we just don't have any infrastructure. We have no support. There's no shelter. There's no transitional housing. Now there's no affordable housing. We have one complex that's geared to income but there's almost five hundred people on the waiting list. EDCT

A former mayor was able to put a number value on the contribution of the North to the county's finances, which was not - reportedly - reflected in funding to the region in return:

What I find disturbing is the fact that, I know the last year or two in the County budget the monies that are derived from North Hastings is about 47 percent of the budget of the County budget I feel that we certainly do not get 47 percent of our representative dollars back in North Hastings. FM

The warden's role - representing a "federation" of the lower-tier municipalities in the county - was recently supplemented by a deputy warden in a move which, according to some, might help address problems related to regional representation:

There was a lot of conversation about splitting the duties between the warden and the deputy warden, so there would be geographical representation across the County and I think there's some merit to that... We have an excellent warden. Rick Phillips has done some excellent things to try and bridge the divide between North South and Centre. He does come to events in the north when he can but the pressure points are in the south where the majority of population is... there were times when he couldn't come because he had things in Deseronto, Belleville. GM

These measures may partially remedy issues of political representation. North Hastings' historic status as a less-developed hinterland will be difficult to overcome without more significant structural reform. The largely unsuccessful struggle to establish agriculture is an important factor in North Hastings' turbulent development trajectory, as will be described in the following sections.

5.8. The Role of "Image-Making" in Attracting Settlers

The government of Hastings County operated at a political tier beneath that of the Province of Canada at the time of the development of the colonization roads. Since the political separation of business hub Belleville in 1860, the overwhelmingly "rural" social and economic character of the rest of the county - recently branded as "Wildly Authentic", as described in Chapter Four - has been maintained. While, following the Baldwin Act, many of the powers at the county level resemble those possessed by the upper-tier today, the Municipality of Hastings County demonstrated a different role facilitating international immigration and settlement, alongside the Province of Canada, in the days of the Colonization Road (Boyce 1967 p125-128).

Competition for settlers - with both the Canadian Prairies, and other colonies such as the USA and Australia - was a prime impetus for the creation of the Colonization Road and the Free Lots. An interviewee, identifying that “*beautiful flat farmland*” in Southern Ontario had been taken, described the period in the following terms:

They settled along the Great Lakes and the St Lawrence and when that beautiful flat farmland was gone they pushed north ... There was a big exodus of people to the West and part of Ontario's thinking to keep people was to give them free land and you had to farm so many acres and establish a house and then it was free.
DGMLH

Marketing campaigns of the era, acting as an important “catalyst” for the new infrastructures, reflect how institutionalized power has the capacity to present a vision of how particular spaces should function, to the exclusion of other understandings. As Schmid (2022) argues:

“representations of space are permeated with knowledge, they can become strategic instruments for the reduction of spatial practice and the imposition of an order on it” (p279).

Promotion of the Free Lots took the form of pamphlets, “widely circulated abroad in English, German, and Norwegian” and published by the Bureau of Agriculture and Statistics (Cameron n.d. p9). Phillip Vankoughnet - assisted by William Hutton - was influential in developing the “place-promotion” agenda, as a member of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada. Due to the fierce competition for settlers, an “optimistic” representation of the lands at the end of the colonization road prevailed. It is worthy of note that more skeptical perspectives - that farming and large scale settlement on the Canadian Shield would not be feasible - did also exist at the time in the House of Assembly (Cameron n.d).



Figure 26: Land Grant Advertisements (HWT Project n.d.)

The approach of British colonial authorities - seeking to make the new terrain legible to themselves as well as potential migrants - is described by Cameron (n.d.) in the following terms:

“As early travellers, British army engineers had justified their time and expenses by stressing alien aspects of a landscape of rocks and forests owned by mosquitos. In the 1860s, Crown Lands Department surveyors and road agents stretched too hard to find the familiar. The maps and language of description used for the Ottawa Huron tract reflected ways of thinking and methods of evaluation devised for settled landscapes. Surveyors worked to impose the order of European concepts of space on this unruly countryside and by 1861 had the prototype of a map showing detail of the tract surveyed at the level of the township” (p15).

In early promotional material, the free lots on the colonization road were argued to contain “an abundance of the very best land for farming purposes” (Cameron n.d.

p9). Ultimately, this round of boosterist “place-marketing” from colonial authorities amounted to something of a false promise. An observer commented:

“If the great strength of the expansionists was their ability to evoke an image of the future...their great failure was their inability to maintain any sort of relationship between the myth and the much harsher and more prosaic reality of frontier life” (Cameron n.d. p7).

This supposed “terra incognita” was subject to a “representation of space” (Lefebvre 1991[1971]) which assumed a particular productive function within colonial capitalism. While the space was permanently transformed into a place of settlement, the practice of agriculture was proven to be a persistent struggle for settlers.

5.9. Decline of Agricultural Settlement

The limits to the transformative potential of the colonization roads is summarized by Boyce (1967) in the following terms:

“The assumption that only better access was needed to make the Canadian Shield a good agricultural area had proved false...Nevertheless the roads did help open up the Northern section of Hastings County and to provide the basis for many of the present chief transportation routes” (p128).

By 1925, of the 500 Free grant lots it was “doubtful if there are more than from fifty to seventy five of them occupied” (Boyce 1967 p124). Following a difficult period of time for settlers in the early twentieth century, a famous quote from Ontario Land Surveyor C.F. Alyswoth described the colonization road as, “one long, long trail of abandoned farms, adversity, blasted hopes, broken hearts and exhausted ambition” (Cited in Boyce 1967 p125).

The realities of farming contrasted starkly with the optimistic representations of government agencies at the time. The inherent difficulties of the task were described by an interviewee:

It was very difficult here. There were a lot of subsistence farmers. A lot of these young fellas went off to war because they knew they would be fed. It was not a happy time here. Certainly the farming conditions here are absurd. Every year your first harvest are the rocks that have come up with the frost. So you know, very tough going for people to try and settle here. EE

While agriculture floundered as an economic end in itself, it played a role supporting forestry and mining in the area. Boyce, for example, documents the fact that agricultural practices, while difficult to profit from, were valuable on a local level through the feeding of local mining and lumbering operations (Boyce 1967 p372). Agricultural settlers frequently adapted to their new environment by making a living through lumber harvesting:

On the other side of my family, not the Martin side, but the other, they were original land grant settlers in Cardiff township, which is one township over. The land that they were given, the free land grant they were given was Canadian Shield rock and dense bush and swamp. You're not going to make a living farming on that kind of land. Their primary revenue was wood. They would harvest it.... my grandfather on the other side had 26 children - three wives - they all lived on the revenue from working in the bush. It was survival if you didn't have farmland. Even if you had some farmland generally you had a lot of bush. DGMLH

This resourcefulness resulted in the establishment of many of the long-running lumber companies in North Hastings. Local historians French and French (2003), identify that - in contrast to present day operations in Northern Ontario, run by large multinational companies - "Most local lumber mills of north Hastings were started not by large companies but rather by local farmers" (p63). Among these companies was Freymond Lumber, the major "productivist" enterprise remaining in the vicinity of Bancroft, and the antagonist of the "No Place for a Quarry campaign" in recent planning contestations. French and French (2003) write:

“Freymond Lumber was built by brothers Peter and Rene Freymond in 1946. They were farmers who needed to earn extra money. It was a small operation that did not load logs downriver. Instead they found it cheaper to move their mill to where the logs were... as of 2002 they employed 50 mill workers and still preferred doing business with the little guy, buying 60 per cent of their wood from local farmers” (p63).

Here, the authors capture the enduring, locally-rooted culture of the forestry tradition in North Hastings and environs. Lumbering continued to be a local economic mainstay, brought into the post-war era through new technologies and regulatory arrangements (see Chapter Six).

Some farmers sold food to mines, which began to proliferate in the region increasingly in the twentieth century. French and French (2003) claim that the establishment of widespread mining in the area ushered in a permanent depletion of agriculture:

“With the opening of the mines in North Hastings in the early part of the 20th Century, the agricultural community was depleted. Many farms were sold as people relocated closer to the mines where the money was more plentiful” (p74).

These changing patterns of local land use, and an accompanying redistribution of the population, reflects another significant moment of economic restructuring.

Chapter Five thus far has emphasized social, economic and political development on the regional scale (i.e. throughout North Hastings), a sharper focus will now be brought to the settlement that would become known as Bancroft. The remainder of the chapter shows that the rise of Bancroft accompanied a period of economic restructuring in the early twentieth century, and was fundamentally associated with the emerging industrial transformation of Ontario society. In this period, Bancroft establishes itself as the central community of North Hastings. A political dynamic emerges - a status as a frustrated “hub” community (discussed more

extensively in later chapters) - which characterizes the particular form of structured agency experienced by local governance actors in the Town.

5.10. The Early History of “Bancroft”

Isin (1992) identifies how, in Canada, the concentration of population - and a supposedly “civilized” urban culture in the eyes of colonial authorities - was planned at the highest political levels. A limited number of “central” political spaces were engineered, while the remaining, outlying municipalities became simplistic political entities by design. Bancroft was never established as a political centre during the period in which colonial state apparatus was being set up in Upper Canada or, later, within the Province of Canada. The town, despite periods of growth and relative importance, has fallen between being recognized as a place of regional centrality and a resource hinterland for much of its existence.

On the establishment of the settlement in the nineteenth century, Lyons (2012) claims that “York River”:

“grew because the river dropped enough to run mills whether for lumber, flour, wool or electricity [much later in the mid-twentieth century] [It] is also at a junction point where two great river systems drain east to Ottawa and south to Lake Ontario. The first pioneers came for the logs and settled as an afterthought” (p39).

In addition to this natural foundation, individual agency emerges from local histories as an important reason for the village’s growth. Senator Billa Flint - well connected within federal and provincial political circles - occupies a heroic position in local lore, due to his role in persuading skilled tradesmen to move to York River in the late nineteenth century, and having renamed the village “Bancroft” after his wife’s maiden name (*Bancroft History* 2016).

In an interview, the Mayor of Bancroft's commented on the important role of more affluent settlers in developing the region:

A lot of the people that came were maybe from England or [somewhere like] that originally, very entrepreneurial when they saw opportunity. They were probably well heeled, they would move to an area to basically take advantage of that opportunity. MB

Isin (1992) cites Berczy to describe how prominent individuals were important in elevating particular places from largely undifferentiated hinterlands in the eyes of governing elites:

“for the acceleration of settlement, it was necessary that men of higher influence, of more property, than could possess the lower and more indigent classes of men, should find it an object worth their attention, to lay out necessary pounds for the introduction, and the support of new and beginning settlers” (Berczy in Isin 1992 p124).

Bancroft was not endowed, historically, with a large number of “men of higher influence”, but a clear exception exists in the case of Billa Flint. Flint's influence appears to owe little to the formal political powers and resources mobilized by the local municipality, but rather demonstrates the outsize impact that personal connections among influential networks can have in the context of a small town.

5.11. Rail roads: Integration into an Industrial Space

At the turn of the twentieth century, a number of important economic shifts impacting Bancroft - now a local trading centre - are documented in the local histories of Hastings County. Around the year 1900, the market for lumber changed. A role supplying materials for English ship construction was supplanted by a function providing saw lumber for the American West (Lyons 2012 p40). At the same time, Cotton (2019) describes Ontario as entering its “urbanization phase”, during which many villagers of North Hastings were leaving for larger industrializing centres. Services

disappeared from many North Hastings communities after having been established for a couple of decades, as the population declined at the start of the twentieth century (Cotton 2019). Here, North Hastings' longstanding status as a "liminal space" (Luka and Lister 2012) can be seen; the development trajectory of the region does not always follow a linear pattern of growth in a particular economic furrow⁷. Railroads, however - and the industrial economy they were profoundly interconnected with - were to herald new socio-spatial transformations in North Hastings' industrial period.

Railroads were not new to North Hastings County at the time of their arrival in Bancroft; several operated in and around North Hastings County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A line - originally known as the Prince Edward County Railway - was expanded as the "Central Ontario Railroad" (COR) following demands from William Coe to provide transportation for his iron ore deposits at Coe Hill. This line was operational by June 1884, while the extension to Bancroft opened on November 2nd in 1900 (*Canadian Railways* 2013).

The spatial shift precipitated by the arrival of the Central Ontario Railroad in Bancroft appears to have put the community formerly known as "York River" on the map, to a degree. According to Lyons (2012), until 1900 harvested logs were floated on rivers from North Hastings to Ottawa. Subsequently logs were typically floated to Bancroft, and then loaded onto rail cars bound for Belleville. Connecting Bancroft more directly to the burgeoning industrial economy was influential in making Bancroft *the* central place in the north of Hastings County, connecting its mineral and lumber resources to the would-be "Birmingham of North America" (Boyce 1967) in Belleville. While, in local histories and interview data, details are fairly scarce about the rise of Bancroft at the start of the twentieth century, its incorporation as a village in 1904 must be seen as a reflection of a growing economic significance.

⁷ Another period of slight depopulation in the early twenty first century echoes this historical moment.

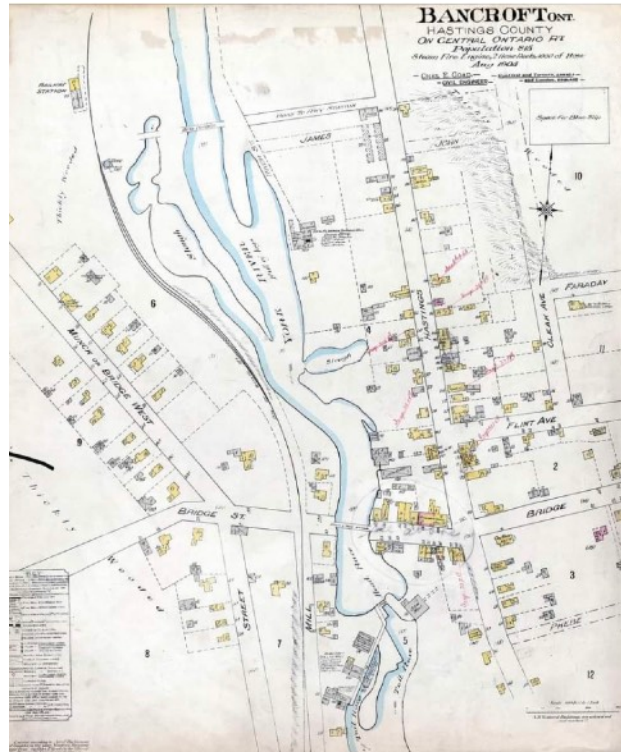


Figure 27: Map Of Bancroft From 1904 (Library and Archives Canada)

French and French (2003) imagine an alternative future for Bancroft in which centrality within rail networks secured a much more prominent status within Ontario's urban hierarchy:

“In the early 1900s, Bancroft has every right to think of itself as a potential railway hub of eastern Ontario. Lines of steel pressed in on it from the south and from the west, pushed by ambitious plans to link those railways to others in the north and the west...Unfortunately, many railways of the 1800s were like the dot.com companies of a century later, they were wild and undercapitalized fantasies which teetered on the verge of bankruptcy for most of their lives. And then they folded” (p218).

The Irondale, Bancroft and Ottawa (IBO) railroad, for example, struggled to justify its creation for the purpose envisioned by American capitalists Henry Howland and Charles Pusey: transporting deposits of ore and minerals. As with the concurrent agricultural enterprises in the area, many mining ventures ultimately proved unviable.

The IBO railroad became regarded as a “rich man's toy” (Canada Rail n.d.), and many efforts to mine the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a similarly speculative quality.

The Victoria Railroad, meanwhile, served nearby Haliburton. As described by the Harvey Historical Society (*Canadian Railways* 2013), the line did not connect to spaces of industry like the Central Ontario Railroad and, instead, established a rather different connection to urbanizing, industrial society for Haliburton. They write;

“There were no mineral riches in the area; most of the good timber had been logged at this point and the soils too poor to support truly prosperous farms. A temporary halt at Haliburton became permanent. There was however spectacular scenery surrounding the village and plenty of wild life. It wasn't long before vacationers and hunters were arriving by the trainload” (*Canadian Railways* 2013 para. 6).

This connection can be seen to have had an enduring impact on socio-economic development in North Hastings County's eastern neighbour, in the formation of an incipient “cottage country”.

5.12. The Early Recreational Economy of North Hastings

While vacationers frequented Haliburton via the Victoria Railroad, the Bancroft area was developing its own recreational economy at a slower rate. Lyons links the growth of Bancroft as a business centre with practices of rural recreation, claiming that “cottaging” began in 1910 when five prominent Bancroft businessmen (“beginning to see a little prosperity” [Lyons 2012 p58]) bought lots from settler Bill Mulcahey for \$10 a lot (Lyons 2012). This occurrence suggests that two conditions were fulfilled for the development of “rural recreation” in Bancroft in the 1910s; first, that the business class had the capital to develop land for this purpose, and second, that demand existed locally (the first cottagers would have been local due to transport limitations). While the

first cottage was built in 1914, the shoreline was “less than idyllic” as log driving (still practiced until 1926) caused driftwood along the shore (Lyons 2012).

A first lodge “Edenswold” was built in North Hastings 1917. Guests were often American tourists and the clubhouse on “twin islands” (or “Millionaires island”) served the rich and famous (Lyons 2012), indicating that - despite a reputation as “poor man’s cottage country” - wealthy classes have long had some connection to the area. Evidence suggests, however, that North Hastings was far behind nearby Muskoka’s development trajectory as a rural recreational escape for city-dwelling elites, which had received a growing stream of prosperous tourists since the last few decades of the nineteenth century (Jasen 1995).

According to Canadian historian Watson (2017), “tourism was actually critical to defining the [Muskoka] region’s rural identity from the earliest stages of Euro-Canadian resettlement” (p292), whereas North Hastings had undergone fifty years of resettlement before tourism became well established. An interviewee stated:

[Tourism] was later developing [than other cottage country areas], of course. The Muskokas developed out of the Toronto political folks, who were the first people to have their vacations in that area, so it’s a lot of older and established cottages. The cottaging here not as active and not as many... It’s catching up. EE

Watson (2017) describes Muskoka’s upwardly mobile transformation in the following terms:

“By the turn of the century, a competitive atmosphere of one-upmanship had transformed the collection of modest board-and-batten structures that comprised the original cottages into opulent mansions and summer homes, famously known as ‘Millionaire’s Row’”(p76).

While Muskoka developed “as a place where people could escape the burdens of civilization without blurring the lines of social class” (Jasen 1995 p123), this would not be case in North Hastings due to tourism’s later emergence, smaller scale and - as argued by an interviewee - the ongoing primacy of coexistent logging and mining operations:

I feel perhaps that market [for cottages] was somewhat depressed partly due to the acquisition of a lot of the land by the mining companies. There were a lot of holdings by timber and mining companies. And while there were cottages, certainly not to the same extent as you would see to the west in Haliburton and area or to the east in the Laurentians. EE

As evidenced by their relative present-day prominence, North Hastings’ mode of integration into a recreational economy for city-dwellers was different to that of nearby Muskoka. As with Haliburton, shaped by the Victoria Line connection, each of these regions - often lumped together today in a homogenized notion of “cottage country” - had their own distinctive development path. The differing articulation of various economies - tourism, natural resources - in these localities shaped their class character and set local municipalities on particular development trajectories that influence the present day decision-making context for local governance actors. Moreover, these varying development trajectories produced, in part, the rent gaps between North Hastings and Haliburton and Muskoka, as identified and discussed in Chapter Three.

5.13. The Rise of Cottage Country in a New Period of Provincial Politics

At a moment of intensified industrialization, the scenic landscapes of the sparsely populated Canadian Shield underwent increased valourization by mobile sections of Southern Ontario society. By the 1920s, private car ownership had grown, and out-of-towners began seeking summer homes in the North Hastings area (Lyons 2012). Certain unremitting features of the local landscape, however, created an impediment to economic development in the form of tourism. An interviewee described conditions in the early years of automobile-enabled tourism:

The geography, the topography doesn't lend itself to real easy travel. So even with the advent of the automobile, yeah more people came here, but the stories you hear of people running into difficulties like wearing out tyres to come up here to visit [are plentiful]. It's rugged. Very very hilly. EE

According to Lyons (2012), recreation grew steadily until the 1940s, by which time “tourism and cottagers were the mainstay of Baptiste Village [15km northwest of Bancroft]. Most of the early farmers had given up...” (p61).



Figure 28 Over The Hills of Hastings 1923 (Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County. n.d.)

A major factor in this transition towards an emergent “cottage country” identity was new highway construction, which helped overcome many of the physical barriers created by the terrain. According to French and French (2003), the construction of Highways 62 and 28, which travel from Bancroft to Belleville and Peterborough, respectively, “doomed the railways” (p224), leading to the eventual closure of the unprofitable IBO and COR lines in the 1960s. By this time, the railway lines were owned by Canadian National Railways (CN), a public organization and a notable feature of an

integrated national economic space that had coalesced since the early twentieth century.

Michèle Proulx, author of a thesis on the environmental history of uranium mining in the Bancroft area, describes the period of highway construction as “depression era relief work” (Proulx 1997 p56), while claiming that these infrastructures helped establish the recreational economy in the area:

“In 1937 the Department of Highways took over the Colonization Roads Branch of the Department of Northern Development. The Final gap on the road from Burleigh Falls to Bancroft (Highway 28), between Apsley and Paudash Lake, was completed in 1937. The completion and the upgrading of these roads, in concert with the increase in the private ownership of automobiles, influenced the development of the cottage / tourist resort industry in the area” (p22).

The Great Depression era represented a transformative moment with regard to the political structures of the local and provincial governments in Ontario. Crawford (1954) describes the shifts in the following terms:

“Municipalities ceased to be liberal institutions based on statute and confined to purely regulatory concerns, and became proactive agents of wealth redistribution in the emerging welfare state, with greatly augmented roles” (Crawford 1954 cited in Marshall and Douglas 1997 p13).

At this point in time, maintaining newly important road networks was an important local government function, while “poor relief” and education also became greater priorities at the local level (Marshall and Douglas 1997). Higher-level political transformations occurred in tandem with local changes. By the outbreak of World War Two most provinces (including Ontario) had set up a Municipal Affairs Department as an overseer, after having allowed for relative municipal autonomy for a sustained period of time following the Baldwin Act (Marshall and Douglas 1997).

In addition to creating the means of accessing an emerging “cottage country” by constructing highways, a key role for the state is evident in shaping new land use patterns. In a web publication, a cottage association describes provincial land use interventions in Apsley, just west of North Hastings County in the Kawartha Lakes region:

“In 1957, the Province of Ontario made lots available on a number of area lakes...Maps were provided in Apsley and the news of the availability of lots spread by word of mouth...Once you had the lot, you had two years from the date of purchase to construct a building with a minimum area of 240 square feet and a value of at least \$2000” (Loon Call Lake Cottagers Association 2015 p10-11).

SCHEDULE 1.

MINIMUM PRICE LIST

The minimum price for each of the lots on the plan of subdivision of Crown land on Looncall Lake, in the Township of Barleigh and Amstruther, shall be as follows:

<u>Lot Number</u>	<u>Minimum Price</u>	<u>Lot Number</u>	<u>Minimum Price</u>	<u>Lot Number</u>	<u>Minimum Price</u>
1 - - -	\$410.00	25 - - -	\$470.00	51 - - -	\$410.00
2 - - -	\$350.00	26 - - -	\$220.00	54 - - -	\$325.00
3 - - -	\$370.00	27 - - -	\$240.00	55 - - -	\$324.00
4 - - -	\$340.00	28 - - -	\$260.00	56 - - -	\$316.00
5 - - -	\$330.00	29 - - -	\$310.00	57 - - -	\$344.00
6 - - -	\$335.00	30 - - -	\$330.00	58 - - -	\$327.00
7 - - -	\$325.00	31 - - -	\$330.00	60 - - -	\$336.00
8 - - -	\$330.00	32 - - -	\$335.00	61 - - -	\$332.00
9 - - -	\$330.00	33 - - -	\$497.50	62 - - -	\$139.00
10 - - -	\$325.00	34 - - -	\$307.00	63 - - -	\$336.00
11 - - -	\$325.00	35 - - -	\$552.00	64 - - -	\$330.00
12 - - -	\$325.00	36 - - -	\$357.00	65 - - -	\$418.00
13 - - -	\$340.00	37 - - -	\$348.00	66 - - -	\$330.00
14 - - -	\$345.00	38 - - -	\$330.00	67 - - -	\$368.00
15 - - -	\$340.00	39 - - -	\$345.00	68 - - -	\$360.00
16 - - -	\$345.00	40 - - -	\$329.00	69 - - -	\$330.00
17 - - -	\$340.00	41 - - -	\$331.00	70 - - -	\$315.00
18 - - -	\$385.00	42 - - -	\$328.00	71 - - -	\$460.00
19 - - -	\$350.00	43 - - -	\$370.00	72 - - -	\$270.00
20 - - -	\$335.00	44 - - -	\$385.00	73 - - -	\$275.00
21 - - -	\$340.00	48 - - -	\$376.00	74 - - -	\$350.00
22 - - -	\$360.00	50 - - -	\$368.00	75 - - -	\$335.00
23 - - -	\$365.00	51 - - -	\$325.00	76 - - -	\$325.00
24 - - -	\$330.00	52 - - -	\$322.00	77 - - -	\$360.00

Figure 29: Original Cottage Lot Prices On Loon Call Lake Circa 1958 (Loon Call Lake Cottagers' Association 2015)

Through these transformations, the primacy of local scale social and economic lifeworlds was altered in mid-twentieth century Southern and Central Ontario. As cottages and cars infiltrated the region, shaped by the initiatives of a mature provincial state (moving towards the Fordist-Keynesian period of stability which will be described in the next chapter), traditional rural economic cultures would become juxtaposed with those from the city on an increasingly frequent basis.

5.14. The Advent of Uranium Mining

Bancroft had been a commercial centre since the arrival of Billa Flint in the late nineteenth century, while mining - for a variety of minerals - had taken place in the region for a similar length of time. An economic heyday for the town, however, resulted from its role as a uranium mining centre between the late 1950s and the early 1980s. Many sources confirm a period of optimism and opportunity related to the uranium economy in the mid-twentieth century. An interviewee stated:

Certainly that was the town's heyday. They thought "Wow! This is it, we're all going to do very well". There was more employment and so on. I'm sure there was a great deal of optimism about that. But it was short lived. EE

Another interviewee also commented on a leap in available income for local working class residents, brought by the mines:

They never had those kinds of jobs before here... they never had those good paying jobs, a paycheck every week. RE

By the mid 1950s, French and French (2003) state that "the quiet village had been transformed into a noisy, bustling boom town" in which "Geiger counters were almost as common as fishing rods" (p51). Proulx (1997), describes how, in 1956, 125 properties in the area were actively looking for uranium. In contrast to previous waves of resource speculation, the four properties that eventually became fully functioning uranium mines had an enduring and transformative effect on the local community. An interviewee stated:

There would not have been Bancroft as it is without the mines. There were four or five right? Bicroft, Faraday mine, Greyhawk, there were mines, people mining on every corner. The big ones brought the housing boom and the stores and banks and stuff like that. DGMLH

French and French (2003) claim that growth was expected, by some at the time, to continue well into the 1960s and 70s:

“There were predictions that the tiny town would grow to 5,000, 10,000, even 25,000. Houses were being built everywhere and tradesmen were in short supply.” (p46)

The Bicroft and Canadian Dyno mines were located in Cardiff Township, Haliburton County, while the Faraday (from 1976 onwards renamed “Madawaska”) and Greyhawk mines were in Faraday Township, Hastings County (Proulx 1997, p31). All these operations were within a short drive of Bancroft. The wider context of federal and provincial government regulation supporting the mining industry, without which the boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s would have been inconceivable, will be described in the next chapter.

Figure 30 demonstrates the effect of the uranium boom in transforming the distribution of population in North Hastings County. In the chart, Bancroft and Faraday can be seen to assume regional centrality, while - likely as a result of continuing agricultural decline (see Section 5.9) - North Hastings smaller municipalities’ population decreased.

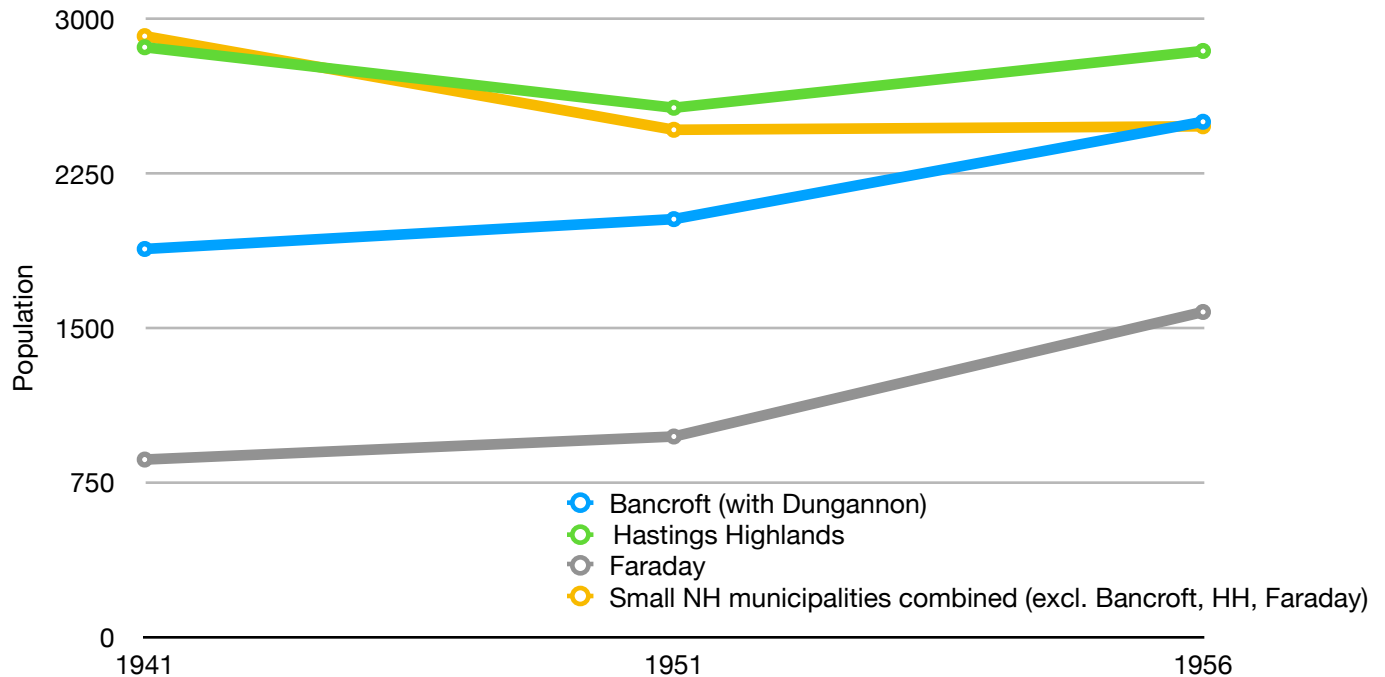


Figure 30: Population Change Related To Bancroft's Mining Boom (Government of Canada 2022)

In this phase of development, certain aspects of the social and physical infrastructure of Bancroft became scaled for a more significant, functionally complex community. As the recently published “Making Our Future” plan states:

“The assets of this community are rich and diverse – many would never be available to a community of this size under today’s economic environment” (Town of Bancroft 2019 p2).

The uranium mining period was a key moment in establishing these assets. At this time, an emerging sense of centrality developed among Bancroft’s business and political leaders as the town’s importance grew. A recent letter to “Bancroft This Week” described the prevailing outlook in Bancroft when the water system - an outsized asset bestowed upon the burgeoning community around the year 1960 - was installed:

“At the advent of the municipal water system, the council of the day was basking in the prospect of potential limitless growth. We had several new mines

which brought overnight growth and this, coupled with the baby boom, meant that we would be a city in short order” (*The Great Water and Sewer Debate* 2018).

Bancroft had been incorporated as a village in 1904, shortly after the arrival of the railroads. The transformative economic changes that, later, accompanied the mines precipitated another significant round of political restructuring:

“In the fall of 1956, Bancroft annexed 3,940 acres of Faraday Township, taking in the York River Heights subdivision and a housing area south of the village and east of the York River. In doing so the village increased its size twelvefold and became twice as large in area as Belleville.” (French and French 2003 p48)

Bancroft’s growing economic importance was, therefore, acknowledged at this point in time with an expansion of its political territory. The implications of the expanded political boundaries of Bancroft for local government actors - notably, the municipality still lacked, and lacks, developable lakefront areas for the growing cottaging economy - will be a theme in Chapters Seven and Eight.

That the town’s transformative changes were imposed from “without” by higher levels of government and private industry - can be seen to have reinforced Bancroft’s status as a somewhat “accidental” population centre in the spatial structure of Hastings County. Bancroft remained outside of Canada’s historic, established centres of political power, which Isin (1992) claims had been engineered during the roll out of the colonial political apparatus (See Section 5.6). Nevertheless, political restructuring, population growth and the arrival of networked infrastructures precipitated permanent changes to life in the town of Bancroft, and to its political and economic role in the region.

5.15. Conclusion

This chapter has described the early history of economic restructuring in North Hastings: from a nomadic hunting ground for the Algonquin people, to a uranium mining hub, via becoming a resource hinterland supplying lumber to Europe, a struggling space of agriculture, and a secondary cottaging region for Southern Ontario's cities. The origins of the spatial form of North Hastings County - in the form of road and rail networks, population centres, spaces for recreation and resource extraction - have been outlined. Transformative infrastructures have been accompanied by particular ideational transformations (as mirrored by present-day campaigns to rebrand the space for the internet age [See Chapter Four]), as well as new economic directions. Each round of development, has resulted in an expanded social and economic space, bringing together increasingly eclectic economic cultures.

I have argued that the given development trajectory has resulted in relative structural disadvantages for the north. North Hastings' foundation as a traditional staples-producing region provided low-pay work opportunities and resulted in minimal local institutional development. The north of the County of Hastings was carved up into twelve townships in the mid-nineteenth century for the purpose of settlement through agriculture. Despite (over) optimistic advertising, settlers to these townships - characterized by extremely limited capacities regarding the exercise of political power - did not experience favourable agricultural conditions.

Bancroft achieved sufficient prominence, through the arrival of powerful individuals, and through economic opportunities driven by railroad development, to be carved out of Faraday Township in the late nineteenth century and incorporated as a Village at the turn of the twentieth century. A outsider status within local political hierarchies remained, however. The Canadian Shield, a non-compliant landscape for agriculture, was similarly troublesome for facilitating tourism which, unlike Muskoka - a second home for political elites - was not able to develop sufficiently to put the region on the map for provincial decision-makers.

Bancroft experienced an economic leap forward in the uranium mining-era of the 1950s onwards, driven by the development of mines, housing and infrastructure by the provincial and federal governments (as will be described more fully in Chapters Six and Seven). This status could be seen as somewhat fragile: mining towns - as an imprint of “cyclonic development” (Keeling 2010) - often possess a transient quality. Bancroft’s mix of economic bases disqualify it from full membership of this category, and the Town’s hub function was, ultimately, consolidated and has endured to the present day.

The local history of the colonial political structure of the municipal corporation has been outlined over the course of this chapter. This institutional form, dependent on property tax revenues, co-existing with a managerial and economic culture of government (see Douglas 2005), will be an important topic in the later chapters of the dissertation. Developing out of the collectivist post-Great Depression moment described in Section 5.13 of this chapter, the construction of the Town’s water system will be described in Chapter Seven.

The next chapter continues along the historical timeline from Bancroft’s mid-twentieth century “heyday”, describing the “regulation” of the region’s economic base between the 1960s and early 1980s, before analyzing subsequent periods of economic decline and recalibration.

Chapter Six - Old Resources, New Resources: Reconfiguring a Small Town Fordist-Era Structured Coherence

So, what you get is this collision of values, one is rooted in the early beginnings of the community which is forestry and resource development and the other which is outdoor recreation and leisure... they're going to have to reconcile what tension they're going to side with, or what peace they're going to broker between the two tensions. Because it's a mixed message, big time. If you don't want mining and forestry you've got to pick something else that's going to be your economic future. Some would like it to be tourism based. Me, I think that's risky, I think that the town can continue to nurture its industrial heritage, we still need forestry products we still need aggregates in the community, it's not like it's an activity whose day has come and gone. It's still relevant in our consumer society, have all of these things, so we've just gotta live and let live that's my philosophy. MA

6.1. Introduction

As reflected in the opening quote, rural restructuring processes are often complex, conflictual and incomplete. With a focus on a wider regional scale - also incorporating Eastern Haliburton County, and areas to the east such as Renfrew County - this chapter describes the differentiated internal dynamics of social and economic restructuring between North Hastings and environs' "Fordist" and "post-Fordist" periods. The chapter focuses on the status of traditional productivism (primarily in the form of forestry, following the withdrawal of mining). I show how diminishing economic returns on resources are a central factor in the restructuring of North Hastings County. Here, the arguments of rural gentrification scholars Martin Phillips (1993) and Eliza Darling (2005) - who identify parallels between the inner city disinvestment observed by Neil Smith (1979) and undercapitalized productivist spaces in rural areas - provide a precedent. As Darling writes:

"Formerly productive agrarian land... might be understood as 'undercapitalized' in rent-gap terms, and subsequently 'revalorized' through residential real estate development, such as barn conversions" (Darling 2005 p1025).

Thus, the chapter rounds out an analysis of rent gap dynamics in North Hastings which has run through the early chapters of the dissertation. Other conceptual framings are largely foregrounded, however, which help illustrate key socio-spatial formations in the Fordist and post-Fordist moments. Sections 6.2 to 6.3 describe the second half of the twentieth century in the North Hastings area via the concept “structured coherence” (after Harvey 1985), identifying the particular configuration of political, economic and social regulatory features which allowed uranium mining and lumbering to provide consistent and widespread employment in the local area for a sustained period. In Sections 6.4 to 6.11, rural geographer Halfacree’s (2006) Lefebvre-inspired “three-fold architecture” framework will be drawn upon in assessing the “coherence” of the present-day society and economy of North Hastings County.⁸ Halfacree’s categories “rural locality”, “everyday lives of the rural” and “representations of the rural” are used to understand multiple dimensions of social, economic and political dynamism in the region.

6.2. A Fordist-Era Structured Coherence: Forestry in Maynooth and Harcourt

Manufacturing operations - as a central feature of Fordism in cities - existed locally, most significantly in the form of G.P. Flakeboard - *“that employed hundreds of people in its heyday, it was a huge economic driver for the town”* (GM)⁹ - which made engineered wood boards from shavings for use in cabinetry. The facility is located just outside of Bancroft municipality, on Y Road in Bird’s Creek, Hastings Highlands. Manufacturing built upon North Hastings’ forestry-based economic culture, central to the local identity since European settlement (See Chapter Five). The economic foundation of sawn lumber production will be the focus of this section, centring the

⁸ Relevant, contemporary data supporting this approach was not available for the historic analysis undertaken in Sections 6.2 and 6.3.

⁹ In 1993, \$53million was invested by Atlanta-based Georgia Pacific and New Brunswick-based Flakeboard to resurrect the struggling Combi-Board plant in Bancroft (French and French 2003). In 2005, the plant closed due to a lack of low-cost materials (Natural Resources Canada 2006). Despite recent discussions around reusing the building for a cannabis production plant, however, no use has been found for the vacant facility to date.

major local employer G.W. Martin Lumber. As will be shown, general Fordist-Keynesian political and economic characteristics are evident in the region in this period in the advancement of technology in the production process, increased living standards for unionized workers and government interventions in social regulation at multiple levels.



Figure 31: Former Flakeboard Factory, Outside Bancroft (Photograph by Author)

Describing the rural structured coherence of Wales in its productivist heyday, Halfacree (2006) writes: “the whole rural locality appeared to radiate out positively from agriculture” (p53). A similar claim rings true for Bancroft-area forest-based economies during periods within the post-war era. A former worker in the forestry industry described the local significance of the sector in the following terms:

Forestry was very dominant. In the 1980s, 70 percent of the employment in the area was the lumber industry, in 2020 it would be 40 percent. That would include little operations like Freymond Lumber but also the contractors. So from seventy down to forty in forty years. DGMLH

The villages of Harcourt, Haliburton County and Maynooth, North Hastings were fully integrated into Canada's staples economy through G.W. Martin's role as the largest hardwood producer in North America (**DGMLH**). After purchasing his father's already-successful lumber company in 1958, Martin rose to regional dominance, in a large part due to productivity-increasing innovations such as using trucks as opposed to rail networks for distribution, and thawing logs in a hot pool in order to facilitate winter sawing (**DGMLH**). The success led to Martin acquiring other large lumber companies:

We bought up companies in the late '70s and early '80s that were owned by American companies like Weyerhaeuser, Weldwood, huge companies were selling off their sawmills and we were buying them... he took great pride in buying companies that were American and making it Canadian first of all.
DGMLH

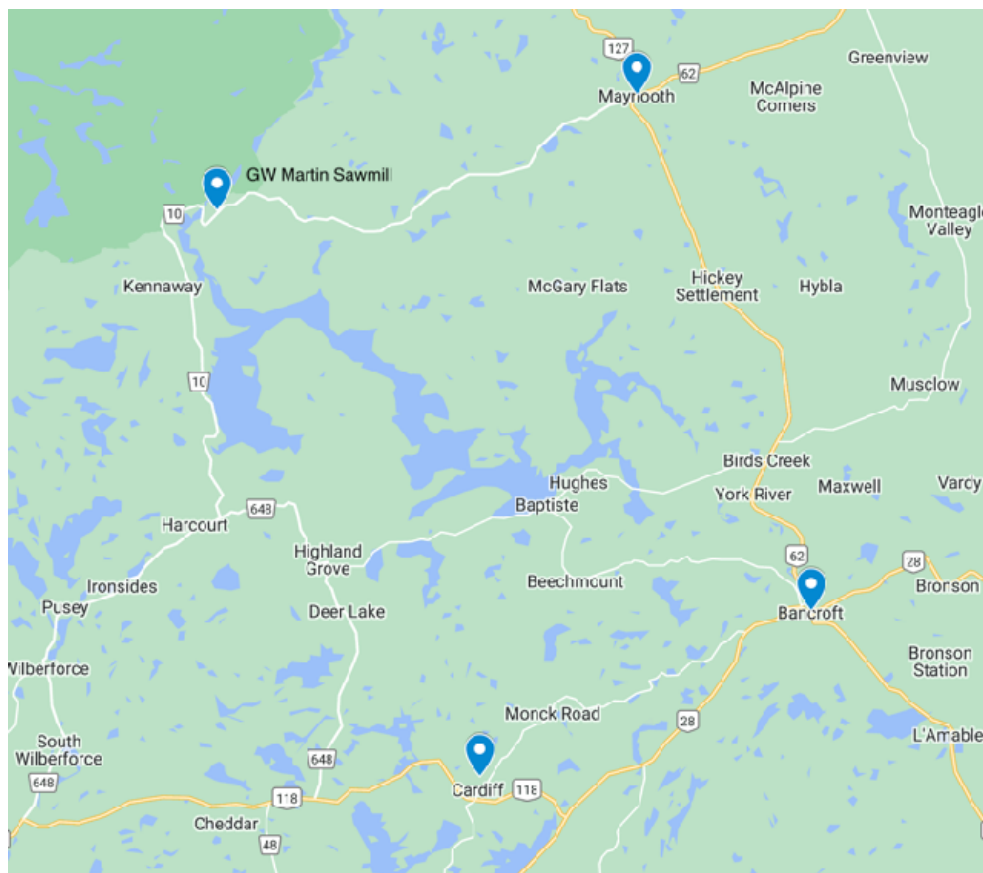


Figure 32: Map of Areas near GW Martin Sawmill (Google Maps)

Harcourt was the site of G.W. Martin's sawmill and most workers lived in nearby Maynooth. According to the daughter of G.W. Martin, the road between Maynooth and Harcourt was called "*the longest driveway in Ontario*" because "*the politicians paid to have that put in to the mill because of his relationship with the government*" (DGMLH). The establishment of this spatial form allowed patterns of accumulation to proceed efficiently and predictably for Martin's operation. An enduring relationship with the provincial government - G.W. Martin "*was a huge supporter of the Conservative Party*", financially as well as more generally (DGMLH) - resulted in the granting of generous timber limits which provided stability for the Harcourt mill for several decades.

At this time, harvesting was regulated directly by the Ministry of Natural Resources and, within Algonquin Park, by the Algonquin Forestry Authority (DGMLH). Restrictions on harvesting were fairly loose until the 1980s, in comparison with today. Martin Lumber employees were members of the International Woodworkers of America Union ("*minimal benefits*" according to DGMLH) and typically owned their own homes in Maynooth (DGMLH). Home ownership and commuting to the Harcourt site were features of an improved quality of life, in contrast to the earlier use of a communal bunk house for sawmill employees under G.W. Martin's father.

A seemingly stable arrangement of relative prosperity began to unravel rapidly upon the death of G.W. Martin in 1984 (See Section 8.2 of Chapter Eight). In the absence of relationships with the Province, the purchasers of Martin's company were deprived previously-granted timber limits, and the take over was unsuccessful. Upon the closure of Martin Lumber in 1988, Maynooth and Harcourt faced a social and economic catastrophe. Harcourt was described in the following terms:

Harcourt... has just withered away and died. Restaurants closed. I still visit there but no growth, maybe retirees but I can drive through there a dozen times and not see a person outside. It's a dead community. It was progressing and other communities adjacent to it are still progressing with curling clubs and skating rinks but Harcourt just died. DGMLH

Details regarding the approximate number of workers impacted by the closure were provided by the same interviewee:

There were fifty four people working at the head office... There were one hundred and fifty people working at the sawmill. There were fifty to one hundred local logging contractors that worked for Martin Lumber you add that all up, you're over three hundred people. That's a huge impact on a little community. Bancroft is 3500 people. But it didn't devastate Bancroft, it devastated Maynooth and Harcourt. And they all went to work elsewhere. But a lot of them lost their homes. All of of them would not have been able to get employment anywhere else. You probably know Bancroft has a huge unemployment rate and welfare, I presume some of them had to resort to that. The impact would have been huge on the community of Maynooth and Harcourt. DGMLH

As identified in this quote, knock-on effects impacted Bancroft - as the region's service hub - which added to the problems it was experiencing due to the decline of its once-booming uranium mining economy.

6.3. A Fordist-Era Structured Coherence: The Uranium Industry

Bancroft was one of Canada's most significant sites for uranium, which was considered a "strategic mineral" at the time of the Cold War by the Canadian government. As such, special price contracts and income tax breaks were provided which "suckled the private uranium industry into existence" (Alexander 1989 quoted in Proulx 1997 p8). Representing Lefebvrian theorist Schmid's (2022) notion of a widespread "urbanization of everyday life" (p174), new serviced suburban-style housing options - rapidly constructed by the federal government in Bancroft and Cardiff - were created to support the mining industry (Proulx 1997) (See Chapter Seven).

At this time, varied forms of investment into the local community, are described by French and French (2003):

“During the boom, the mining industry had invested \$30million in its own plants, municipalities spent \$3million on schools and services, and residents put more than \$5million into homes. The mines themselves had poured money into local services. Faraday, Dyno and Bicroft put more than \$2.5million into housing, Bicroft erected its own curling rink and recreation hall for \$60,000, Faraday [mines] gave \$20,000 towards Bancroft’s curling rink and \$35,000 to the village’s water system” (p47).

For a while, the benefits from creating this stable social milieu for uranium companies were significant. In the 1956 to 1964 operating period, 500,000 kg of uranium oxide concentrates worth \$105,000,000 were extracted from area mines (Proulx 1997 p32).

Mines	Maximum Number of Employees	Value of US Contract	Mill Capacity Tons (Tonnes)	Years of Operation
Bicroft	500	\$37,885,000	1,100 (998)	1956 - 1963
Canadian Dyno	450	\$34,875,000	1,000 (907)	1958 - 1960
Faraday	565	\$46,410,000	1,000 (907)	1957 - 1964
Madawaska	n/a	6,000,000 lb. U ₃ O ₈ with AGIP of Italy	1,500 (1,360)	1976 - 1982
Greyhawk	75	\$20,350,000	no mill	1957 - 1959
Totals	1,590	\$139,520,000	4,600 (4,172)	

Sources: Carson-Brown 14; Hewitt 38; Alexander, SMDR 247; ODM 1957-1959

Figure 33: Production from Uranium Mines In Bancroft Area (Proulx 1997)

Year	Average Number of Employees	Number on Surface	Number Underground
1956	284	154	130
1957	616	270	346
1958	619	283	336
1959	552	226	326
1960	556	195	361
1961	488	187	301
1962	490	190	300
1963	183	91	92

Source: Ontario Department of Mines Annual Reports 1956 to 1963

Figure 34: Bicroft Mine Employment In Uranium Boom Years (Proulx 1997)

In the decades following the early 1960s boom, economic challenges were faced by the community as specific trade deals for uranium expired. The US government finding an alternative source for uranium for nuclear weapons in 1962 was particularly significant (Proulx 1997). Despite this, mining activity was preserved in the area for two more decades. Federal planning, in the form of stockpiling programs, was partly responsible, while local municipalities helped maintain social stability by requesting grants from higher levels of government for temporarily unemployed miners (see Figure 35). A well-connected local individual, Father Henry Maloney, persuaded Prime Minister Diefenbaker to issue dormant federal uranium contracts with the UK to Bancroft-area mines.¹⁰ Subsequently, the development of nuclear power by the Province of Ontario kept Bancroft-area mines running until 1982 (Proulx 1997).

¹⁰ Maloney was later accused of sexual abuse of minors (*Catholic priest falls from Grace* 2015)

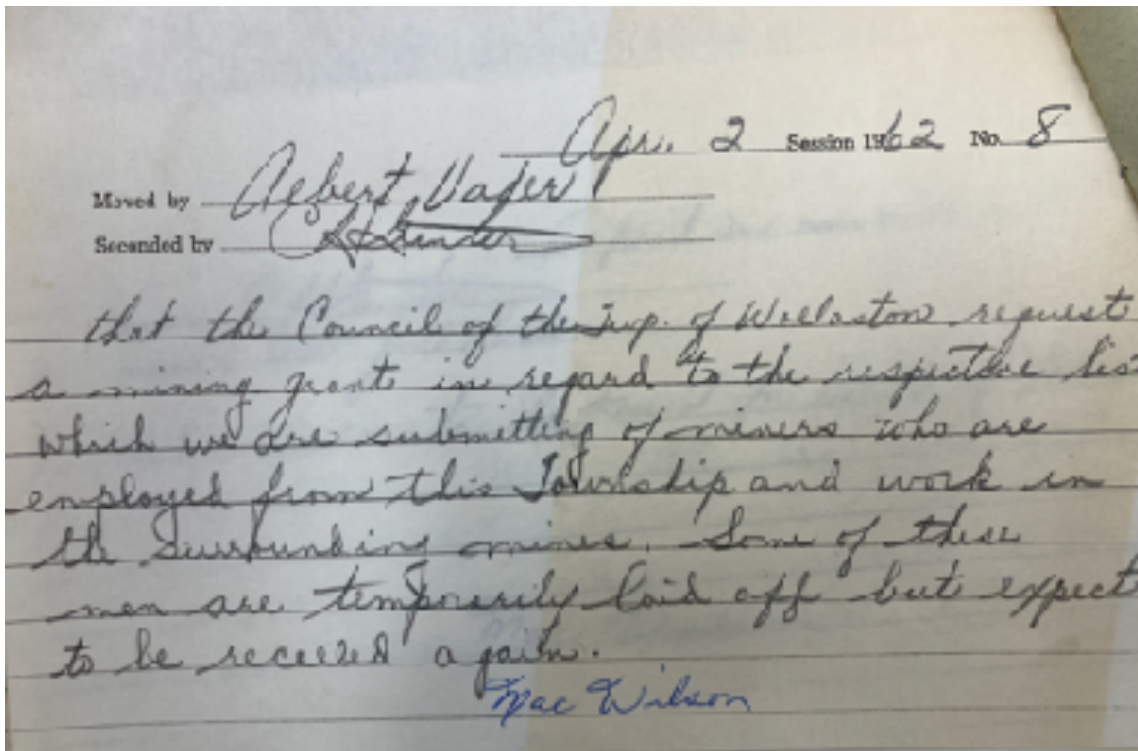


Figure 35: Municipal Motion From 1962 To Request Grants for Unemployed Miners (From Belleville Archives, (Photograph by Author))

While uranium mining peaked in the early 1960s, a local economic vibrancy was sustained for two subsequent decades. Claiming “everything was just popping on eight cylinders” in the late 1970s, an interviewee described diverse forms of employment in the town - beyond that immediately provided by the mines - in the following terms:

We had Greyhawk, Bicroft, Faraday ... and Madawaska it had two or three different names. It was a huge, when we were just rolling, meaning the area. MNR [Ministry of Natural Resources] had a hundred and some people, MTO [Ministry of Transportation] had a hundred and some people with the garages, Hydro, we had all of the major high school, senior and elementary a hundred and some teachers there. Then we had the mines, I think it was three hundred employees. I remember as a kid we had six or eight hockey teams in all sectors. The school was at eleven hundred, we're down to four hundred now in our high school. The softball there was six teams. Everything was just smoking, right?
CRD

Until the provincial Conservatives relocated elements of the public sector workforce in the 1980s (CRD), government jobs were important locally. A long-serving former mayor explained:

When I came to town you couldn't call it a government town but we had a good logging industry, mining was working, we had a big MTO department here a big MNR department here we had the police station of course which is still located in the town of Bancroft and the government facilities were larger than they are now... I've always felt that these government agencies or government jobs that were there in the roads department, and Hydro even, were cut back to a certain extent and never replaced with anything by the government to make up for the shortfall that we had and those jobs going out of the area...government jobs didn't disappear 100 percent but certainly cut back in the number of people they employed. FM

The economic vitality of the Fordist period, featuring a “benevolent” role for the province, in a wider socio-economic context of low housing costs, low utility and tax rates, would have masked municipal revenue imbalances - evident in the present-day - generated by Bancroft’s status as a service centre for other municipalities (see Chapter Seven). Even so, French and French (2003) identify tax revenue as a problem for local governments following the withdrawal of particular mining enterprises from the area, stating:

“local municipalities were burdened with the costs of new municipal services no longer offset by a guaranteed tax base” (p46).

Local public sector losses were accompanied by huge personal financial difficulties for miners, while mining companies ultimately profited:

“One media report said Dyno mines was able to walk away from the deal [US uranium contracts] with \$12million in profit, tax-free. The loss to the area was estimated at \$26 million. Unemployed miners were left with mortgaged houses” (ibid p46).

Despite these injustices, periods of success for capital, labour and local government were achieved. These periods of success resulted from an embeddedness in historically distinctive political-economic arrangements and spatial relationships. According to Proulx, “the Bancroft area's proximity to Canada's industrial heartland and the availability of good road and rail transport” (Proulx 1997 p57), under special price incentives from the federal government, had made it a favoured site for uranium extraction. Eventually, in a changing technological and regulatory environment, economies of scale regarding abundant raw materials in Northern Canada came to trump the benefits of urban proximity. Ontario Hydro negotiated new contracts with producers in Elliot Lake, ON and Northern Saskatchewan in the early 1980s (Proulx 1997). Operations at Elliot Lake came to an end in 1996, but today Saskatchewan is the second largest uranium producer in the world (Government of Saskatchewan 2023)

While economic imperatives were instrumental in the closure of the mines, an interviewee also spoke to a tit-for-tat situation between Bancroft authorities and higher levels of government regarding the disposal of radioactive soil found at McClure Crescent, Scarborough at this time:

The Government said “if you will take this soil we will agree to extend your contract with Ontario Hydro” so the mill could carry on. And the human outcry was so significant that they said “we can’t take it”. A year later when the contract was up they said “we can’t produce here cost effectively” and the mine closed, and three hundred jobs were gone. All the people who came in, miners they follow wherever there are mines. They all packed their bags and went off to the next mine someplace else. That was the beginning of the demise. Over time we lost the MNR, we lost the MTO, Hydro, [the town] became a shell of what its former self was. CRD

This reported dynamic casts Bancroft as a subordinate place in the eyes of higher level government authorities. Proulx’s (1997) environmental history of the Bancroft area also reports this saga, though it does not confirm the claim that the Town’s refusal to accept the radioactive soil led to a retributive cancellation of contracts. In Proulx’s account, the comments of a local resident - which reflect a concern for being a low priority for business and political elites - are worthy of note:

“It makes us feel that we are only second class to the people of Scarborough... why should we want to import the pollution from the city, while this is what we come here to avoid” (Proulx 1997 p87).

As will also be seen in Sections 6.10 and 6.11, a similar dismissal of the “Everyday Lives of the Rural” by city dwellers, is a significant source of conflict in North Hastings today.

With regard to both uranium mining and forestry, particular institutional configurations sustained a period of Fordist-era prosperity in North Hastings and environs. As Barnes, Hayter and Hay (2001) identify, in the context of Fordist British Columbia’s forestry industry: “the market was not free, but embedded in a set of complex state institutions of control and management” (p2140). The period during which North Hastings was a key producer of uranium ore and hardwood lumber was fragile, however: events such as the death of G.W. Martin, and the expiration of mining contracts served as opportunities for new, more profitable spatial configurations of extraction and production to be established elsewhere.

At the local level, various contestations over the recapitalization of this underinvested space - seeking “new resources” in real estate, recreation and service economies - have subsequently taken place, as will be explored in the upcoming sections.

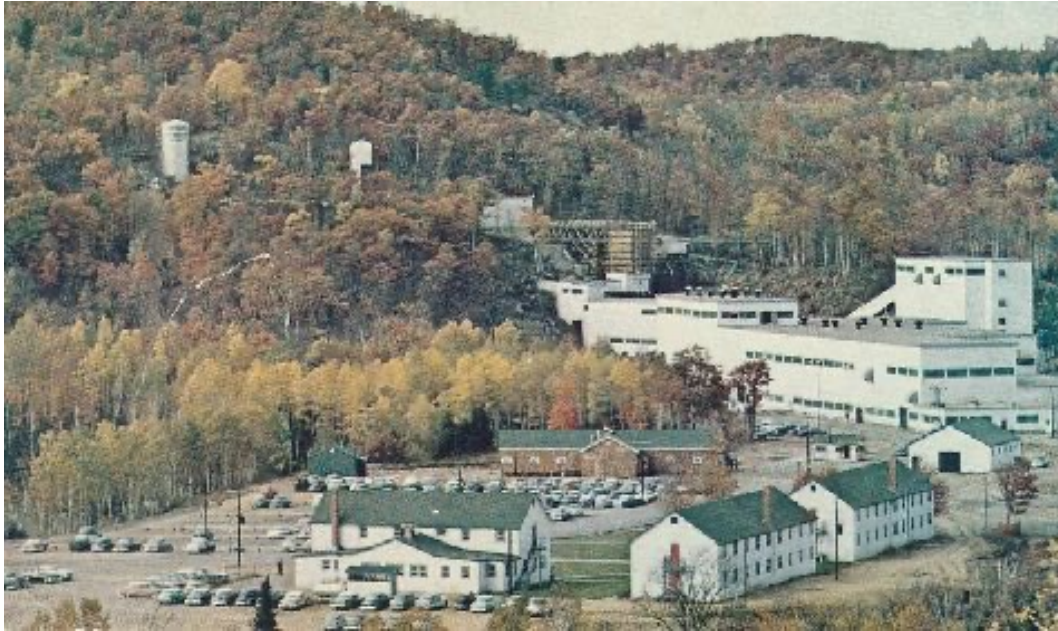


Figure 36: Madawaska Mine in 1962 (Wikipedia 2024)

6.4. Introducing a “Three Fold Architecture” of Rural Space

From Section 6.5 onwards, forces shaping the production of a social and economic space in North Hastings and environs in the present-day will be analyzed. Factors contributing to the evolution of productivism, locally, since the Fordist period are identified, as are some of the means by which post-productivist economies have gained a stronger foothold in the region. Through use of Halfacree’s Lefebvrian framework - “a three fold architecture” (2006) - links are revealed between local economic practices (old and new), governmental plans and strategies, and subjective perceptions of the “rural” space by local inhabitants.

Halfacree proposes using the three-fold model to move beyond a persistent dualism of “locality” - specific practices, routines and divisions of labour (a notion put forward by Gilbert [1982] among others) - vs “representation” (commonly held images and ideas, as also expounded by Halfacree [1993]) - in debates around defining the concept “rural”. The three-fold model - comprising “localities” (*spatial practices* in Lefebvre’s terminology), formal “representations of the rural” (*conceived spaces*) and “everyday lives of the rural” (*representational spaces*) - allows various understandings

of rurality to co-exist within a single space, and can capture dynamism on a number of axes. When an alignment of the three facets is present in a given rural space, Halfacree uses the term “structured coherence” to represent a relatively stable balance, enduring through time. A space may be considered “congruent and unified”, “contradictory and disjointed”, or “chaotic and incoherent” depending on the alignment of the three facets of rural space (Halfacree 2006 p52).

Acknowledging Schmid’s comments (see Chapter One), it is recognized that it is undesirable to conceptualize Lefebvre’s three forms of space separately. Following Halfacree (2006), however, the three elements are sometimes analytically isolated in an effort to clearly capture divergent sensibilities shaping the multidimensional production of rural space. Interdependencies and mutually constitutive elements of the three forms of space are considered, wherever possible.

6.5. Rural Locality: Productivism

Schmid states that “spatial practices” (Halfacree’s “rural locality”) are primarily associated with “material production”: the term denotes rhythms, routines and embodied enactments of space. Spatial practices in North Hastings and environs today are largely comprised of rhythms and routines related to 1) the ongoing productivist economy, 2) the tourist and cottaging economy, 3) the service economy. On the roads of the town, the spatial practices described herein converge; lumber and aggregate transportation exist alongside local commuting and cottage traffic, creating congestion and political problems for the town.

The uranium mining economy was clustered on the outskirts of Bancroft, employing a large proportion of the town. Since the last mining company withdrew in 1982, extensive environmental remediation has been necessary, effectively removing several areas around the town from productive use to this day. Recent proposals by engineer Derek McBride for a nickel, cobalt and copper mine in Limerick Township are presently on hold, and have faced strong opposition from the local community (Meeks

2018). Meanwhile, 2,649 active mining cell claims exist in the Bancroft-Minden Forest area (Bancroft-Minden Forest 2021). While a revival of mining would, therefore, face fierce opposition from sections of the community, other interest groups are pursuing opportunities on an ongoing basis.

Aggregate production, as a less intensive form of mining, remains significant locally. The spatiality of this economy consists of the blasting and transportation of aggregates and related products to storage depots and construction sites. Circa 2010, a report on Bancroft area employment statistics identified concrete and aggregate company Levesque Bros as the town's largest employer (N. Barry Lyon Consultants 2010).¹¹

Forestry, on the other hand, is an economic sector with a strong historic imprint on the spatiality of the Bancroft-centred area, but one which - trends suggest - is facing a slow decline. The sector's spatial imprint remains largely consistent, but areas for harvest do shift according to public or private land availability, and the growth cycle of trees. Timber is transported to sawmills to be sawn into lumber. While lumbering can be practiced year round (since G.W. Martin's log-thawing innovations in the local area), North Hastings harvesting has a preponderant seasonal temporality to its spatial form, as contractors frequently return to the bush in winter, due to summer environmental restrictions and practical wood-storage purposes.

¹¹ Two interviewees, however, credited Tim Horton's with this claim to fame.



Figure 37: Freymond Lumber Truck (Photograph by Author)

Long-running sawmill operation Freymond Lumber are entering the gravel quarry business through the controversial rezoning of a site near Grail Springs Wellness Retreat for extractive uses. Low profit margins on lumber are a key reason for Freymond moving into the gravel business. This, as will be demonstrated, is due to a number of factors, most significantly the availability of profitable material for logging. Nevertheless, the Bancroft-Minden Forest Area (the local “sustainably managed” territory within which harvesters operate) supports many companies within and beyond North Hastings and Haliburton Counties: sawmills, hardwood veneer mills, pulp mills, a paperboard mill, a medium density fibreboard mill, and a coated bleached board and chemicals facility (Bancroft-Minden Forest Area 2021).

Freymond, founded in 1946 (See Chapter Five) - a relative newcomer compared to a number of local operations - endures as a “generational” feature of the local landscape, with current owners Lou and Dan Freymond having inherited the fixed capital of the sawmill. For most newcomers entering the business today is prohibitively expensive. As the daughter of G.W. Martin stated:

Logging has changed, like I say, you have to have \$2million to go to the bush if you decide you want to be a logger. DGMLH

Forestry was described by several interviewees as an enduring economic *culture* in the area (See discussion of a local “rural economic culture” in Chapter Four Section 4.10). Despite this, many sawmills in the area are struggling as new generations choose not to inherit an increasingly difficult business model. Finding new labour sources outside of an acculturated population of in-situ workers is a major challenge for Ontario sawmills:

It's hard to convince people to move to a community like Palmer Rapids, you know? It's worse in the Boreal Forest, nobody wants to live in White River, Ontario. BMFM

The death of G.W. Martin - who, it was claimed, was partly motivated by a “responsibility... to keep it running and keep men employed so they could provide for their families” (DGMLH) - meant that the continuation of forestry as *the* dominant employment opportunity was broken, to a large extent. Logging operations on that scale will likely never be seen again in Hastings and Haliburton Counties.



Figure 38: Inside G.W. Martin Sawmill Today (Photograph by Author)



Figure 39: Outside G.W. Martin Sawmill Today (Photograph by Author)

Ultimately, spatial practices related to forestry are environmentally dependent, corresponding to natural limits of the resource. A depleted resource base was a critical challenge for forestry-based interviewees. A major factor was historic over-harvesting:

For one hundred years we will pay for the sins of J.R. Booth and the huge lumber companies of the late 1800s that took all the great timber and so now it's just garbage. DGMLH

New regimes of forest management have been introduced. Many of these measures primarily aim to preserve forests as a resource (as opposed to environmental protection for its own sake):

In '85 they started a little more meaningful forest management on Crown Land... there's probably sixty or seventy year window ahead of us here in this country of nothing but junk. The good sawable material is gone. If the industry doesn't rejig to be able to handle composites and things like that it's not going to exist. TPA

Government-imposed restrictions under the rationale of ecological preservation, however, were also argued to impede logging:

The other biggest constraint they're facing is operating restrictions from species-at-risk so logging has become a seasonal industry. A lot of people cannot sustain a living year-round in the logging industry. I was just on site with a logger yesterday. He woke up at three in the morning yesterday and he was working until ten at night. He has to do that every day, even weekends sometimes, to actually make enough money to survive because he can normally log for six months for a year because the rest of the year it's turtle protection. BMFL

The Manager of the Bancroft-Minden Forestry Company described the how the collective of organizations under the Sustainable Forestry License (SFL) system had been fairly consistent since the 1990s:

Back in the '90s, when they were forming the shareholders agreement, they were looking at who are the sawmills here already. Most of them had been here for over one hundred years, right? Who are the loggers who have traditionally operated on this land base? And they offered them the first seat at the table for developing shareholder agreements. Since coming to fruition some of the shares have changed hands here or there, mostly on the loggers end, some of our loggers have retired and maybe sold their shares to new entrants, but for the most part its remained the same and if anything our number of shareholders has actually shrunk over time cos some of our shareholders have bought shares from another one that's leaving the industry. We haven't had a lot of interest from new entrants saying "hey, I just bought all this equipment and I really want to get into this industry, can I buy shares in your SFL". BMFM

Freymond Lumber receive the second-highest proportion of wood (12.8 percent) in the SFL agreement, behind Madawaska-based Murray Brothers (19.8 percent) (Bancroft Minden Forest 2021). Many of the mills who are served by the agreement are located to the north and east of Bancroft, marking a geographic shift from the days of dominance for Haliburton County-based G.W. Martin Lumber (this shift may reflect a "residential recreational economy" gaining a foothold in eastern Haliburton County). McRae Mills in Whitney and Cascades Containerboard of Trenton, southern Hastings County, are the other major recipients of wood within the agreement (Bancroft Minden Forest 2021). A total of thirteen organizations are part of the SFL, and the distinctive "generational" spatial practices of these long running companies in North Hastings and environs are sustained by this institution.

Newer forestry operations, as claimed by an interviewee, are frequently run by international corporations and operate further north in Ontario, harvesting softwood:

What makes us unique in the Bancroft area is the amount of shareholders [within Sustainable Forestry License]... the fact that some of our shareholders are really small operations. One guy is literally him and his dad, just two guys. If you go up north into some of the boreal forest units, you'll get what's called a "single entity shareholder": Georgia Pacific or Econ or Domtar, Resolute. BMFL

Under the SFL system, Freymond was deemed to be the beneficiary of the withdrawal of smaller sawmills in the region, as they struggle to find good quality raw material and new generations of workers and managers:

Wherever you go, the mill industry seems like it automatically downsizes by the rate it needs to keep the remaining operations running. Freymond's cover a huge area to get enough saw logs to feed that mill. DGMLH

In contrast with Norcliffe and Bates' (2018) portrayal of a cottage country region whose economic culture had been eviscerated by large forestry corporations, North Hastings and environs maintains a historic culture of producers managing to hold on to a place in the local landscape. The economic “ecosystem” is fragile, however, as will be further explicated with a discussion of the growing recreational economy and, subsequently, services and retail in Bancroft.



Figure 40: Lebel Cambium Sawmill, Near Bancroft (Photograph by Author)

6.6. Rural Locality: Recreation

Recreation often depends on the rhythms of migration to and from major urban areas though, of course, many long-time locals and in-migrants also participate in this

economy. The practices of boating, biking, skiing and hiking (frequently favoured by immigrant populations) alongside hunting, snowmobiling and ATVing (more popular with long-time locals) have their own forms of spatiality, dependent on the contours of the physical landscape. Reused rail trails facilitate motorized and non-motorized recreational activities outside of settlements. While Bancroft still lacks a major hotel - commented upon by a number of interviewees - a recreation and tourist economy in North Hastings has grown significantly in the past few decades (for a discussion of the roots of this economy, see Chapter Five).

An important early moment in establishing the region as a retirement area can be seen in the repurposing of housing built for miners through “the real estate sale of the century” by realtors Bowes and Cocks in Cardiff, Haliburton County. French and French (2003) claim this initiative established “Canada’s first retirement community” (p46). Cottaging, meanwhile, really began to develop decades later, in the early Twenty-First Century:

Cottaging wasn’t a big deal in the ‘70s and ‘80s. A little bit in the ‘90s but it’s really come into its own since the start of the Century. RE

A role for private lumber companies in shaping a slow transition towards “recreation”-oriented spatial practices was revealed by an interviewee. A direct connection between the cessation of logging operations and the beginning of recreational land uses was identified:

Up until the ‘80s the lumber companies owned all the land around the lakes. Even where we live, a lot of these lakes... they would buy up those huge tracts of private land and they would log it and there were no cottages... if it wasn’t for logging around these lakes there would have been no roads for the cottagers. So for example, Martin Lumber owned all the property around the lake next to us. When they were finished with it they sold it and it was privately developed into cottages but the logging was done. DGMLH

Partially through this process, new social groups - linked to the economies of cities - have come to frequent the North Hastings area through the practice of

cottaging. These groups have influenced the local social and political culture. Prizing rural areas for their natural beauty and recreational opportunities, Cottage Associations are particularly engaged with environmental issues (see their concern with the impacts of septage in Chapter Seven). Cottage Associations can be seen to be key actors in establishing and maintaining “post-industrial” spatial practices - establishing something resembling what Marsden calls “the consumption countryside” (1999) in the UK context - in areas such as North Hastings. According to Proulx (1997) “a vacuum of government jurisdictional responsibility” (p58) existed with regard to environmental remediation in the local area, following environmental damage caused by uranium mining. Into this void, the “Paudash Lake Conservation Association” (which has existed since 1973), alongside “the Bancroft and District Action Committee”, played an important role resolving issues related to the decommissioning of the mines (Proulx 1997).

While the encroachment of cottagers continues, a more sudden socio-economic shift in the region’s identity can be seen in the creation of an exclusive new 65,000 acre private park by a wealthy businessman.¹² The Land’Escapes park, straddling several municipalities south of Bancroft, allows individuals to consume an isolated private “wilderness” proximate to Ontario’s major cities. A preservation-first ethos guides the operation:

This land needs to be protected indefinitely, absolutely. So yes, I do not plan to sell it any time in my life, and after I die there needs to be a plan in place. LB

Changes in ownership of the Land’Escapes property in the past few years demonstrate a diversity of profit-making opportunities related to forested land, presently. Following ownership by Canadian forestry company Domtar (for years, the property had been known as the “Domtar Lands” locally), the lands became acquired by companies in the business of managing forests for financial returns: through sustainable harvesting, re-sale, and supplying carbon-offsets for a growing market of

¹² Heir to the “Little Trees” air freshener fortune.

environmentally self-conscious companies. Land'Escapes' owner describes the history as follows:

Domtar is probably Canada's largest, or one of the largest pulp and paper, forestry companies and they own, I'm going to say, millions of acres - some shockingly high number of acres - but they've been gradually divesting those, a few of their properties that have come up for sale recently. They sold the property... about ten years ago to a company called J.M. Longyear and J.M. Longyear then proceeded to sell it to TFG [The Forest Group] and TFG sold it to me. And I think at every turn it was that the easy forestry has been done and based on the individual companies financial position, short term returns, long term returns etc. They kinda said "we're done with this place". A lot of the forestry that's left to be done is either more difficult to access or is still five years away from being harvestable. Especially the two companies that bought it between Domtar and myself were looking for extra return. LB

The acquisition of the "Domtar Lands" by the Land'Escapes businessman caused controversy among long-time locals by disrupting decades-old informal use of the lands for hunting camps. While some existing camps remain - under more strictly enforced rules (LB) - formal membership of the park costs \$6000 ("limited") or \$10,000 ("unlimited") per year. As such, the park can be seen to embody reorientation of rural recreation practices in the region towards an elite economic clientele, justified in the eyes of its founder by the importance of its preservationist mission:

The reason it's a high price is, we could do this at \$300 a head but then we'd have to have two thousand members, right? And so the idea, the sales pitch is essentially: "this is the backcountry park we all wish we could get to. Not a lot of crowds, conservation first, no yahoos, no fireworks" ... I hiked thirty kilometres into Algonquin Park last year on the first day just to get away from the yahoos. The guy in the next campsite over had hiked in with a chainsaw and he was cutting down live trees for firewood. I'm thinking "What the...! What?!" ...we're going to have, even at peak, two or three hundred members. LB

In this sparsely populated region, governed by municipalities of limited resources, the owner of the private park is a powerful figure. This individual acknowledged a degree of responsibility towards Limerick Township and the community, regarding the park's impacts on local municipal revenues and service

provision. Recent “McBride Mine” proposals in the area were unpopular among township council members - revealed to be dominated by ex-urban interests in Chapter Six, Section 6.6. - and it was argued that the Land’Escapes project helped establish a preferable long term post-productivist identity in Limerick:

On the scale of things, if we went by acre I would have the controlling majority vote in the township. People joked that I think that means I become the Duke of the township or something. So on a grand scale I’m kind of a big deal to these guys. It’s a township of three or four hundred other people. It’s not a big township on any level. I met with them relatively early on and one of the first questions I got was “so, what are your thoughts on mining?” This being a rural township, I didn’t know their stance on mining, I said “well I don’t plan to do any mining”. You could just see this collective sigh of relief go around the table because they’re extremely anti-mining. LB

Thus, as recreational spatial practices gain a greater foothold in the region, resistance - from cottagers, councils or preservationist landowners - can be seen to preclude more intensive productivist activity.

While practices related to “consuming nature” are, in the present economy, firmly imposed onto North Hastings, other experience-oriented economies - less associated with the notion of a “rural idyll” - are also increasingly important to the region. Bancroft’s General Manager testified to the importance of the “experience economy”:

We recognize we don’t have the money here to do the things we need to do, so we need to get people with money to bring it to us and give it to us willingly. We have the Rockhound Gembouree, which is a recognized Canadian landmark festival, i think we were in the top ten festivals in Canada a few years back. We hosted our Wheels, Water and Wings festival each weekend in July and August for the past number of years, and added things like motorcycle rides to it where we’re recognizing “this population now wants these experiences and we have lots of things we can give people to experience”. So we are capitalizing on that, and I think it’s probably made it even more tourism and recreation focussed than it would have been in the past. GM

The Rockhound Gemboree capitalizes on the area's unique geological characteristics, and demonstrates how an extractivist history can be reinterpreted to benefit the present-day tourism economy.

6.7. Rural Locality: Services and Retail

The service economy, within the North Hastings region, is centred upon the Town of Bancroft. The service economy brings cottagers and commuters from outlying municipalities to the town's stores, offices and banks. While Bancroft is home to large stores such as Canadian Tire - requiring the municipal water services which will be discussed in Chapter Seven - a public battle to attract Walmart ended in failure:

They [Walmart] always put conditions on, they always backed out. When that recession hit [2008/9] it changed everything. They all backed out...Saying that in the last fifteen years we've got two supermarkets, a full size Shoppers Drug Mart, a McDonald's. We have some of the bigger stores. They've done really well. They've all done really well. RE

An interviewee spoke of retail and services partially replacing mining within the local economy. Also mentioned was a centralization of regional banking services in Bancroft, reflecting the increasing regional commercial importance of the town in relation to communities that were, at one time, of equal standing (See Chapter Five):

[After mining] a lot of people though we were going to have a ghost town but Bancroft and the whole North Hastings area really has lumbering and forestry and retail and so we're managing fine...[Forestry is] not as strong as ever, but it is still maintained. There's less people working in that area but it's still a big employer for people here. In the last few years we've got a new Canadian Tire store it's been built now twice since the original one so that's a major draw and you've got the two grocery stores two major drug stores and banks, and some of the things that were in Hastings Highlands and Maynooth some of the banks have closed up and they're now in Bancroft. DMFM

Similar to the practice of converting of forestry lands to cottage areas, lumber businesses have played a role in creating new commercial lands for the town. The

economic viability of this shift in land use - in areas close to the town, at least - reflects the recalibration of the regional economy:

We have seen a development sold by one of the loggers on the south side of where I live. That developer has gone through the leg work of getting the zoning and everything in place and drawing some plans. He is selling 2.1 acres for \$2million, so I think we're seeing a little bit more commercial stuff, commercial conversations coming to the table yes...the logger owns land everywhere. That's just a little snip off the pile for him. I don't think it mattered all that much. It's in town, sell it to develop, maybe quite insightful to see the town's going to grow.
RC

While forestry faces many challenges, as outlined previously, ownership of private lands near the town of Bancroft endows surviving lumber companies with power and economic opportunities in the restructuring land economy. Many emerging spatial practices - linked to recreation, services or even the financialization of forest reserves in the case of The Forest Group - are driven by economic actors seeking exchange value from the landscape in new ways, as returns on lumber harvesting continue to diminish.

In the next section, evolving productivist and post-productivist spatial practices are shown to have been both promoted and inhibited by various governing authorities regarding the “conception” of space in North Hastings.

6.8. Representations of the Rural: Provincial Space

“Conceived space” (“Representations of the Rural” for Halfacree), is associated with “knowledge production” under a hegemonic calculable, bureaucratic “rationality” in modern society, according to Schmid (2022). Contemporary practices in mapmaking, planning and architecture all contribute to this increasingly “abstract” conceived space for Lefebvre, which imposes itself throughout the globe extensively and intensively. Halfacree (2006), meanwhile, draws attention to how:

“representations refer to the way the rural is framed within the (capitalist) production process; specifically, how the rural is commodified in exchange value terms” (p133)

As authors of archetypal, state-sanctioned “conceived spaces”, provincial and municipal government agencies are analytically centred in this section (throughout the chapter, however, private organizations and community groups will also be seen to exert an influence on how space is conceived, in a broad sense). As with the “representational spaces” and “spatial practices”, that they are profoundly interconnected with, the “conceptions” of space - high level plans, visions, maps - impacting Bancroft and environs are frequently conflictual. I argue here that conflicts relate to differing biases or tendencies embedded at a structural level at the various tiers of the state. While regulation enforced by the Province provides an ongoing foundation for rural economies and cultures, distinct forms of “urban” space are shown to be associated with municipal governments. Particular institutional cultures shape these tendencies: i.e. the Province’s historic role managing a territory dominated by forestry, the county government’s exposure to particular policy currents, and the lower-tier municipalities’ structural concern with real estate.

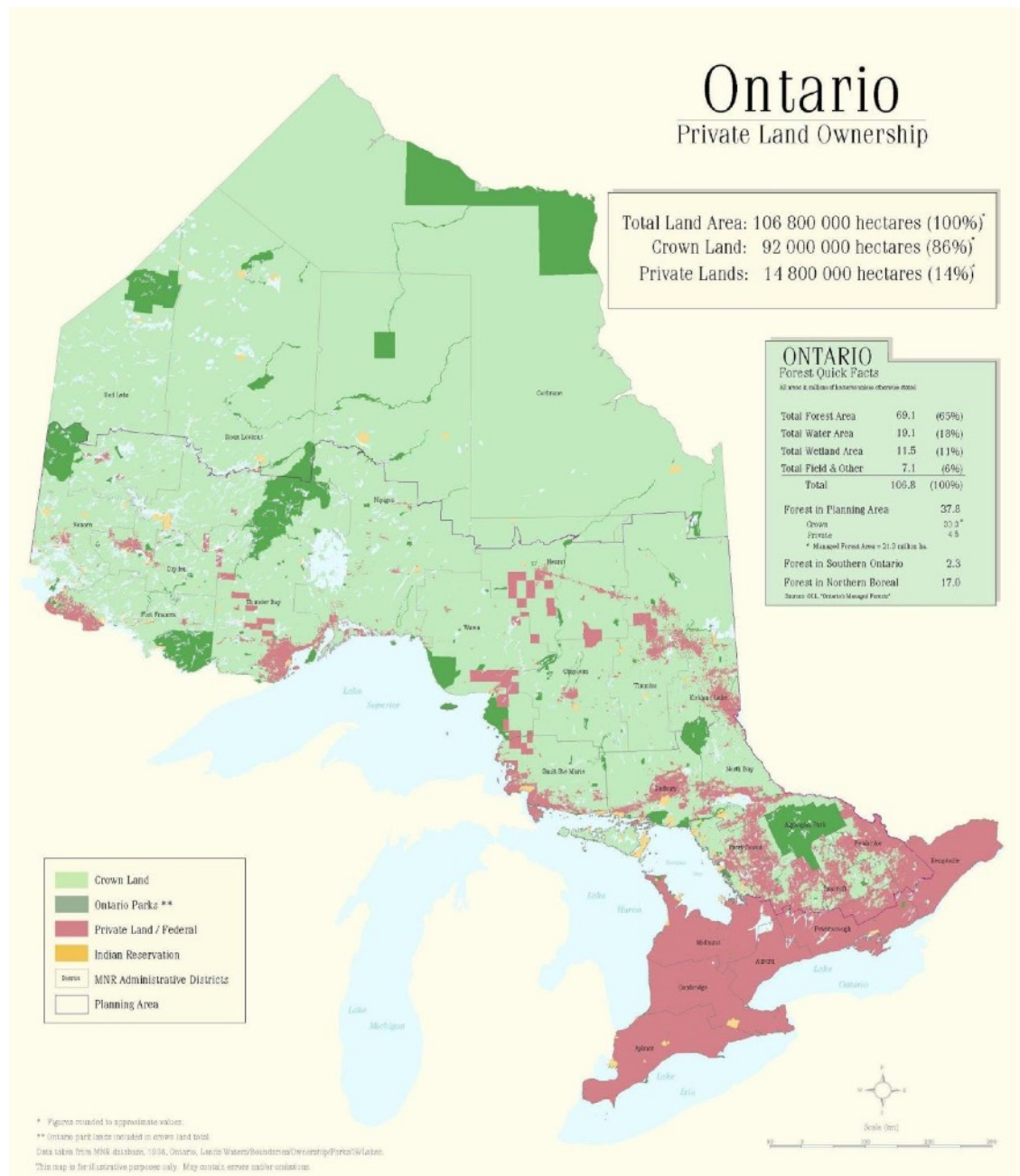


Figure 41: Map Of Crown Land In Ontario (Maps on the Web 2016) [Bancroft area highlighted in black square]

As represented by Figure 41, provincially-controlled Crown Land covers 86 percent of the land area of Ontario. Crown Land provides a large amount of the resource base for lumber harvesting, and also facilitates many recreational pursuits which are foundational for the rural economic culture, such as camping, hunting, and trapping. According to the Bancroft Minden Forest Socio-Economic Description (2021),

there are an estimated 249 private recreation camps for hunting on Crown land within the Bancroft Minden Forest area, supporting thousands of hunters.

A strong connection exists between provincial government and the forestry sector. As well as overseeing lands upon which the forestry depends - including by means of the Sustainable Forest License (SFL) system described earlier - the Province regularly invests in private fixed capital, such as sawmills, to protect and promote the sector (Dalheim 2018, English 2019). The present provincial government have been criticized for supporting economic growth in this sector above environmental considerations; Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner has argued that Doug Ford's policy changes represent an ecologically destructive "rip and ship" agenda for forests in Ontario (McIntosh 2020).

Similar cuts and "downloading" initiatives by the Province affecting municipalities (See Chapter Seven) have taken place since the late 1990s, however. Through the Sustainable Forest License system, controlled harvesting on Crown Land is regulated by the Province, albeit in a more "efficient" form - regarding staffing and expenditure - than in the 1970s productivist heyday:



I believe it was the Harris government... in the '90s. They did a huge downsizing to save money so the personnel were cut back and the district offices they used to have forty or fifty staff carrying out forestry management services. In an effort to save money they downloaded a lot of responsibility to the industry and all of a sudden said, "look we're not going to do this for you anymore, so you want to cut, harvest wood on Crown Land you have to come together to form a shareholder agreement, form a small company that can take care of all that - administration, planning, paper work - so that everything's in place when you do show up and do your harvest operations". BMFM

The Bancroft-Minden Forest Manager described the outcome of this regulatory switch-up in the following terms:

It was a big undertaking and there was a lot of anxiety about how they were going to do that. In the end they did come together and they formed our company and we have six people doing what forty five used to do so it's a lot more efficient in the hands of the industry but I think the government's still there right, they still have a lot of staff in the regional office which is in Peterborough. BMFM

While the backing of the state - maintaining a particular “conception of space” on the economic function of Crown Land - helps preserve the culture of forestry, inherent insecurities regarding the industry’s “social license” in a restructuring economy were highlighted by the Forest Manager:

When we went through that issue resolution with the eco activist group [protesting harvesting in allegedly old growth forests] they put enough pressure and they were enough of a squeaky wheel that they definitely got enough of what they wanted in the end. So there's definitely a concern that if this keeps happening we're definitely here by Her Majesty's will because we're on Crown Land, its a public resource so we need to have a social license to practice and you need that by being in the public favour right? So if one day we completely lost our social license that would be detrimental to our industry. BMFM

The Forest Manager described a disconnect when dealing with municipalities, pointing to the fact that their respective economic regulatory spheres - two dimensions of “conceived space” - often operate in parallel, with little direct interaction:

You have to explain “Hi, we're calling from the Sustainable Forest License holder, we're looking to do this and that”. They have no clue what you're talking about. What your business is, what you're doing. There's a lot of questions, and it's interesting to me, the ignorance level that is held by a lot of these municipal government representatives. I would think they should be very aware of who we are and what we're trying to do. BMFM

The same interviewee pointed out how, in remote areas, private forestry companies perform valuable road maintenance functions for the Province that facilitates access for diverse groups such as firefighters, biologists and tourists. This role illustrates the interconnection and collaboration between private interests in the forestry sector - possessing a privileged role in “opening up” the land - and the state in hard-to-reach places.

The municipally-managed spaces of Ontario (represented in red on the map in Figure 41) have no authority over Crown Land. A real estate interviewee, however, argued that, hypothetically, Crown Land would be valuable for municipalities (and the closely allied interests of developers), and re-regulating land use in this manner would be possible if it were in the Province's interests:

Yeah, I mean there's Crown land, Crown land close to Bancroft. It could be developed. I'm not talking about way out in the boonies, I'm talking about close to these towns, there's land available. But, again, you'd have to ask somebody willing to develop it. RE

While strong connections exist between the Province and the forestry sector, the Ontario government is, of course, concerned with economic development in general. The Province was shown to have “conceived”, for example, of a recreational social and economic identity for nearby Apsley in Chapter Five, by creating cottage lots in previously remote lakefront areas.

6.9. Representations of the Rural: Municipal Spaces

Maps of Ontario's fragmented municipal jurisdictions represent, and give efficacy to, another dimension of conceived space. At this tier of state authority, the county-level “Wildly Authentic” Economic Development strategy promotes the “creative economy” and, broadly speaking, an aestheticized vision of “rural” space that primarily caters to city-dwellers. This “conception of space”, and its various regional and global influences, has been comprehensively discussed in Chapter Four. It was argued that, while the direct effects of this campaign on the culture and economy of North Hastings were hard to ascertain, “Wildly Authentic” both reflects and augments the emergent space of a post-productivist digital economy outside of Ontario's major cities.

The County's vision complements many federal-level initiatives which propose development strategies centred on a more "livable", "inclusive", and technologically-connected "creative" rurality. Examining the the milieu of federal rural economic development policy reveals a strong focus on these forms of "place-based" economic development (see Markey 2010, Mendeelson et al 2021). Thus, facilitating "post-productivist" economic transitions appears to be a priority at the federal and county levels. The entrenchment of a "consumption countryside" (Marsden 1999) economic function for the region, and an accompanying proliferation of resident subjectivities casting North Hastings as a "rural idyll", are influenced by these conceptions of space.

At the lower-tier, Bancroft's own "Making Our Future" plan reflects a pragmatic desire for intensification - as is elaborated upon in Chapters Four and Eight - in service of "balancing the books" financially. Moreover, a range of concurrent features of the structured agency of local government actors - a drive towards maximizing the Town's agential capacity, a growing recognition of collectivity regarding the infrastructural basis of local political arrangements, and an increasing need to manage complex contradictions around socio-economic identity in the community - should be seen as representative of growing "urban" tendencies. These urban dynamics - possessing a distinct lineage: namely the present-day "entrepreneurial" municipal corporation (See Chapter Eight), descended from the "rational" colonial political order conceived for the erstwhile "wilderness" in the period of European settlement (as described in Chapter Five) - will be unpacked in the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

Here, post-colonial planning scholar Ananya Roy's (2016) definition of the "urban" as a *governmental category* (alongside, significantly, "rural" in the Indian context) captures important features of the North Hastings case. Here, "urban" denotes a "particular way of being political" (Roy 2016 p819), within a formal local democracy centred upon private property and capitalist planning practices. Roy (2016), in a critique of Brenner and Schmid (2015), suggests that North American-style colonial municipal corporations "may very well be the grassroots of the complete urbanization of society" (p818), while pointing out that their territorial control of global political and

economic space is far from universal. From this point of view, all Ontario's municipalities - of which Bancroft is at a noticeable inflection point in terms of the "urbanizing" phenomena identified above - are potential urban spaces, varying only in the degree to which this potential is actualized.

Bancroft and environs, in their distinctive Central Ontario location, are influenced by an unusually even balance of municipally-managed lands and Crown Lands (See Figure 41). The Bancroft mayor's description of the town, therefore, as a "rural-urban" community - "rural" reflecting an enduring economic culture and lifestyle, and "urban" reflecting the increasingly dynamic forces which shape structured agency within the municipal space - is highly appropriate in this context of land use. As has been argued in this chapter, the traditional rural economy is weak, and forestry in Central Ontario depends, to a large extent, on established institutions - e.g. provincial funding for fixed capital, the SFL system and the protection of Crown Land - to support its survival. A geographically distinctive confluence of political and economic *cultures* and *dynamics* is apparent, therefore, in a context where the state-protected wilderness of Canada's Crown Land perpetuates what Lefebvre describes a "rural milieu" in the face of a dominant "urban reality" (Lefebvre 2022 [1953] p59).

6.10. Everyday Lives of the Rural: Culture Clash for In-Migrants

For Halfacree, the concept "everyday lives of the rural" captures residents' own sense of their lives as constitutive of a specifically "rural" space. "Everyday lives of the rural" are described as:

"inevitably incoherent and fractured, these incorporate individual and social elements ('culture') in their cognitive interpretation and negotiation. Formal representations of the rural strive to dominate these experiences, as they will rural localities." (Halfacree 2006 p51)

Lefebvre's "Representational spaces" are associated with "meaning production" according to Schmid (2022). The concept describes inhabitants' everyday imaginations, visions, and subjective ideas about space. As is familiar from other accounts of rural restructuring and gentrification (e.g. Smith and Phillips 2001, Brown-Saracino 2009, Hines 2010, Frisvoll 2012), interview data reveals competing understandings of "rural" space between subsets of the North Hastings population.

Divides exist primarily between recent in-migrants (associated with a residential recreational economy) - or part-time "consumers" of the countryside - and long-time locals (connected to the historic rural economic culture). The experience of long hours of labour as a lumberer were mentioned earlier in this chapter. At another end of the local socio-economic spectrum, many lives now revolve around remote computer work, as was discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Schmid (2022) identifies how intensifying urbanity, according to Lefebvre's theory, provides "opportunities for encounters between previously isolated communities or individuals, thus generating new centralities" (p245), accounting for new socio-economic juxtapositions in a restructuring cottage country.

This section will emphasize the conflictual coming together of divergent "everyday lives" within the space. The changes to local spatial practices outlined previously - the growth of cottaging and services, the disappearance of mining, and the weakening of forestry - shape new social relations in the region, influenced by various "conceptions of space". It will be shown that partial, individualized understandings of the multifaceted space of North Hastings County - shaped by subjective positionality in relation to the "locality" and its official "representation" - contribute to an intensifying bifurcation of the region.

Creating a coherent and thriving community requires bringing disparate rural subjectivities together. In-migrants' difficulty integrating into the local community was a theme in some interviews:

Last week I heard of the first person whose finally admitted they made a huge mistake moving here. This is something I've heard over the course of years. Living in this community is not for everyone. Its very easy to get caught up in all this excitement and hoopla and the media crap that's going on out there that "this is the place to live", "this is where you gotta live". That's entirely different to physically actually living here.... there comes along with this lifestyle somewhat of a fantasy about this lifestyle and its very easy for folks in the city, for instance, to say they don't want to see a soul when they come here. Well they have no idea what its like to not see a soul and live in the rugged circumstances that we find ourselves. EE

In this account, some challenging aspects of living in the region were described:

You could be two days before being ploughed out of the storm or not at all, you might not at all be ploughed out. You may not have access to medical care or that sort of thing.... I have this feeling that when we see the end of the pandemic there's going to be a lot more people that say "ok, where's it happening?". And it's like "this is it!" [laughs]. There isn't much more. We have a different existence here. EE

An interviewee discussed in-migrant husbands adopting traditionally "rural" outdoor pursuits to the detriment of their marriage, reflecting gendered aspects of social practices which contrast with norms in the city:

Well I think for people that move from the city and move to the rural areas I think there's a bit of a romance in the beginning. Right? They're tired of the city, tired of the pace of the city, tired of the amount of people, they're tired of the crowdedness, they benefit that way but a lot - this is not blanket - a lot of people get tired of that after four or five, six years. A lot of women... their husband develops an interest in outdoor sports, hunting and fishing... and their wives don't join them, the wives get a little bit lonely. What happens is they're pushing to move. It's not uncommon to see people we've sold houses to and all of a sudden they're back in the market four or five years later or there's a divorce, that happens too. RE

Outside of town, in lumbering areas, a clash of expectations regarding land use is particularly evident. One interviewee commented on in-migrants' erroneous perception of the rural area as purely "peaceful" and not a place of labour and industry:

You're leaving the city because of the hustle and bustle. It's fine, but there is a little bit of hustle and bustle around here. So if you want peace and tranquility buy one thousand acres and build a tent in the middle of it. CRD

As previously mentioned, in many cases cottages are a consequence of the actions of enterprising loggers creating lots and roads in previously inaccessible lakefront spaces. Long-time forestry workers have acknowledged rural restructuring processes and taken economic advantage of outsiders' perceptions of a "rural idyll":

[Loggers will] punch a road in to the top of a really nice hill, make a nice road and sell the dream to somebody, say "isn't this great" ... I look at it and say "that's a hill". Somebody from Toronto sees it as paradise. So they take advantage of that opportunity. CRD

According to the same interviewee, the post-COVID wave of in-migration has exacerbated tensions:

They may pay a little more attention to it [lumbering] because they weren't here twelve months of the year and now they are so they have a great presence of cottagers. There's not too many, there's always that one out of ten that's just a complete a-hole. Doesn't matter what you say he's not going to be happy. He wants to impose a whole bunch of rules on them, but it's OK for him to come up with his twelve buddies and party all weekend at the cottage, and drive his jet skis six feet from the edge of my dock and be irresponsible. But that's OK because he's letting loose. But he doesn't look at the big picture. Honestly, they're somewhat selfish...small towns the people are genuinely good and responsible. The last thing a logger wants to do is create havoc for anybody. CRD

While recreation and forestry have coexisted for a long time in cottage country, the rising numbers of former city-dwellers in the region is generating a new degree of "incoherence". In an interview, the forest manager told of intense altercations since the pandemic began:

The issue got even worse during COVID because so many people were moving to their cottage. Our loggers were actually getting verbally and physically abused in the forest "...you're murdering the forest, you're destroying the climate, you're a horrible person". A steelworker in downtown Hamilton wouldn't deal with that.
BMFM

Steel workers and lumber workers both undertake socially valuable labour, while partaking in activities that are frequently understood to be environmentally deleterious. This perspective demonstrates how the context of a "rural" space shapes unfair prejudices against participants in forest-based industries.

6.11. Everyday Lives of the Rural: Freymond vs Grail Springs

On the outskirts of Bancroft (in Faraday Township), the planning dispute between Grail Springs wellness retreat and Freymond Lumber's new quarry can be seen to represent the two different "rural" subjectivities. The divide in local opinion was reflected by contrasting signs within a Bancroft neighbourhood (see Figures 42 and 43):

It was very divisive in the community. On one street you had "No Place For a Quarry" signs and the next, even the neighbour across the road it said "bring on the quarry we need the jobs". So you had these two, this huge dichotomy of opinions in the same community. It was really interesting because it became this sticking point "which side do you sit on?" right? BMFM



Figure 42: Pro-Quarry Sign on Bay Lake Road, near Bancroft (Photograph by Author)



Figure 43: Anti-Quarry Sign on Bay Lake Road, near Bancroft (Photograph by Author)

At a county council vote Bancroft's mayor backed Grail Springs, in contrast to the leaders of most other local municipalities. The mayor explained his decision in the following terms, revealing a strong support for post-productivist forms of economic development:

On a sort of regional scale we were developing a really good industry with respect to health and wellness and the Grail Springs is part of that. I just thought it was counter to a ... burgeoning, potentially growing industry that employed a lot of people, while the expansion of the quarry had very minimal job growth with it... I was just trying to look at the long term economic development picture and what the region could become. MB

Local government actors also inhabit “everyday lives of the rural”, and act as representatives for their constituents’ “everyday” imaginings of their community. With regard to votes around major land-use decisions - in the case of the quarry - or key strategic projects - such as upcoming downtown revitalization initiatives (See Chapter Eight) - these privileged “everyday lives” engage with the production of “conceived spaces”. For the mayor, voting to approve the rezoning was a high stakes and contentious decision, given public sentiment over the proposal.

Many public comments on the Official Plan amendment - required, by statute, to facilitate development of the quarry - of which representative examples are included here, strongly opined that “industrial” land uses should be a thing of the past in the region:

“People choose to live and visit Bancroft for its natural beauty. Risking the natural beauty of the area for some gravel is not an acceptable exchange.”

“I still can’t believe that a family like Freyman [sic] can get away with destroying the environment, with no cares of who gets hurt in the process.... All for money. It angers me that people get away with these things when in this day and age we are trying to protect the environment and keep our beautiful lakes.”

“The idea of a quarry of this magnitude does not appear to be in keeping with the vision of the Township of Faraday, stated on a sign along side the Freymond Lumber yard as ‘Experience a different kind of lifestyle’.”

“Tourism comes because Bancroft and the surrounding areas are gorgeous and clean. Full of wildlife. Tourists and cottagers do not want to hear blasting and to follow dump trucks to their cottages or when they go to town to spend money. They want peace and quiet. They want clean air.”

(Public Comments, Hastings County Official Plan Amendment No. 18)

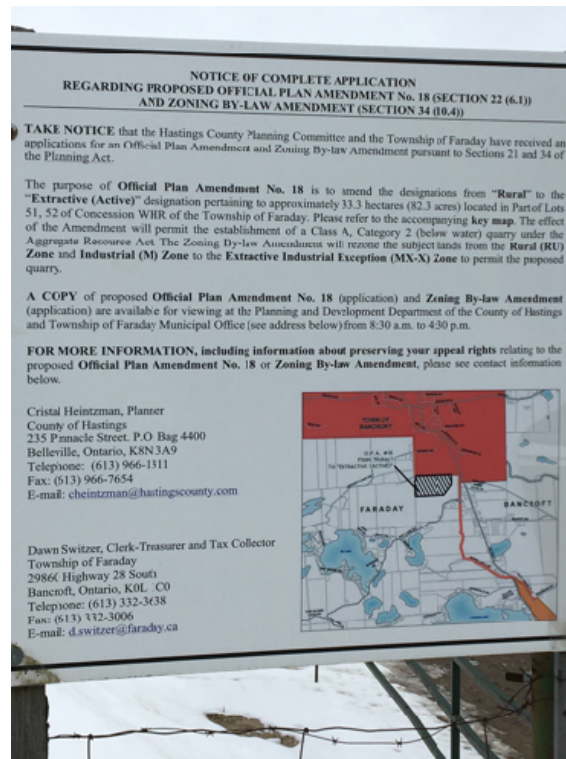


Figure 44: Notice of Official Plan/Zoning Amendment for Freymond’s Proposed Quarry (Photograph by Author)

The projection of a “rural idyll” onto the landscape, as is evident in these perspectives, clashes with a pro-productivism point of view, unsurprisingly put forward by interviewees with close ties to the forestry sector. The following interviewee opinion

identifies how city-dwellers' preconceptions around "rural space" enable the erasure of working landscapes in North Hastings:

I think it was a lot of privileged people who have already made their money elsewhere, and they're moving up here and now they don't want anything in their back yards. What better place for a quarry, going behind an existing industrial site? It's not like they're bulldozing wetland and putting in a quarry like what they did to Toronto. They're taking an existing industrial site and putting a small quarry behind it. There was a huge outcry about that. Really it's just NIMBYism. BMFM

Another forestry insider stated that ongoing productivism was economically necessary for the town and surrounding areas:

Our area cannot survive on tourism, there's not enough money comes in and we need industry ...we're pro quarry. Because we know how hard it is to make money from a lumber mill, you have to diversify, and that's what they're [Freymond] trying to do to survive. DGMLH



Figure 45: Grail Springs Wellness Retreat (Photograph by Author)

Long-time inhabitants' (i.e. those connected to the local rural economic culture) repudiation of North Hastings' longstanding status as the "city's countryside" denies a social and economic function which has been integrated into the regions' identity for at least a century. On the other hand, the dualistic projection of "city" and "non-city" spaces by recent in-migrants, tourists and cottagers frequently shapes unfair preconceptions around appropriate economic activities. As pointed out by the Executive Director of NHCT in a newspaper interview, this is to deny the fundamental dependencies of "urban" spaces upon "rural" resources:

"We're talking about wind farms, big solar farms, we're talking about food, we're talking about our lumber, mining has always been in rural areas...There's a real disconnect between the urban and the rural in terms of recognition of where this stuff comes from. It comes from us so support us" (Sobanski 2017).

Accordingly, the existence of these interconnections - the "rural" as an important supplement to the "urban", and vice versa - should be a key consideration in planning and policy initiatives affecting areas such as North Hastings County.

6.12. Conclusion

This chapter has, for the most part, highlighted how economic space has changed significantly *around* the town of Bancroft. Higher-level institutional arrangements that supported the Fordist-era mining economy no longer exist, but regulatory measures enacted by the Province do help maintain the spatial practices of forestry in the region. These practices, however, no longer represent the "highest and best use" for the lands. As cheaper cottage areas proximate to major cities have become increasingly desirable - in tandem with increasing numbers of city-dwellers developing expendable incomes - a rent gap has developed. Differential rents, with regard to Muskoka and Haliburton in particular, have grown substantially, while former lumbering areas "appear ready made" (Phillips 2005) for gentrification due to disinvestment in productivism. Local landowners in the forestry industry have

capitalized on this situation by developing cottage lots, while cottage associations have used their collective powers to help “regulate” an ongoing recreational use for these spaces. A similar outcome - regarding the preclusion of more intensive industrial activities - results from the interventions of the major new environmentalist landowner in North Hastings.

Both Bancroft and its surrounding municipalities have drifted away from the kind of “coherent” regional form described in the early sections of the chapter and exhibit a significantly contested social and economic identity, through analysis of interrelated spatial practices, conceived spaces, and representational spaces in the region. Halfacree’s (2006) characterizations of “contradictory and disjointed”, or even, to a degree, “chaotic and incoherent” ruralities apply here. A look forward at how a hypothetical “new structured coherence” might function, in light of the ongoing social and economic reconfiguration of North Hastings County described herein, will be presented in the concluding chapter to the dissertation.

It will be argued that a “new structured coherence” must acknowledge the structural biases at the level of “conceived space” demonstrated in this chapter. Municipal and provincial jurisdictions have been shown to correspond to particular “urban” and “rural” dynamics and cultures. The Province sustains a “sea of productivism” by maintaining traditional patterns of land use, which helps perpetuate the local rural economic culture. Structural tendencies at the municipal level, meanwhile, drive a number of dynamics which, in sum, produce an intensification of political and economic “urbanity”. I now turn attention towards the intensified dynamics exhibited by municipal spaces, with a deeper exploration of how structures such as political boundaries and infrastructure networks (Chapter Seven) influence the strategic agency of local governance actors (Chapter Eight)

Chapter Seven - Creature of a Cruel Province: The Multi-Scalar Politics of Municipal Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

The history with the waste water plant is really fascinating and it's a good exercise in understanding the power that the Province has over municipalities.
PE

Bancroft's situation was sort of, I was going to say a comedy of errors but there's nothing funny about it. It sort of reflects what goes on in a lot of small, growing municipalities. TPA

7.1. Introduction

A sudden 58 percent increase in Bancroft residents' water and wastewater rates between 2016 and 2017 created severe hardship for Bancroft's low income population and ushered in a local political crisis. Raised rates were rapidly imposed on users of the municipal water and wastewater systems - along with property tax increases for all residents of the municipality - due to debts incurred on provincially-mandated wastewater infrastructure upgrades in the mid 2000s. Through a central focus on this story, I explore, in this chapter, the multi-scalar politics of water and wastewater infrastructure in North Hastings County. In particular, I demonstrate how power dynamics within Ontario's hierarchical system of government limit the capacity for lower-tier municipal actors to appropriately respond to the crisis in Bancroft.

Regarding the key concerns of this dissertation's research questions, I identify the particular "rural" characteristics of what Rutherford (2019) has called "unsettling infrastructure arrangements" (p200) in the North Hastings case. Elaboration of local arrangements reveals:

“the articulation here between collective and individual, public and private, redistribution of costs and benefits, and the degree of agency attributed to the environment” (Rutherford 2019 p200).

At the same time, the town’s “hub” status and its role maintaining the “second nature” of networked water systems - accompanying the installation of water systems in the late 1950s - are shown to create a crucial new structural context for local governance actors.

Sections 7.2 to 7.6 explain how Bancroft’s water and wastewater infrastructure developed over time: initially under “benevolent” provincial post-war institutional arrangements and discursive rationales, before neoliberal reforms are seen to place deleterious pressures on local municipalities. Then, in Sections 7.7 to 7.10, a more detailed exposition of the significance of “horizontal” fragmentation in present day regional politics is provided. Here, I show how inter-municipal relations are intimately interconnected with the public economy of water and wastewater systems, and demonstrate the rising importance of lucrative, taxable lakefront properties as an asset for area municipalities in the present day. From Section 7.9, I show how the (mis)management of water infrastructures manifests at the community level in the divided political orientations of local governmental and extra-governmental actors.

7.2. Universal Municipal Water and Wastewater Provision in Ontario

Following the Baldwin Act, powers were in place for villages, towns and cities to regulate their own water sources (Pelton Stokes 2018) but, as the twentieth century progressed, provincial oversight increased. As Young and Keil (2007) argue, water governance in the post-war period underwent a discursive transformation which, increasingly, centred upon a technical vision of progress:

“Where the early twentieth century can be seen as a triumph of the discourse of *public health*, the mid and late twentieth century can be seen as a triumph of the discourse of *technology*” (p145).

Most small municipalities in the province developed technical systems for water and wastewater management in the years following the creation of Ontario Water Resources Commission (OWRC) in 1957. At that point in time, particularly in rapidly industrializing areas of Southwestern Ontario, large-scale interventions by the Province were necessary to maintain rapid economic growth and serve an increasing population. Water tables were lowering through excessive groundwater pumping, while drinking water supplies were becoming contaminated, often from sewage flowing into fresh water sources (OWRC 1969). While the situation was most acute in Ontario’s industrial centres, the moment allowed the Province to “future proof” all manner of municipalities, regarding public health and the potential for residential, commercial and industrial growth.

Of the early years of water and wastewater provision in Bancroft, the Town’s Municipal Advisor stated:

They were relying on private arrangements right up until about 1950, early ‘40s. So there must have been a realization that this was unhealthy [laughs] and this was not sustainable. And so those first servicing systems that were put in small town Ontario way back in the day were often almost 100 percent funded by the Province, very little local investment so it was kind of free money to take care of really pressing health and environmental constraints on continuing that beyond the historical node of development. MA

Bancroft was the third municipality in Ontario to sign an agreement with the OWRC to develop a water system, and also the third to sign an agreement for a sewage system (OWRC 1969). While this may point to the growing of importance for the town at the moment when the uranium mines were opening¹³, the development of

¹³ French and French (2003) report private input in the form of a \$35,000 investment into local water systems by Faraday mining company

water and wastewater systems was widespread among communities both large and small in the Province in the years immediately following 1957. By 1961, 56 water and 53 wastewater systems had been built and were operated by OWRC (Government of Ontario 1961).

Regarding Bancroft's original sewage system, the Municipal Advisor stated:

It was just a collection system there was no sewage treatment plan. They just collected it and dumped it into the river. MA

A network of sewage pipes leading to the York River was installed in 1957 (French and French 2003) before the development of a treatment plant in 1974 (Town of Bancroft 2018, Lum 2019, WSP 2022). Almost \$20 million was spent in the 1970s on water and wastewater assets in the town, Bancroft's highest decade on record for expenditure on municipal assets (WSP 2022).

By the middle of the 1970s, while Bancroft was developing its sewage treatment plant, more densely populated areas in the province were subject to forms of "regionalization" of water and wastewater networks, which according to the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association (OSWCA) was:

"A way to overcome the fragmentation caused by suburban growth... [and] facilitate a more cohesive and consistent approach to development." (OSWCA 2001 p6).

Comprehensive regional planning was in vogue in the province, but was not practiced in a sparsely populated regions such as North Hastings. Bancroft's Municipal Advisor explained how - in contrast to the strict economic margins which influence development decision-making today - a climate of generous provincial funding and a low level of risk for the lower-tier government shaped a fragmented and incremental approach to the development of wastewater infrastructure:

I've poured over servicing drawings ... It was amazing to see how small the little incremental expansions to the sewer system was. It was a section of sewer that was put on Snow Road and it may have serviced only a dozen properties but they wanted a sewer and the town probably got a nice grant from the Province to put in a sewer. When they did the design calculations for that sewer they were only servicing the twelve homes, they weren't looking at the other hundred that could potentially be serviced if the line went further. MA

Development on municipal services in Bancroft has taken place section-by-section, without the requirement of significant economies of scale. The lack of “a large vision of what was possible in this region” (MA) in the early years of water and wastewater infrastructure development has shaped the prospects for present-day physical development. It has determined - to a large extent - a continued existence for Bancroft as a relatively peripheral community, without the potential to assume a role as a burgeoning sub-urban population centre. The “lack of vision” contrasts with the City of Peterborough (where the Advisor had spent his professional career as Chief Planner):

The engineers of the day would have looked at all the topography even beyond the city [of Peterborough's] limits to forecast what areas can eventually contribute to this trunk sewer and let's make sure the trunk sewer is sized to accommodate all this potential for growth... It wasn't done at all - that I can find - in any of the Bancroft applications. Which just underscores it was done to take care of existing and imminent development as opposed to a futuristic look out at life. MA

“Networked” infrastructure as a precondition to urban lifeworlds, is governed under particular discursive rationales, ranging from notions of public improvement to pursuit of private profit (Graham and Marvin 2001). While Bancroft benefitted from the Province of Ontario's rationale to introduce widespread technological fixes for economic and environmental issues, it fell outside of the criteria for being a “city”, thereby undergoing more comprehensive infrastructure planning.

An interviewee, who had worked at both Limerick Township (south of Bancroft within North Hastings) and the Town of Bancroft, suggested water infrastructure management constituted a fundamental qualitative difference in the practice of local government between “networked” municipalities and those without technical systems to operate:

It's also different, they [smaller municipalities in North Hastings] don't have public water wastewater systems, and those kinda things that eat up a huge amount of time here because of the risk and the liability costs and the impact of those systems to our ratepayers. GM

While Bancroft was not treated as a “city” - with regards to infrastructure planning - by Ontario, these comments reveal a distinction between the two places regarding a certain notion of “urbanity” and “rurality”. Central place status brings many accompanying responsibilities and, among network users, a new degree of collectivity to local political arrangements. In the mid-twentieth century, therefore, the then-“village” can be seen to have experienced a partial transition towards the collective solidarities created through the shared use and funding of water and wastewater infrastructures.

7.3. Modern Living Arrives in North Hastings

To date, around nine hundred of approximately three thousand parcels of land in Bancroft are connected directly to the municipal wastewater system; the rest are served by individual septic systems.¹⁴ Continued reliance on septic systems for the majority of residents in the Town of Bancroft - not to mention the outlying North Hastings municipalities - would have been the development trajectory of least resistance and least expense in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Cultural factors contribute to these ongoing arrangements: due to “rural” Canadian inhabitants’ expectations of spaciousness in their residential environment (septic systems require

¹⁴ The small number of users on the system will be shown to be significant in the context of the wastewater crisis of the 2010s, discussed later in the chapter.

space, while networked systems are more viable in densely populated areas), and as a result of self-reliant habits regarding property maintenance.

The development of a small water system, however, did accompany significant changes to Bancroft. The new system catered to a new population influx in the form of managers and workers for the mining industry. Of the intrusion of “urban services” (to use the language of municipal staff and council) into the community, Bancroft’s Former Water and Wastewater Policy Advisor claimed:

[The development of the wastewater system is] a little hard to determine, it was put in piecemeal all over town. The initial situation was what we call “Faraday Heights” which is a subdivision within the town which was built by [a] uranium mining company as a housing area for management people. TPA

Similarly, Proulx (1997) describes areas developed for mine workers in nearby Cardiff, in Haliburton County, as being “completely serviced with a central water supply system. sewage disposal system and rural hydro” (p32). These aesthetically “suburban style” bungalows represented a new kind of local housing option.¹⁵

¹⁵ The units are still popular today according to local realtors (RE).



Figure 46: New Bungalow Area for Mine Workers in Cardiff, ON, by the historic Monck Road
(Photograph by Author)

The development of a small network of water and wastewater systems was sufficient to augment “central place” status in Bancroft, by facilitating larger commercial developments which were able to serve the wider region, and enable higher density residential development in central areas of the town. This residential development includes social housing, a feature of Bancroft’s status as North Hastings’ service hub.

By the time of the arrival of the mines in the late 1950s, significant shifts in expectations regarding lifestyle would be evident within the region.¹⁶ As such, this moment represents a coalescing of particular “models of consumption” and

¹⁶ While electricity had been introduced in the centre of Bancroft in the 1930s (French and French 2003 p9), it was only arriving in much of North Hastings in the 1950s. French and French (2003) claim that “when hydroelectricity became available in North Hastings in 1952, people noticed astonishing changes in their lives” (p74), such as undertaking tasks at night and refrigerating produce.

“sociological and psychological attitudes” (Harvey 1985 p140) that eventually constituted the late twentieth century “structured coherence” (Harvey 1985, Cloke and Goodwin 1992, Jessop 2001) detailed in the previous chapter.

7.4. Political Restructuring and Water Governance, Late-Twentieth Century Ontario

By the late twentieth century, municipalities existed within a highly bureaucratized provincial political space, which emerged following the Great Depression, and crystallized in the post-war period of comprehensive planning. In this period, municipalities - created, ostensibly, as agents of local self government under the Baldwin Act (See Chapter Five) - increased in functional complexity as managers of water and wastewater systems. Another evolution of municipalities’ role would come through the “downloading” of these systems in the 1990s, following a number of institutional and discursive shifts regarding water governance in the province.

Between 1971 and 1974 the OWRC merged with the Air and Waste Management and Pesticides Control Sections from the Department of Health, among others, to form the new Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) (OSWCA 2001 p7). By the early 1980s, MOE funding for new waterworks began to decline, partly because systems were in place in most municipalities where they were deemed necessary. At the same time, infrastructure costs were rising rapidly and municipalities began working increasingly with developers to fund new services (OSWCA 2001). In Bancroft, however, the 1980s saw the construction of a drinking water treatment plant near the source at Clarke Lake, at a cost of up to \$5million (WSP 2022 p2).



Figure 47: Bancroft Water Tower (Photograph by Author)

The Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) was formed in November 1993 under the NDP government as an arms-length provincial agency, reporting to the MOE. The rationale for this restructuring was to avoid conflicts of interest regarding the Province's role in funding, developing and regulating its water system (OSWCA 2001 p9). Under the Harris-led Conservative government, formed in 1995, grant-issuing powers bestowed on OCWA were returned to the MOE, while legal title of water and sewage works were transferred to municipalities (OSWCA 2001 p9).

An important discursive shift marked this period of provincial politics. A rationale of “efficiency” and cost-saving at the provincial level had, by this point in time, replaced a comprehensive planning approach focused on providing a universal public good. Declining interest, on the part of the Province, towards funding and managing infrastructure assets may have corresponded to the systems becoming “built out” and naturalized as part of the landscape at this point in time. Importantly, however, political ecologist Scott Prudham (2007) describes widespread staffing cuts and regulatory roll

backs at the MOE at the time as, “highly ideological in character, initiated ... with little consideration of whether they would compromise existing and statutory commitments” (p169).

Bancroft’s Public Utilities Commission was disbanded around this time, removing local oversight from water and wastewater management. According to Bancroft’s Former Water and Wastewater Policy Advisor this was:

A watershed issue, no pun intended. It caused all kinds of things to happen... that were not well thought out. TPA

The distance between the local government and the newly-formed OCWA, became a problem in years to come as the Town became unaware of mounting debts under OCWA’s management.

A publication by the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association (2001) describes how a financial burden was downloaded onto municipalities, and how this impacted users’ experience of water provision:

“An outcome of years of provincial financial assistance for water systems is that municipalities were relieved from paying the full costs of water and sewage infrastructure. In many cases, municipalities passed on the provincial subsidies to consumers in the form of low water rates. The unintended impact of years of low rates has meant that municipal attempts to raise water rates to cover the costs of infrastructure rehabilitation is sometimes met with local opposition.” (OSWCA 2001 p11)

While these changes were universal within Ontario, many specific features of the Bancroft case account for the town becoming particularly notorious for exorbitant water rate increases.

7.5. Bancroft's Wastewater Plant Expansion and Mounting Deficit

Local dysfunction in Bancroft can be seen to be an indirect result of the Walkerton water crisis, which according to urban scholars Young and Keil (2007) “cast a shadow over the entire system of water supply in the province” (p147). In May 2000 in Walkerton, Ontario, six people died and two thousand were sickened by an e. coli outbreak, caused by agricultural waste getting into the town's water supply. The disaster could be attributed to both negligence on the part of local managers - as was found to be the case in a court of law - and a wider context of “organized irresponsibility” (Prudham 2007 p173) from the cost-cutting provincial government. The punishment of jail time, handed out to Walkerton's municipal officials, made local governments wary of managing their own water systems, as an interviewee stated:

The fallout from Walkerton that ... a lot of municipalities did a full fledged retreat. They were afraid of what the implications were for councils in the event of system failure. Not realizing that in reality it doesn't matter who you hire to manage the system if it fails the buck's going to stop with the municipality. TPA

The Province's proposed Nutrient Act, put forward in 2002, would phase out “field spreading” (putting human waste on fields) as a practice in rural municipalities, in order to prevent similar occurrences taking place. The implication for the municipalities of North Hastings was that hauled septage would require processing at a wastewater treatment plant. In a *Huffington Post* article, Zi-Ann Lum (2019) provides details of a regional agreement in this regard, between Bancroft and its outlying municipalities:

“Documents show neighbouring towns, including Hastings Highlands and the Village of Limerick, signed declarations that part of their tax revenue would support the operational costs of Bancroft's expanded plant” (Lum 2019 para. 38).

Bancroft's mayor, meanwhile, described the move to upgrade the treatment plant in the following terms:

I think it was identified our wastewater system, based on growth projections etc. - let's face it, those always change - if you have a recession everybody downscales, if you get a boom period... so they undertook a process to look at expanding the plant. At that same time the Province brought in legislation under the Nutrient Act that would have prevented the dumping of septage on fields, which is what they were doing. So all the outlying municipalities were suddenly going to be forced, [asking] "what are we going to do?" MB

The mayor described an initially collaborative approach between local municipalities:

So we teamed up with all the outlying municipalities and designed the plant to handle the waste situation coming in by trucks from all the outlying municipalities, they were going to participate in some of the capital costs and there was going to be an ongoing revenue stream so the whole plant was designed around this whole concept, our growth needs and theirs. MB

The Province's disruptive u-turn left Bancroft unable to fully adapt existing plans:

The Province basically pulled the plug at the 11th hour with respect to the changes in the Nutrient Act. So, we had to scramble and go back and cut out the septage portion or reduce it in the plant design but we were still left with a fairly big plant. MB

The expansion - according to this perspective - was initially seen by the Town as an opportunity to capitalize on Bancroft's hub status by generating new revenue streams, not merely a contractual requirement imposed by the Province. A former mayor, and the current deputy mayor, put a positive spin on the situation from a present-day perspective, still focusing on the opportunities presented by the outsized facility:

We put in our application and we were successful so they [the Province] paid the majority of it, we still have an outstanding loan but now with all the development coming on in Bancroft it's been really a blessing, a real blessing because we're set for it. We're looking at extending the sewer north. DMFM

In 2005, Bancroft was awarded \$6.4 million by the Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund to create a wastewater treatment facility with capacity to treat a region of 10,000 septic tanks (Lum 2019). Around the same time, the Minister of the Environment - Leona Dombrowsky, also the representative for Bancroft and North Hastings as a Liberal MPP - announced the u-turn on the sections of the Nutrient Act pertaining to field spreading and septage treatment. An interviewee claimed the influence of her constituents might have informed the policy shift:

This is probably ...considered to be an accusation that's unfounded. I believe there was so much political pushback out of her own area, so she caved in and allowed field spreading to continue. TPA

The outsize plant was the underlying reason for a mounting deficit at the municipality, but mismanagement of the accounts eventually resulted the sudden shock of 2016/17. Bancroft's Former Water and Wastewater Policy Advisor cites council's unwillingness to raise rates as a reason the huge deficit was allowed to build up (*"it's really difficult to get good long term planning from people with a four year shelf life"* TPA), contrasting with a more pragmatic approach from other, larger municipalities:

I spoke with one of the managers within the City of Toronto, part of the GTA ... He said we have no problem with our sewer and water. I said really how do you manage that? He said "we've been bumping up the rates on average eight percent annually for years now" because they were low and not so meaningful they were able to charge their way to some sort of stability, I guess for lack of a better term. TPA

Consultancy company CN Watson had devised a rate schedule for the Town in the early 2000s, which was ignored:

The recommendation of rates, replacement schedules and what have you... they came up with a rate schedule that should be able to fund continuous replacement. They simply, for whatever reason I can't comment on, council chose not to follow the rate schedule. TPA

A North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT) report records a deficit in excess of \$2 million by the year 2015, just before the rate increase was imposed (NHCT 2019).

The approximately nine hundred addresses on the municipal system were hit by the 53 percent increase to water and wastewater in 2016. The following year, the Town of Bancroft argued:

“To keep the 2017 wastewater rate increase to only 100 percent, the Town must dedicate a \$200,000 revenue contribution annually from taxation to the wastewater budget and contribute another \$100,000 to the wastewater budget from Gas Tax Funding. These transfers have a noticeable negative impact on other Town services” (Town of Bancroft 2018 p4).

These further increases, of course, impacted all residents, not just the minority who resided on the municipal network. Illustrating a potential political cleavage between users and non-users, Don Taylor has argued - in a letter to “Bancroft this Week” - that greater responsibility should lie with the County of Hastings as social service provider:

“As has been pointed out by others, water and wastewater access is a matter of life and as well, a reasonable expectation. As such, and especially in regards to the County of Hastings, it is only reasonable that these new costs be covered by increased support levels. Any change to the current debt repayment schedule brought on by rate decreases, will probably mean that those of us who don’t use the system will face extended periods of extra taxation which we can ill afford. How fair is that? The problem here is not with our town council but rather with the upper tier government which is letting you down by not acknowledging these extra costs” (*The Great Water and Sewer Debate* 2018).

Interviewees from County Housing Services, meanwhile, stated that their department had upheld its responsibilities to the low-income residents of Bancroft:

If there was an issue with water payments in the north, we have pockets of funding so that we could support people to pay those bills and we were pretty active in making sure that if people couldn't pay the water bill and they were housed that they were supported.

CH1

The Housing Officer's colleague replied similarly:

Anyone who was in an arrears situation due to an increase in water we would have stepped in 100 percent to say "what do you need?" CH2

The Province's actions can be seen to have placed stress upon both levels of municipal government in North Hastings County, and increased tensions between them. These stresses - discussed more fully in Sections 7.9 and 7.10 of this chapter, as well as in Chapter Eight - also reveal the importance of a non-governmental social service sector within North Hastings, established, in part, due to a lack of formal governmental services in the region.



Figure 48: Bancroft Waste Water Treatment Plant (Photograph by Author)

7.6. Personnel Issues at Small Municipalities

Small Canadian municipalities' already limited capacity to withstand crisis situations was exacerbated under Harris-era neoliberalism. Local governments were subject to “downloading” and were rapidly expected to undertake new responsibilities with limited financial and human resources. Staffing deficiencies increase the chances of sub-optimal levels of operation, as may have been evident in both Walkerton and Bancroft. Of course, the issues regarding personnel described in this section are primarily driven by the financial strains that municipalities experience, with staff wages constituting a major part of municipal budgets: 31 percent in the 2021 budget (Town of Bancroft n.d.).

The Town's Wastewater Policy Advisor claimed that staff had to operate in uncomfortable conditions in the build up to the wastewater crisis:

So, we didn't have the skill set among staff level, nor in a lot of cases the willingness to hunker down and fight your way through it. TPA

A document produced by the Town of Bancroft, calling for greater provincial support for the wastewater deficit, mentions an insufficient number of skilled staff at the outset of the decision to upgrade:

“Small municipalities do not have skilled personnel on staff to make this kind of determination [suitability of infrastructure upgrades] and rely on the Provincial Ministries to ensure that the data to support a significant infrastructure undertaking such as the Bancroft 2004 wastewater plant expansion” (Town of Bancroft 2018 p5).

Staffing limitations - in terms of appropriate specialized individual training, as well as number of employees - exist in a wide range of local government functions, according to the Municipal Advisor:

Small towns have an enormous breadth of responsibility and very few staff so the reality is staff are often playing outside their comfort zone. The director of public works here is a roads guy but actually his training, he was a butcher. [laughs] He got experience in roads and he grew within the organization, but he's also responsible for the sewage treatment plant and the water treatment plant. He's responsible for the Bancroft landfill site. He gives oversight to the construction of new municipal infrastructure. He's a roads guy, he learned how to plow snow and do basic engineering on the fly. He's got this huge responsibility, he's doing his very best. MA

A local politics expert pointed out some of the further implications of this situation, reflecting on the difficulty of embarking on “*shovel ready projects*” with limited staff given the “*cruel expectations*” of the Province:

The Province has, I think, really cruel expectations of municipalities in terms of when they make money available and how you're able to access those funds and it's really unrealistic to expect that municipalities can do the work in advance and not know that there's ever going to be the opportunity to put it forward for funding. PE

The mayor offered a similar appraisal:

The problem with some of these grants...[Is that] the notice is short and the time requirement to get them done is sometimes a little bit short. Municipalities don't have staff sitting around to do this. MB

This situation benefits more financially comfortable municipalities, which are able to devote more time and resources to competitive funding opportunities for development projects (often available, in particular, to designated “rural and remote” municipalities from higher-level governments). The widening of inequalities between political jurisdictions may be seen to be an outcome of the resulting dynamic. Meanwhile, an institutional culture comprising ad-hoc improvisation and multitasking is normalized. In cases such as Bancroft, this culture may be congruent with notions of “rural” self-reliance, and thus more readily accepted than it otherwise should be.

The increasing use of consultants also reflects municipalities' current predicament in two ways: first, a lack of internal confidence to deal with traditional

managerial responsibilities, and, second, a newly enforced need to enact strategic and entrepreneurial development practices.

7.7. Revenue and Horizontal Political Relationships

The Province - in a key shift regarding hierarchical “vertical” political relationships in the late twentieth century - has been shown to have moved away from being a benevolent overseer of public welfare by downloading responsibilities onto municipalities. Sections 7.7 and 7.8 will sketch out another critical dimension to the structural context Ontario governance actors inhabit, by discussing of the significance of “horizontal” (i.e. inter-lower tier) municipal relationships. The fragmented “horizontal” landscape of North Hastings municipalities was of great significance in shaping political relationships at the time of the Bancroft wastewater crisis, encouraging economic self-interest within jurisdictions, as opposed to harmonious regional planning.

Municipalities’ major source of income - property tax - is determined by the number of properties, and their monetary value, that lie within municipal limits; the roll-out and evolution of which, in Bancroft and North Hastings, was described in Chapter Five. As such, the landscape of “horizontal” political boundaries profoundly influences political actors’ structural position by determining the budget they are able to deploy for particular initiatives. Municipalities’ spending - including, significantly, water and wastewater systems (comprising 20 percent of expenses, alongside roads, in Bancroft [Town of Bancroft n.d.]) - is balanced against the revenue generated by historically contingent borders. Added to the equation is the fact that water and wastewater systems also serve as a precondition for generating tax dollars through new development.

Within Ontario, the importance of property tax is demonstrated by the fact that it accounted for \$21.8 billion, or 40 percent, of municipal revenues in 2018 (Financial Accountability Office of Ontario 2020). Transfers from other governments, meanwhile,

constituted \$12.2 billion, or 22 percent. User fees and service charges brought in \$10.8 billion (20 percent), while licences, permits and rents, fines, and other sources comprised \$9.5 billion (18 percent) of revenue (Financial Accountability Office of Ontario 2020). In Bancroft in 2021, meanwhile, property taxes were more significant to the Town's budget than the provincial average, accounting for 57 percent of revenues (Town of Bancroft n.d.). User fees made up 24 percent of revenues and "grants" (transfers) represented 16 percent (Town of Bancroft n.d.).

Douglas (2023) cites CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees 2019), in pointing out that local governments share between 8 percent and 12 percent of Canada's tax base. They are responsible, however, for managing 60 percent of the country's infrastructure. Douglas states that local governments in Canada rely on property taxes at a rate of double the OECD average. Local governments in Canada are, therefore, disproportionately burdened by international comparison, and this is increasingly the case. This is a longstanding dynamic: the burdening of local governments - as a receptacle for the Province's unwanted responsibilities and expenses - has occurred throughout Canadian history (Tindal et al. 1990).

Presently, local and global forces (discussed in Chapter Three) shaping significant rises in property prices create a property tax-"carrot" for municipalities, while financial repercussions related to the withdrawal of the Province from the role of a benevolent overseer represents a "stick". The decline of commercial revenues from industrial operations in towns like Bancroft also contributes to a financial shortfall (Marshall and Douglas 1997 p15, Chapter Six of this dissertation) that growing property-based revenue opportunities may, in part, rectify. On municipal revenues in a changing economic context, Bancroft's General Manager stated:

[Lumbering] has changed ... because it's Billy-Bob with the truck in his yard. We probably aren't getting commercial taxes and issuing commercial licences like we would have to [major sawmill company] Jan Lumber who has hundreds of acres and a huge industrial production and 150 staff. GM

The presence of real estate assets which generate property taxes within a jurisdiction is, therefore, crucial. Due to ever-ascending exchange values for property - partially conditioned, in the local context, by a social valorization of the “cottage country ideal” - lakefront real estate has become a crucial resource for local government revenues in the region. Unfortunately for Town leaders in the present-day, the boundaries of Town of Bancroft happen to contain a relatively low amount of prime lakeside real estate, compared to its’ neighbours (See Figure 49).



Figure 49: Map of the Municipality of the Town of Bancroft (McKechnie & Davis 2023)

7.8. Municipal Amalgamation

The evolution of settlements in terms of population, economy and infrastructural capacity asks questions of existing municipal boundaries. Higher level authorities may respond in the form of political restructuring, though practical and ideological motivations often mediate outcomes. In North Hastings, the political borders of local governments have, at times, been renegotiated (Chapter Five, for example, described Bancroft’s annexation of lands in neighbouring Faraday Township at the time of the uranium boom). The persistence of unfavourable boundaries for long periods of Bancroft’s history - regarding tax base and the patterns of social and economic life - is another way in which the Town feels “hard done by” with respect to the Province.

Referring to recent discussions between the Town of Bancroft and the Province about amalgamation, Bancroft's mayor evoked municipalities' evolution over time as a justification for a reform of political boundaries:

If you go back one hundred years they were individual settlements, you know. There wasn't water and sewer, the big highway systems etc. Municipalities have grown in complexity and size and requirements over time and costing as well so it was a model that probably worked for a long time...Everything changes, it's a hundred year old model... All we've asked from the Province is to say have a look at it and see what you think might be the best one and get everybody's input. MB

A disconnect between Bancroft's de facto function as a regional hub - facilitated by the Town's water and wastewater systems, in providing such functions as major retail outlets and social housing - and a lack of power and resources to properly fulfill the role was a frequently recurring theme among interviewees (referred to as "*that age old disparity question that has loomed large in the minds of Bancroft politicians for the last twenty years*" MA). The dynamic has been exacerbated as Bancroft's function as an "urban" service centre is intensified by an internet-based remote working economy developing in and around the town (See Chapter Three).

According to interviewees, the municipal amalgamations of the Harris-era presented an opportunity for the Town to address imbalances in this regard. A former mayor, in office during this period, stated that Bancroft had tried to push for amalgamation with its outlying municipalities:

What we started out as was a larger amalgamation here in this area. We actually started out with four townships and I think that was a good move. I think that considerable savings could have been made in that regard, but then plans fell apart and we ended up only with Dungannon ...we joined them, and we became one municipality and that was never, as far as I'm concerned a big achievement because it didn't change the picture for either party. We needed more parties, more people to the party and unfortunately, or fortunately depending on how you look at it, it didn't go [ahead] and I still think amalgamation is something for the future of North Hastings. FM

Pointing to the fact that financial problems incurred during the wastewater saga built upon pre-existing issues, the former mayor argued that amalgamation fell apart due to the other municipalities not wanting to take on debts held by the Town of Bancroft:

I think the excuse, I think it was an excuse, that was used at the time was Bancroft carried a higher debt than the other municipalities did... They saw Bancroft as debt and they didn't want to be part of paying off that debt. What they didn't want to understand was that if you joined the municipality, the four municipalities that joined together, the debt that Bancroft had at that time stayed with Bancroft, it stayed with the municipality that created that debt, it wasn't spread amongst the others it was kind of a [red] herring I think to stay away from amalgamation. FM

A few years later, as described earlier in the chapter, the Town's wastewater plant expansion proposition appeared to be another means of capitalizing on the town's "central" status, though this opportunity was also short lived.

The current Mayor of Bancroft claimed fairer outcomes to the process of political restructuring could be found in neighbouring communities. These solutions allowed for a just distribution of valuable lakeside property:

When I look what's happened in other municipalities, for example whether it be Apsley which has become North Kawartha, or whether its in Haliburton, which is Dysart et al. they take in quite a bit of waterfront property. All those people need the services offered within the town itself whether its grocery stores, banks, hospitals, you know that type of thing. We're doing all of that, we're just not getting any revenue for doing it. In a way the outlying municipalities - I'm not saying this in a negative way at all - its a bit of a false tax scenario that they have because they don't have to pay for the infrastructure that we have to service all of their residents. MB

In more recent years, the Town of Bancroft has also proactively sought to induce amalgamation. Here it can be seen that local governments have channels available through which they can exercise agency to *improve their structural position*, however little leverage they may possess in these negotiations. A local politics expert discussed the Town's efforts to induce amalgamation:

[The Town has] asked the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, on several occasions, to consider the benefits of amalgamation because I think nobody sees the boundaries in Bancroft except for some members of council. But it's really a North Hastings region and almost everything we do is regional in nature. PE

An uphill struggle on the part of municipalities, in this regard, was reported by the mayor:

It [amalgamation] is very politically unappealing and so upper levels, the Province, seems to be quite unwilling to tackle that. MB

The lack of appeal is due to lingering resentments surrounding the controversial Harris-era program of amalgamation, and presumably due to concerns about stoking resentment among other disadvantaged municipalities. A number of approaches to improving the Town's structural position were described by the mayor:

We've lobbied hard and fast with the provincial government etc. for a solution to this, whether it would be everything from investigating amalgamation or a change in the formula for the Ontario Municipal Partnership fund which was originally developed to help rural and Northern areas but somehow over the years expanded to cover other things as well. To be frank with you we've not got anywhere with the upper levels of government. We are a little disappointed with that because we feel we are a catalyst for growth in this part of Central/Eastern Ontario which has historically been a very low income area. MB

Rightly, the mayor perceives the town as a catalyst for growth, as demographic changes result in outlying communities demanding more "urban level services" (Chapter Three Section 3.9) and cultural offerings. Without a wider vision of integration and socio-economic development, however, the self-interested motives of the outlying municipalities - described here by the former mayor with regard to the Harris-era amalgamation period - remain:

I remember when I met with the one Minister and we chatted about amalgamation and he said “well why don’t you talk to your neighbouring municipalities about doing it?” I said “are you kidding me? If I was them I’d be very happy with this situation”. I’ve got good tax revenue, relatively low cost base and I can keep my taxes down because I can go elsewhere to obtain all these services. FM

A situation results in which financial inequality between neighbouring municipalities exacerbates. The Municipal Advisor identified this dynamic with regard to Hastings Highlands, a neighbour of Bancroft:

The services they provide within their municipality don’t grow, they don’t have stacks more roads to maintain from year to year, they don’t have all kinds of new parks, they don’t have community facilities to be building. Their operating costs are largely fixed from year to year, but they keep getting big infusions of tax dollars because of growth that’s happening in the lake country. So what they’re able to is keep everyone’s taxes lower because they keep getting the growth in their assessment from year to year offsets the inflationary costs of running the municipality’s services. And so, as time goes on there is a growing disparity between the tax structures that are wealthy by assessment and those that are not. MA

While these accounts testify to Bancroft’s structural disadvantages, agency was also regarded as an important factor in shaping development trajectories by a former mayor. It was argued that skillful political actors negotiate the challenging structures in which they find themselves:

[Regarding being able to work with neighbouring municipalities] there are still as much as we don’t like to admit it, there’s still a lot of personality differences between staff and council that can make it difficult to interact I don’t know why. I think that’s the same in any organization across all the sectors. Successful municipal government really comes down to people and personalities and being able to negotiate. FM

While a high degree of municipal fragmentation - as evident in North Hastings - may offer a wide “public choice” for prospective residents (Tiebout 1956), extensive political boundaries, it is argued, help facilitate overarching regional planning, greater economic development competitiveness, efficiency regarding government spending on

a per capita basis, and strength in numbers with regard to inter-governmental pressures (Marshall and Douglas 1997 p20).

Evidence on the ground in North Hastings suggests a popular “public choice” is to live in an outlying municipality while driving for services to Bancroft. That the outlying municipalities are blessed with a larger proportion of valorized lakeside real estate makes this arrangement all the more appealing. A degree of overarching political coordination - given the significance of reciprocal social and economic relationships between the municipalities of North Hastings - would be a just outcome for the region, especially in light of present-day population redistribution and economic change, and considering the new importance of lakefront real estate for municipal revenues.

Furthering the case for regional co-ordination within North Hastings is the fact that, generally, small political jurisdictions “are more vulnerable to variations in property tax patterns due to their lower capacities (relative to urban areas) to absorb downturns in the economy.” (Marshall and Douglas 1997 p58). Debates in local governance scholarship on appropriate population size for Municipalities usually argue for a minimum in excess of all North Hastings’ lower-tier jurisdictions (Marshall and Douglas 1997 p17). That, in the absence of significant service responsibilities, minor Ontario townships maintain political independence (relative to the universal municipal experience of being “creatures” of a powerful Province) is more a product of happenstance than informed design.

In actuality, in the fragmented region of North Hastings, the exacerbated pressures experienced by the hub community following the wastewater crisis profoundly impacted local politics both within council and the community, as is described in the next section.

7.9. Political Responses to Water Crisis: Town Council

Sections 7.9 and 7.10 will explore how local political subjectivities, both inside and outside formal government, have been formed in response to the “second nature” of the municipal water system, and the governmental structures that mediate the solidarities and inequalities it produces. Here, a focus lies on the direct links between local political attitudes and the water and wastewater crisis, before a more expansive description of the divergent outlooks of governmental actors and community groups follows in Chapter Eight.

Ideally, a harmonious spatial configuration should be achieved in a given water infrastructure network: base expenses should be offset by the incorporation of a sufficiently large built-up area for necessary tax revenues, while ensuring the broader needs of a municipality are met through services and commercial development.¹⁷ For the Town of Bancroft - if outlying “lakelands” could not be incorporated into the municipal territory through amalgamation - then measures to increase the number of users and taxpayers on the existing water and wastewater systems represented a clear way forward. Despite the economic hardship the enlarged wastewater treatment plant precipitated, it was consistently framed as an important asset by the mayor and council:

We’re now in a situation that we’re fortunate that we have that capacity...many smaller municipalities are running into roadblocks with water and sewage capacity which is stymying development, they’re out. MB

Influenced by municipalities’ fundamental structural motivation to maximize property tax revenues, the Town - in a post-water and wastewater crisis moment - catalyzed a focused strategy in pursuit of growth. The approach was centred around maximizing revenue from the still-outsized wastewater facility. A local expert summarized the Town’s direction in the following terms:

¹⁷ See Sadler et al. (2021)’s hypothetical discussion of right sizing Flint, Michigan’s water system following population shrinkage for an illustration of the complexity of this balance.

After spending a lot of time understanding where things went wrong with the plant extension and understanding the financial impact that that had on the community and knocking on the Province's door to say "its because of actions that you took that we're in this position" and, again, realizing that that's not going to get us anywhere because the Province is not going to open its chequebook and just get rid of our debt... what [then] are solutions that we could possibly offer? One was to undertake the composite correction program and understand where opportunities lie in terms of improving capacity and getting more users on the system, and that's going to be the answer to improving the cost and the strain that it has on the system users. PE

Here, again, the Province is an immovable object on the political landscape, around which the cultures of other governing institutions and organizations must be shaped. The Town's Municipal Advisor, however, argued that the inheritance of a water system could also be the foundation for greater autonomy for the lower-tier government:

Don't rely on someone else external to save you, and waiting for amalgamation is not going to save you because you're going to be waiting and waiting and waiting. So, seize the moment. You have services, you have a modern waste water treatment plant. You have a modern water treatment facility. No other municipality around you has that so, yes you are paying a burden at the moment for that luxury of having those modern urban services, but guess what? Big investment, retirement homes, large tract housing, they'll only come to your municipality because you have those amenities ...Embrace the growth that's going to help sustain your municipality...encourage more investment to happen on your prime services so that they pay taxes and everybody begins to benefit from growth in your community. That's how you change your future, by being more assertive today about what you look like tomorrow. MA

The expansion (and, to an extent, the ongoing repair) of the system, however, is key to facilitating a growth-oriented political strategy:

It would be far better for the Town to make an investment in the extension of a sanitary sewer up Hastings Street North to service, to be able to service three hundred acres of open land ...with those new revenues we'll be able to afford to buy a new park. MA

The confidence regarding growth generated during the pandemic, as described in Chapter Three, can be seen to have facilitated more ambitious future planning through expansion of the wastewater infrastructure:

[Council have] *put forward an RFP* [request for proposals] *for a sewer trunk extension but thats something we always have trouble justifying the cost of previously.* PE

Capacity on the wastewater system is a precondition to future growth but, as described earlier, the Town's history of economic uncertainty and piecemeal development has not created an expansion-oriented foundation to the network. Possessing the will to push forward in this regard signifies optimism within the council. Technical challenges to the network expansion, however, were spoken of by some interviewees, and ambitious plans hung in the balance.

Another interviewee cited a cultural preference for single detached dwellings and "small town charm" as a challenge regarding intensification:

[There is a need for] *higher density and that's hard in a town like Bancroft because people are very attached to the concept of a single detached family home dwelling right? That's part of the appeal of living in a smaller community. I think we're seeing the reality is that we need higher density residential development in every municipality whether you're in Toronto or you're in Bancroft. But it takes away that small town charm aspect. So, I think we'll see some changes hopefully.* PE

From the Town's point of view, intensification is deemed necessary. In the Bancroft case it has been recognized that chaotic underlying infrastructure arrangements require organized local government action. A distinction can be made from the dynamics of *suburban* growth in Canada (see Keil et al. 2015) where preconditions exist - i.e. well organized modern systems laid out for future expansion - for development to continue apace. The growth-oriented culture in Bancroft emerges amid a discourse of crisis, and against a backdrop of haphazard historic infrastructure development.

7.10. Political Responses to Water Crisis: Community Action

In North Hastings, a community-based political movement exists as a growing counterpart to the municipal government. The outlook of this group has been shaped by the water and wastewater crisis. To a large extent, the local social crisis has resulted from the actions of the Province, and by the response - consciously pursued, but under the influence of strongly determinant structural conditions - of the lower-tier government.

The political sensibilities of the community as a whole are - necessarily - not captured in the agendas of its elected representatives. Direct democracy at the local level - as advocated for by Magnusson (2015) - is compromised by the strategic selectivity of the actually-existing local state. That is not to say that alternative currents of community sentiment will not, ultimately, manifest in Bancroft's "development trajectory" either through the formal apparatus of government or through alternative means in the future. With regard to their selected case studies in urban and regional development, Martinelli et al. (2013) state that:

"Alternative political agendas and politics – and how they were rooted in, or absent from, the territories under investigation – were as important for the analysis as dominant agendas pursued by existing hegemonic development coalitions." (Martinelli et al. 2013 p58)

The "town hall" form of early local democracy - celebrated, in many respects, by Magnusson (2015) - no longer exists (See Chapter Five, Section 5.6), but informal community meetings may, nonetheless, carry forward important political sentiments. In an event which exemplified these possibilities, over one hundred concerned citizens showed up to address the issue of the rate hikes at a Water Rates Town Hall Meeting in March 2017 (North Hastings Community Trust 2017).¹⁸

¹⁸ The meeting - and a subsequent report (from which Section 7.10 draws extensively) - was put together by the following local groups: The Gnomes for Justice & Equality North Hastings Chapter, Bancroft Dollar Store Plus, Maggie's [women's shelter], North Hastings Community Trust, A Place for the Arts, The Partista, Life House, Deuce Tattoos, Métis Nation (NHCT 2017).

Huge knock-on social and economic effects, reported by attendees of the public meeting, are cited in the resulting report. The continuing operation of services such as day cares and charity organizations is called into question. Financial hardship for businesses produces a decline in local employment opportunities, greatly impact young people who already struggle to find work. Low income seniors - a populous demographic in the area - are made increasingly vulnerable. Issues related to the town's future economic growth are also mentioned: developers were said to be increasingly unwilling to work with Bancroft given reputational damage to the Town and rising expenses (North Hastings Community Trust 2017 p5).

One attendee of the meeting claimed that Bancroft was less affordable than the notoriously expensive metropolitan area of Vancouver:

"I'm concerned because I'm finding that the individual living costs are really affecting my standard or quality of life. As well as my mental health. It was literally cheaper for me to live in Vancouver than it now does to live outside Bancroft. Let me show you the math!" (North Hastings Community Trust 2017 p5).

The following personal testimony, in a later 2019 NHCT publication, reflects the personal struggles of many community members:

"I use my dishwasher 1x a week and it is not built-in so I use this water for my toilet. Only shower 2x a week and use this water for my toilet. I wash my clothes, before it drains, wring out my clothes and put them in another load. I do this so I can pay my bills" Local resident (North Hastings Community Trust 2019).

Despite adversity, the 2017 report argues that the town possessed "powerful number of people committed to creating a healthy community, to supporting each

other, and to finding creative solutions together” (North Hastings Community Trust 2017 p3). A range options, to mitigate the effects of the water and wastewater rates crisis, were discussed at the meeting. These options include: deferring payment of the Town’s deficit with a long term loan, putting pressure on the Province, and “taking back control of the treatment plant” (North Hastings Community Trust 2019 p8). This localist proposal appears far removed from the current norm of placing responsibility in the hands of distant multi-national corporations. An NHCT publication claims:

“Veolia [French multinational managing Bancroft water since 2017] is to train local people to take back the plant at the end of Veolia's contract(s). Many community members support this and have made Town Council aware of this” (NHCT 2019 p8).

Here, engaged community members recognize the importance of the wastewater system as more than a purely “technical” concern. The infrastructures are valuable for social and political cohesion; local management by concerned citizens provides the most responsible and accountable possible approach.

In January 2018 direct action was undertaken by community activists connected to the NHCT in the form of a stand off between fifty Bancroft residents and the Town Council, who were in in the process of conducting a closed session. Dressed as “Gnomes for Justice & Equality” the residents confronted council over the water and wastewater rates. All but one of the council members retreated to a nearby kitchen and locked the door. According to NHCT’s Executive Director:

We were seeing people that couldn’t pay other bills and their water would be disconnected and water’s pretty fundamental to living. We ended up doing some direct action and this town does not have a history of activism and direct action that I’m aware of... They haven’t recovered [relations with Town Council]. And so the trust in their mind I think was broken. EDCT



Figure 50: The Gnomes For Justice And Equality (Gnomes for Justice & Equality North Hastings Chapter 2018)

For the “Gnomes”, the issue is framed in terms of water being a fundamental human right, which is being “held to ransom” “abusively” (quote from a photo on “Gnomes for Justice and Equality, North Hastings Chapter” Facebook page) by political representatives. A solidarity results among water and wastewater users who are unjustly punished for receiving municipal services. Activism around the water and wastewater issue has allowed a grassroots left-wing politics to continue to coalesce around the NHCT. At the same time, this community has become increasingly disconnected from the formal political spaces occupied by the Town Council.

Despite the instrumental role of the Province in creating the local fiscal deficit, the “Gnomes” ire is directed at the local council as the frontline of organized politics. The withdrawal from responsibility by the Province - despite the suffering of Bancroft residents and reported attempts at pushback from lower-tier representatives - stands in contrast with a seemingly locally engaged and benevolent role it played in the post-war years when water and wastewater systems were being developed.

7.11. The Metabolic Process in Cottage Country

While the political boundaries and ideological paradigms that frame the aforementioned political dynamics are contingent, the physical structures and material processes that sustain social and economic life in North Hastings County are necessary and will endure. In light of this - and the ongoing environmental risk associated with septage disposal in the outlying municipalities - the Town has demonstrated an awareness, in publications, that present arrangements are not necessarily permanent. Expansion of the septage collection network throughout North Hastings may again become necessary, under more stringent environmental regulations. Proper usage of the wastewater system should be realized both in terms of financial fairness for the region's municipalities *and* proper environmental management. Ideally, environmental considerations should determine the utilization of water and wastewater infrastructures, while development agendas should proceed responsibly within an appropriate governmental context.

The Federation of Cottage Associations of Ontario point out that the ongoing use of septage on fields - proposed to be banned in the wake of Walkerton but repealed for unclear reasons - means that the spectre of serious environmental risk remains (FOCA 2015). This is particularly the case following an increase in the year-round use of the region's septic systems post-COVID. If current trends continue, the environmental limits to "off network" growth could be tested, with e. coli contamination in the ground water a potential outcome.

A feature of the septic systems of rural areas is their obfuscation of the "metabolic" process (Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2006).¹⁹ The septic system operates as a kind of black box: informal waste disposal arrangements, outside of

¹⁹ The term "metabolism" - within the theoretical sub-field of urban political ecology - is used to describe urban development processes in terms of inputs and outputs of raw material, as mediated by contingent political and economic conditions.

“legitimate” municipal processes, and their potentially messy implications are obscured. A cohesive political arrangement to deal with the sum total of wastewater in an area not only creates a degree of solidarity among all residents, but also a measurability and accountability to environmental processes.

Prudham points out how:

“Beck [1999] argues that environmental risks are becoming endemic and pandemic in late modern society,...a perspective that at first glance would seem directly applicable to the contamination of municipal water systems” (Prudham 2007 p165).

For Prudham, it is crucial to understand that accepted ways of managing environmental risk are shaped by the social regulation of capitalism in a given place and time. As will be expanded upon in the next chapter, the organization of local government under neoliberal capitalism shapes Bancroft’s pursuit of a growth-driven agenda despite adverse effects on the low-income population in the community. Meanwhile, a sub optimal dynamic for human health and environmental well-being persists in the outlying municipalities of North Hastings, due to contingent, fragmented political structures and a persistent cost-cutting tax culture.

Considering a broader understanding of social regulation, it can be seen that the metabolic foundation of this rural space - individualized water and wastewater systems - complement many residents’ view of an ideal housing product: an isolated, detached house, often found on a lake. Such forms of housing are ill-served by collective infrastructures. The regulatory norms created by the Province which facilitate the ideal form of rural residence, however, are not conducive to environmental sustainability or social equity, as identified by the Executive Director of the NHCT:

Right now you can't have a few homes sharing a well or sharing septic, nor can you build a small house and have a composting toilet all those things that seem like they'd be really smart to do at this time in our history with climate change you can't do and so we need to have those zoning changed and I think people in other communities are working on that too. EDCT



Figure 51: New Detached House on Septic System, Bancroft (Photograph by Author)

On the other hand, a higher density housing “product” coevolves with the practical requirements of the networked spaces of the Town. Functional units for the elderly, or properties reflecting an imported “condo lifestyle” become particularly viable products in this context. Both expansive lakefront properties and dense “urban” units serve the needs of municipal finance departments well but, ultimately, the latter - despite an ill-fit with the traditional “cottage country ideal” - better fulfills overarching imperatives of environmental sustainability and social equity.



Figure 52: New Condo Building in Haliburton Village, ON. (Photograph by Author)

7.12. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how the local politics of water and wastewater infrastructures are shaped by “vertical” and “horizontal” governmental relationships. Regarding the structured agency of the local government, the chapter has illustrated how the dependency of the municipal corporation on property taxes has been deepened by the Province’s embrace of neoliberalism. Under these circumstances, strategies centred on increasing tax-generating powers through either intensification - in the form of higher density development - or territorial expansion - theoretically, in the form of amalgamation with lucrative lakeland jurisdictions - are highly incentivized, as they would be transformative to Bancroft’s financial outlook. As argued in Section 7.8, greater forms of regional coordination - if not full amalgamation - would be highly appropriate in the case of North Hastings. Practical and ideological constraints to reform persist, however. Existing dynamics have allowed an oppositional politics to develop in which low-income users of the collective system and the Town Council conceptualize water and wastewater provision in radically different ways.

This chapter has described how amalgamation efforts by Bancroft's political leaders represent a drive for a municipal territory commensurate to the Town's role and responsibilities. Here, it built upon the story told in Chapter Five, which demonstrated how a regional economic centre formed within the municipal boundaries of Bancroft. The next chapter illustrates how a discursive transformation at the lower-tier level - regarding the strategic pursuit of growth and the maximization of agential capacity - represents a new approach to resolving the disadvantaged structural position the town has come to occupy.

Chapter Eight - Making Housing Happen: The Structured Agency of Rural-Urban Entrepreneurialism

We've got to go 110 percent on increasing our tax base ... I think what we've tried to develop here is a culture of "we're open for development". MB

Our local municipalities, I'd imagine they're very excited about what they're perceiving as an economic boom, people moving into the community, people with resources, and I think there's a real hope that's going to make a difference. But a lot of us don't see it that way because we just see that ... it feels like gentrification. People who live here are being pushed out and literally pushed out in tents into the bush. There's a lot of people living in trailers but trailers that are not heated. So, I wish, we really long for more coordinated vision and consultation with community and a more holistic approach to development that looks at the social impact on people, and how do we ensure that everyone in the community can thrive not just the people that are well resourced. EDCT

8.1. Introduction

Fundamentally, all forms of housing - from expensive private cottages to rent-geared-to-income seniors' complexes - provide shelter and a sense of home for residents, but the actors responsible for providing housing frequently operate in distinct public and private institutional environments. Bridging these different worlds, local governments potentially occupy an important space in undertaking a "*holistic*" or "*co-ordinated*" approach to housing, as suggested above. Housing embodies a fundamental conflict for local governments, however, being both important for driving local economic growth and maintaining a functional community. In the case of Bancroft and other cottage country communities, the transformative effects of the pandemic, described in Chapter Three, render this duality more apparent than ever. While the Town has experienced unprecedented interest from developers, and opportunities for growth through in-migration, problems arising from the pandemic also create a pressing need for action to address the exacerbation of the housing crisis locally.

In this chapter it is shown how - as a consequence of the constraints and opportunities inherent to the political structures they occupy - lower-tier actors' attitudes towards housing development are increasingly oriented towards maximizing economic growth. The post-2018 council in Bancroft are shown to have adopted a strongly pro-development approach as a pragmatic response to structural conditions, moving beyond a traditionally passive role for lower-tier governments in the region.

The political, economic and infrastructural contexts described in previous chapters have outlined key *structures* impacting lower-tier actors. In many ways, this chapter highlights the importance of *agency*, showing how structural limits can, to an extent, be creatively transcended through “path-shaping” (Martinelli et al. 2013) initiatives. The chapter will show how the transformation of discourses operating in and around municipal institutions establish and maintain new directions in local governance.

The new direction is described here as “entrepreneurial”, defined primarily as a culture shift in the Bancroft context. Harvey's (1989) emphasis on the self awareness of local governance actors with regard to inter-jurisdictional competition guides my use of the term. An expanded range of legislated activities associated with the term - such as engagement with municipal enterprises, large scale public private partnerships and active speculation on real estate (see Ryser, Halseth and Markey 2023) - are not yet prominent in the case of the Town of Bancroft.

Sections 8.1 and 8.2 begin the chapter by identifying contrasts between the Building Bancroft project of the 2000s and 2010s, and the present-day North Hastings Inspiration Place (NHIP) development. The opening vignette, regarding the Building Bancroft Project, reflects part of the town's “story of woe and hardship” (Town of Bancroft 2019 p8), against which present day revitalization efforts are reacting. In this section, I show why the political currency of affordable housing provision was critical in getting the NHIP project off the ground. Section 8.4 describes the growing engagement of lower-tier municipalities with housing issues, before Section 8.5 outlines the

municipal politics, on the other hand, was perceived largely as a hinderance and, consequently, of little interest to Martin:

Haliburton County really was not amenable to helping, it was a fight all the time, it was so far away [from Harcourt, in Minden] and they just didn't have any interest. So he didn't have a great relationship with the municipal level. DGMLH

Over two decades later, however, several parties at the table for the 1984 meeting would return to engage with municipal politics in Bancroft through the “Building Bancroft” initiative. This story demonstrates how large development initiatives can be initiated, and illustrates the interconnectedness of private industry and governmental actors, at various scales.

An interviewee - the Regional Director for Canwel Forest Products Treated Division - described the coming together of businessmen and politicians, with connections to Ontario's cottage country, in order to conceive of a comprehensive redevelopment project for Bancroft's downtown. The interviewee recounted how John Weir, an influential political figure who had moved into the area, had shown concern for Bancroft and proposed taking action:

That concept was birthed in my friend's garage with he and I one night. He was - John Weir [Principal Secretary to Premier Harris - among numerous political roles - and Grandson of PM Diefenbaker] was his name - reasonably well connected in the political world. Had a passion to see communities survive. He moved up, he bought a cottage right beside our cottage. I got to know him and six, maybe twelve months into his arrival he said “Bancroft is really hurting”. He could see it. I said “Yeah it is, we've had some pretty tough knocks over the last couple decades and [we are] really lost in the direction of where we want to go”...he birthed this idea, had the ability to be able to get government funding, to flesh it out, he knew all the players. CRD

A surprising coincidence at the Toronto-area meeting was described in the following terms:

John says let's go down and meet some people in Toronto and see if we can't get this thing off the ground. So I went down there and met a couple of gentlemen, one of them was [construction entrepreneur] Bruce Evans and the other one was the Mayor of Huntsville. They'd just finished this development in Gravenhurst, this waterfront redevelopment downtown. We were sitting down, John explained who I was and who my father-in-law was. All the fellas at the table were the fellas at the table the day Grenville was killed because he was coming down to meet them to talk about who was going to run for the Premier of Ontario. They just stood there going "wow, what a small world, right". CRD

Building Bancroft proposed a wide range of development projects such as a new library, a municipal office and a riverfront walkway for the town. Ultimately, however, the initiators' political power and access to capital failed to transform the town. Building Bancroft ended up falling through, despite several million dollars in funding being raised for studies via John Weir's political connections:

We started to get some pushback. We were trying to involve all of the community. As my dad always said, he said "small town politics can be very brutal" and all of a sudden it was like all these out-of-town people telling us what we should be doing and its not us. We tried to bring them in, right, but you know how it is, they like to chirp from the cheap seats. They don't want to get their feet wet and their hands dirty but they'll chirp all day long. And I'm being pretty blunt about this because to me it was a huge opportunity that we lost. CRD

With central, riverside real estate for the Building Bancroft project in mind, the Town Council purchased the site of an old IGA supermarket. This decision became notorious in the community as a waste of taxpayers' money, and damaged residents' faith in local political representatives. A present-day councillor recalled this period in the following terms:

The perception has been that they [previous Town Councils] have made some really bad decisions. We paid - I can't remember, when it was maybe ten or twelve years ago now - a million dollars for what ended up to be a mold filled building right in the downtown core and that story has been a thorn in the side of the Bancroft community. RC

After this incident, the Building Bancroft team came to be perceived as "these guys from out of town and they don't know what they're doing" (CRD). Through this

example, it can be seen that actors within high-level business and political circles have the power to “impose” development projects onto communities only up until a certain point. In this case, a lack of buy-in and consensus among community residents were important factors in the eventual abandonment of the project.

The Building Bancroft consortium’s previous work, at the Gravenhurst waterfront, comprised of a luxurious enclave - reflecting the upscale side of cottage country culture - located adjacent to a comparatively dilapidated downtown. It is understandable that residents, given Bancroft’s economic hardships and working class origins, might be skeptical of an outsider-driven refurbishment of this kind; a conscious attempt to alter the town’s development trajectory powered by largely exogenous forces.

A contributing factor to this attitude might be Bancroft’s relative lack of waterfront property: places of residence which are frequently owned by city-dwelling cottagers or affluent in-migrants. In relation to a community like Gravenhurst, Bancroft possesses a relative lack of what Pahl (1966) called “cosmopolitans” with “regional citizenship” within its municipal boundaries. In this case, a less prominent political voice for affluent out-of-towners (whether via elected representatives or through direct pressure exercised on councillors) influenced the rejection of an elite-driven development vision. The early development of Muskoka - where Gravenhurst waterfront is located - as a base for GTA elites (described in Chapter Five) is likely to have contributed to these divergent outcomes.

8.3. A Tale of Two Downtown Redevelopment Initiatives: North Hastings Inspiration Place

Frustratingly for its proponents, given the wasted time and money, Building Bancroft shared many features with present-day revitalization visions. “North Hastings Inspiration Place” (frequently referred to in interviews as its previous name, the “Community Hub”) - a development which includes thirty proposed units of affordable housing over three floors on top of a library - was awarded \$1.4 million in funding from

the provincial and federal governments. A further \$500,000 is being raised by the communities of North Hastings.²⁰ A concurrent “Mainstreet Makeover” of Hastings St. North will improve the aesthetics and walkability of Bancroft’s downtown. Interviewees argued that these revitalization projects were founded on substantial local engagement:

The downtown project [Mainstreet Makeover] and the hub project [NHIP] are really tied together. We’re using a lot of community stakeholders and local experts with that. It isn’t a bunch of councillors at a table guiding those decisions but we actually have people with lived experience. GM



Figure 54: Main Street Makeover Information (Photograph by Author)

Another interviewee also drew attention to how the planning process shaped positive outcomes, thus far:

²⁰ The project, as of early 2024, has been delayed. This is due, in part, to the resignation of the capital campaign committee, who were tasked with raising the town’s \$500,000 contribution. Additionally, the builder of the NHIP requires a more favourable “costing environment” to move forward. The Town expects construction to resume in the near future. It has been claimed that the housing component is vulnerable to cancellation than the main floor library (Riley 2024).

I think it was really a perfect storm of having the right people to have that discussion... just getting a lot of stakeholder engagement a lot of public engagement. PE

While greater community consensus may have been established due to consultation processes, buy-in may also have resulted from the passage of time and attitudes changing in the town:

There was a plan... to do very similar things to what's happening now only it was just, there was a lot of dissent, a lot of people... were really really quite concerned about it being too much too fast, not appropriate, cookie cutter. There was a stall and I think... we're talking twenty years for people to come around and accept that growth is necessary but let's allow everyone to have some input into how we're going to do this. EE

Unlike the Building Bancroft project, in which elite actors used connections at the provincial level to bring the project forward, NHIP was facilitated by local political actors putting together a proposal that “ticked several boxes” with regards to higher-level funding requirements.

As Bancroft's Municipal Advisor pointed out:

We came to understand that we were the only library project that was funded across the province and so we feel good that we made a compelling case because many other municipalities applied and weren't successful so there was something in our bid; whether it was the partnership with the private sector, inclusion of affordable housing with the library build project, downtown renewal effort all of those came together to win the day for us. MA

Expertise and resourcefulness of the actors involved played a significant role in moving the project forward:

[The North Hastings Inspiration Place is a] *project that's near and dear to my heart and I'm waving it around wherever I can to say "you can make these things happen". That's a perfect example of a private public partnership with funding from all three levels of government and the private sector to say we'll provide what we can, we'll provide land, provide funding for the main floor so you don't have to worry about tenanting a main floor building on main street where we'd prefer not to have residential development on the ground level. But what can you do to sort of help us meet our goal of increasing housing? I think that's the perfect example of thinking outside the box.* PE

One interlocutor cited the use of vacant Town-owned land as a creative approach, which aided the goal of affordable housing provision:

[The Town can] *deploy municipal property assets in a way that is more than just a real estate transaction. Just because you've got vacant land doesn't mean you should sell it for the highest value because dollar value may not equal community benefit.* MA

The provision of affordable housing was a key component of the success of the NHIP.²¹ As well as helping to secure funding, the provision of affordable housing signals to the community that an endogenous form of development - in which local needs are being responded to - is being pursued.

Future tenants will no doubt benefit from the considerable efforts of the Town of Bancroft (and affordable building company Springdale: see Section 8.5) in creating discounted rents within the NHIP. The Executive Director of NHCT, however, suggested that the term "affordable housing" with regard to the NHIP was being used disingenuously by the council for political appeal within the community:

Affordable means 80 percent of market which is no longer affordable for most of us. But I think there's ... they're being a little bit sly about it when they say they're building affordable housing when in fact they're not. EDCT

²¹ It should be noted that, while the mixed-use concept contributed to the successful bid for funding, the housing component was never going to be funded by tax dollars (Ibrahim and Davis 2023).

The above claim, that “affordable housing” in the NHIP may be of greatest significance for its symbolic value, is justifiable. While many interviewees showed a deep concern for the issue, the notion of achieving “affordable housing” victories is often reified by federal, provincial and municipal actors, while little impact is made “on the ground” for those most in need of genuinely affordable housing. Kick-starting a major revitalization project through higher-level grants, meanwhile, is highly effective in creating the impression of political success:

We’re saying this is really going to determine the direction the town goes in for the next decade or two potentially. This is really going to set the stage for where we’re going to go in the future. GM



Figure 55: Announcement of the NHIP at Old Bancroft Library (Photograph by Author)

In a dynamic identified by Leitner (1990) within larger municipal governments, the NHIP stands to be a legitimizing project for the Town’s current political elites. The mayor and most of the incumbent council got re-elected in the Fall 2022 municipal

elections, validating the decisions that resulted in successful outcomes - so far - regarding the project.

The following two sections will illustrate why affordable housing is a particularly important issue for local governments in the current moment. First, in Section 8.4, the growing need for municipalities to engage with housing issues will be described and, second in 8.5, the challenges faced by a specialist affordable housing construction company will be recounted.

8.4. Growing Municipal Engagement With Housing Provision

Housing provision - interpreted in various ways - is high on the agenda for politicians of all stripes. At the provincial level, Doug Ford's Conservatives have frequently sought to overhaul Ontario's land use regulations - including the protection of the green belt - under the rationale of increasing housing supply in the province and aiding the development industry. Though housing is not traditionally the purview of lower-tier municipalities, gestures towards mitigating the local housing crisis are important currency among constituents. Encouraging housing development is also a means of positively influencing perceptions of Bancroft and, of course, improving Town finances.

An important factor behind the political importance of housing at the lower-tier level are the direct democracy pressures experienced by the local state. As mentioned previously with regard to the Town taking action on water infrastructure deficits, the lower-tier municipality, as the primary governmental point of contact for residents, experiences pressures to act - often beyond its remit - on affordable housing issues:

The county has responsibility, as the upper-tier, for those [social housing] portfolios, but the county is once removed from the residents, so the residents are still coming to the Town to say “what are you doing about this?”. And then the Town has the challenging role, I think, of keeping information flowing, and also being as helpful and open to facilitating improvements and change, without any of the strings or the carrots that can really help it, apart from their one vote at the County and trying to advocate for residents. PE

These pressures are particularly acute in Bancroft. An informant stated that “something about the position the Town finds itself in makes it need to be more proactive [than other municipalities]” (PE), before elaborating:

Bancroft is unique in that it does have these six outlying municipalities that are really bedroom communities and that Bancroft carries the brunt of the responsibilities for a lot of the non-traditional municipal mandates so outside of the scope of landfill, roads, water and wastewater, recreation, once you go beyond that to housing and social issues and housing and mental health I think Bancroft, both from residents and from other levels of government, and internally at the council table as well, felt a lot more pressure or took on a lot more responsibility to address those issues. PE

Macro-economic factors (see Walks 2019) and a laissez-faire regulatory culture have resulted in increasingly unaffordable housing being produced through market processes. Housing is now particularly expensive in Bancroft and environs due to the area’s proximity to the high real estate prices of the GTA (see Chapter Three). A weak “bargaining position” for small municipalities was described by Bancroft’s General Manager regarding affordability goals, due to the fact that developers are able to play municipalities off against each other:

If we looked at a seniors’ development that’s coming here and we said “ok we can put your sixty units here but you need to make ten of them geared to income and you must work with the County to find subsidies and you have to take those people from the housing list”, they’re going to pack up and go elsewhere. They’re in this to make money. We don’t really have that much influence. GM

The interviewee, also formerly a long-term employee of the County, commented critically on existing subsidies for the housing sector (the primary means through which

governments now seek to address unaffordability, aside from promoting increased supply via private developers):

The ones that do apply to, say, CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] for government funding for support to build some of these affordable projects, they are 80 percent of the normal market rent. That's what the federal government defines as affordable. The federal government has currently set market rent for a one bedroom apartment for our area at \$1150 per month, so an "affordable" [unit] is \$825 or \$850 a month. That's still completely unattainable for anyone on fixed income whether they're a young family, senior or disabled... What those populations need is rent-geared-to-income, which is the provincial language that affects specific rates based on a percentage of your income up to a maximum of 40 percent of your total gross income. The challenge of that is that the Province isn't putting any money into those programs anymore. GM

Bancroft's major rent-geared-to-income social housing area Woodview Lane ("it's been here a long time so it's starting to need some significant retrofits to stay feasible" GM) is run by a local non-profit which is funded by the County. The complex was built in the second of two waves of social housing construction in Hastings County, between 1986 and 1995 (the first took place between 1978 and 1985 [Hastings County 2014a]). As part of the Conservative government's "Common Sense Revolution", social housing responsibilities in Ontario were devolved to municipalities in 2001, before former provincial and federal housing stock was fully downloaded in 2003 (Hastings County 2014a).

Bancroft's Municipal Advisor described an evolving municipal engagement with housing issues since time of the Harris-era provincial Conservatives:

For the past twenty years municipalities have been paying a significant portion of the social housing responsibilities and they are sustaining locally social housing through property taxes. The province and the federal government are giving capital dollars to build more housing which is great, but guess what? That new housing has to be sustained operationally year after year. Who has to sustain it? It's largely local municipalities. The reality is that as time goes on municipalities are required to dilute the limited taxes they do collect funding more and more and more areas of daily life that the province and federal government are deciding they're going to pull out of. If municipalities don't do that then their

citizens are suffering... It's a dilemma that small town Ontario copes with and it's hard. It's pretty hard. MA

The interviewee implied that it had been an ongoing process of municipalities coming to terms with the fact that greater engagement with housing issues was necessary:

In the early days municipalities resented that because it was obliging them to become directly involved in funding social housing using property tax dollars and that's income redistribution in most people's minds. MA

Eventually, the Municipal Advisor argued, lower-tier municipalities should realize that a deeper engagement with housing issues is in their own interests:

You have to be engaged as a lower-tier municipality...they [the Town] realized that they needed to be a champion of affordable housing in their municipality, they couldn't simply wait for the County to pick a site in Bancroft to build or hope that a local developer or local service provider, faith-based agency submits an application to do a project... you've got to get out there and you've got to convince the County that your municipality wants that investment to be made and that you truly are a partner and communities that produce housing are communities that accept that responsibility. MA

Part of “*becoming engaged*” from the Town of Bancroft’s point of view, given their limited powers, required “*thinking outside the box*” (PE) in the form the NHIP. A striking feature of this project is that a successful bid for substantial government funding, and the hopes of the Bancroft Council and community rely, to a large extent, upon the involvement of a self-described “*one man band*” affordable housing builder Phil Spry.



Figure 56: Woodview Lane Social Housing Area (Photograph by Author)

8.5. Springdale: Hastings County's Affordable Housing Builder

Phil Spry has carved a unique and in-demand niche as Hastings County's go-to affordable housing builder. On his company "Springdale", the Mayor of Bancroft commented:

Yeah, there's no government building affordable housing. They do have funding programs, which are not in my opinion that attractive, so [affordable housing builder] Phil [Spry, of Springdale] is one of the only guys, he's the only guy that's ever approached us on it. MB

A brief account of the operation of his Belleville-based company will illustrate the fine margins which influenced funding dispersement for Bancroft's key redevelopment project, as well as elucidating some general challenges of producing affordable housing in Ontario. Spry describes the origins of his business - after acquisition of track-side rental properties while employed as a railroad worker in the early 2000s - in the following terms:

I used to when I first started, I did it all. You buy the land, clean it, rezone it, develop it, build on it with the architectural plans and everything. Occupy it, put the tenants, agencies into it and you maintain it and operate it, there's not too many people that do that. There's lots of builders, lots of developers, landlords, property maintenance [companies]... we do that all. AHB

After Belleville, Bancroft experiences Hastings County's longest subsidized housing waitlist. Under the current funding system, points allocated on the basis of need allow for greater funding provision. While this made Springdale's involvement in Bancroft viable, Bancroft's Municipal Advisor - who was connected to Spry via Hastings County's staff - was a key figure in cementing the relationship:

[The Municipal Advisor] was great he was the reason that we're doing the Community Hub up there. He's pretty much the sole reason. If it wasn't for him I don't think we would have. AHB

Spry described Bancroft as “a highly motivated municipality” (AHB) within a competitive environment for Springdale's services within, and beyond, Hastings County:

They're all interested. I've been to different municipalities when I was looking to get the last wave of funding. I went to the different municipalities to see what they had to offer. They're all interested and want to talk but some of them are a little more aggressive and some are not. It all depends. Some of them have more, I guess, raw products or whatever you want to say. Some of them might have land and be able to give you a rebate in taxes, for example, some of them don't. It all depends which municipality you're looking at and you have to grade them. AHB

Despite a “huge, huge demand” (AHB), Springdale's founder stated:

We've turned down all kinds of projects, just because he [Son Andy Spry, undertaking the majority of Springdale's work outside of Belleville] can't expand, he has to take the time for one thing, has to take the time to train somebody. For another thing, we just don't have the capital. AHB

The continuation of Springdale's business over the years has depended on the strong social conscience of the company's founder and the fact they were able to create a unique space for themselves in a funding environment that no longer exists:

Funding, well to be honest with you it has pretty well run dry in our area. Even these billions of dollars that the federal government has in funding, they only allow so much in certain areas, know what I mean? They try to disperse it... Anyways, the funding has changed. Some of it was in the form of a forgivable loan and that's pretty much dried up now, it's just in a loan, in a mortgage. AHB

Springdale's business - while invaluable for communities like Belleville and Bancroft - is not easily replicable due to tight financial margins:

In the long term, after twenty years or thirty years, the mortgage is paid for, then you're going to have some return on your investment... That's what the funding is there for, to make you commit for twenty to thirty years... I always say, they [buildings] not only have to be sustainable they have to be profitable. You have to make a little bit of money, if you don't, that's like your contingency. If it's just sustainable and you have some problems, well you're going under, right? AHB

The arduous process of getting funding was described as follows:

It takes time. It's overtime too, not just time consuming doing it, but it's over time... a builder, developer can get the land ready, he can go get a design and building permit but dealing with the funding doesn't happen that way. It's over a course of time. That's another drawback for a developer. But, again, it all boils down to return on investment when it comes to large developers. AHB

Developers, it was claimed, would have to be unusually motivated by factors beyond pure profit to produce even "medium rent" buildings, which may then have a knock on effect of increasing local supply in the lower-cost range:

There are no, that I know of, for-profit developers that are out there looking to do affordable housing, the return on investment is not there. The closest you get is: there's one developer not too far from here he's doing that but he's using construction financing, rental construction financing... that rent is a little bit higher level rent above affordable rent but their theory is that if they can provide

housing for medium rent people then that will free up housing for affordable rents. So anyways that's the only private developer I know that does "affordable housing". AHB

Difficulties surround the issue of finding labour - alongside the problem of increasingly expensive building materials - when more lucrative employment opportunities existed locally. The reconstruction of the region to cater to the housing preferences of affluent city dwellers, dominates the housing construction sector locally:

It's hard to get trades in Bancroft right now because of these multi-million dollar cottages. Trades guys always want to work on those at a higher rate... We're not living right there and being an outsider its hard just to come in. The trades want to work for local people, which you can understand. AHB

Ultimately, the task of producing affordable housing is extremely challenging, even for an experienced and motivated operation like Springdale, who are called upon to patch-up local manifestations of a vast structural problem.

8.6. Rural-Urban Entrepreneurialism: Strategic Planning

A range of practices, which are argued to represent a more “entrepreneurial” direction for the local government, will be described in this section. “Entrepreneurial” governance prioritizes economic growth, and is associated with speculative measures by which localities compete for inward investment with rivals. A feature of this mode of governance is a focus on “image”, at the expense of more socially-minded initiatives (i.e. “the circus succeeds even if the bread is lacking” Harvey 1989 p14).

Through the example of Bancroft, it can be seen that pursuit of entrepreneurial governance strategies has cascaded down the urban hierarchy towards “rural” municipalities, since Leitner described city managers’ increased engagement with the development process as early as 1990:

“In numerous cities, the local state has moved beyond its traditional activities of land-use control and planning and the provision of public services to become a major player in urban land development” (Leitner 1990 p147).

Aspects of this shift have already been discussed: i.e. using municipal lands for eye-catching revitalization projects which legitimize the approach of the current leadership. Other features, such as the mayor working increasingly closely with developers, and the local government bringing in planning and real estate experts, will be discussed henceforth. Entrepreneurialism, I argue in this small town context, seeks to increase local government actors general *agential capacity* with regard to influencing their community’s development trajectory. In the case of Bancroft, I show how the adoption of this mode of governance is, to a large extent, a necessary survival measure, due to challenging structural circumstances, as opposed to being an optional strategic choice. As such, I demonstrate the significance of Magnusson’s remark on the role of governmentality at the municipal level:

“The magic of the market is such that no conscious collusion is required to discipline states or peoples or communities that stray from the “business friendly” path.” (Magnusson 2015 p118).

A degree of fortune, therefore, can be seen in which small town communities are able to draw upon appropriate expertise regarding the strategic development initiatives. Despite the fact that, today, specialized skills are necessary to navigate municipal planning frameworks and procure advantageous funding opportunities, resourceful multi-tasking and “making do” often characterize the staff culture at small municipalities (see Chapter Seven). Bold moves in a high stakes environment, however, require experienced professionals and Bancroft - due to the political and economic challenges described previously - reflects an exacerbated example of this general need.

Of the town’s introduction to strategic planning, an interviewee argued:

The Bancroft Council has always, until [the Municipal Advisor] came along, and until there was this push for community economic development plan, really hesitant to undertake strategic planning. I don’t know if it was a failing on staff’s part to explain the importance. I don’t know if there was no legal mandate to undertake strategic planning around the council table, or if that four year election cycle made it impossible for anyone to sit down and focus on charting Bancroft’s course. PE

That the more well-resourced municipalities are, typically, also those that undertake strategic planning initiatives was a “*chicken or egg*” situation for the interviewee, but the advantages for those able to establish a consistent agenda were clear:

With strategic planning, some municipalities are very excited about it they commit to it and that allows them to sort of budget and undertake projects based on an approved plan. Bancroft was sort of doing things on an ad hoc basis, dealing with things as they were thrown at us. I liken it to fire fighting. You’re constantly, you’re not having a lot of time for moving benchmarks or goalposts forward you’re just dealing with whatever’s coming at you. It makes it hard when you don’t have a lens through which to examine issue and say “this fits within our mandate and our resources and our hopes for the future”. When you don’t have that everything’s a priority and if everything’s a priority nothing can be a priority. PE

A realtor and councillor stated that access to the framework put forward in the “Making Our Future” plan helped them make everyday political decisions:

[The Municipal Advisor] did what I considered our only truly strategic development plan. I am a fan of strategic plans. I am a fan of four or five high level items up on the wall. Things where you're struggling with the decision...are you meeting what that strategic plan says?...past mayors, they're not necessarily a fan of sitting down and doing a strategic planning meeting. RC

Moulaert, Jessop and Mehmood (2016) point out the importance of controlling the “time horizon” of governance projects with regard to altering development trajectories. Bancroft’s “Making Our Future” plan represents an effort to institutionalize an outward-looking and entrepreneurial approach to governance in the challenging context of a four year election cycle. Consistency of vision is increasingly important for municipalities in the absence of a strong backing by the provincial state (see Sections 7.2 to 7.6 of Chapter Seven). As stated in the strategic plan:

“The Town should assess its processes...to make sure...the Corporation has time for strategic thinking.” (Town of Bancroft 2019 p.i)

The plan presents a focused vision to consolidate the status of being North Hasting’s “urban centre of choice” through the following measures: downtown revitalization (including a “library project” and improved public spaces), maximum utilization (and potential expansion) of the water system, an openness to rezoning, improvement of the Town’s “Mineral Capital” brand, better co-operation and delineation of responsibilities for local governance actors, promotion of arts and culture, development of heritage and mineral museums, promoting use of the airport, and using municipal property assets for the benefit of the community (Town of Bancroft 2019 p.i-viii).

Bancroft’s commitment to a new, longer-term vision seeks to remedy a longstanding “insular” attitude:

[Throughout consultations] there was a consistency in the message that the Town really needed something to get the community as a whole out of the doldrums. There was a sense of malaise we're hard done by, we bear more of the financial burden than we should as we're the regional centre, taxes are high, water rates are high. We don't have a lot of waterfront property in the Town of Bancroft to bring massive injections of assessment and so "woe is me", "woe is me" over and over again. And a recognition that the town's own worst enemy are its citizens who have a hard time feeling positive about their home. So the mission through this plan is to try and change that and give to the citizens reasons to be proud of home. MA

The perspective put forward in "Making Our Future" was shared by many actors in and around council, which speaks to the notion of an "intersubjective production of meaning" (p56) as articulated by Martinelli et al. (2013):

When discourse is regularized and embodied in typical patterns of belief and conduct, it can have a significant structural impact. In particular, new discourses are usually key aspects of institutional and structural change (Martinelli et al. 2013 p56).

Similarly, Markey (2005) provides an account of local elites shaping a new "mode of social regulation" in a restructuring staples-producing town in British Columbia, through the act of strategic planning. It is argued that a consistency of vision and coherence between local institutions and the community can generate stability through economic restructuring processes.

While dynamics internal to a given community are crucial for "changing the narrative", Markey also identifies that relationships with other agencies within the spaces of multi-tiered governance are also fundamental. Bancroft is structurally weak within Ontario's multi-tiered government system, but its attempts to assert itself as a strategic agent might be as a first step in the greater institutionalization of the Town's regional centrality. While amalgamation is presently unlikely to be achieved (see Chapter Seven Section 7.8), funded new agencies for regional economic development,

or social services, could be layered on top of existing institutions. Governance, ultimately, takes place through direct communications in a social space, and perceived standing vis-a-vis higher level actors can be the basis for future reform.

8.7. Rural-Urban Entrepreneurialism: Pro-Development Agenda

The importance of property tax has been self-evident for local government actors past and present. Strategically centring the pursuit of this revenue, however, as a means of bolstering local agency (with the *potential*, at a future moment, to be deployed in service of redistributive projects) has only recently become a dominant rationality at the lower-tier.

An interviewee claimed that “[the mayor] *wanted, I think, to take a much more pro-active and hands on approach to being a mayor* [than the previous mayor]” (PE). In interviews, the present-day mayor consistently espoused the value of aggressively “selling” the Town of Bancroft, primarily to developers:

We’re in business and if you’re in business you have to attract customers, you can’t just assume that they’re going to come. MB

Proactively seeking development opportunities was an important part of the mayor’s role:

You constantly have to move forward and keep looking ahead. Always have to be looking for the next project is the bottom line. MB

Working with the developers who already had an interest in the town came across as a major commitment for the mayor:

You’ve got to have your attention on it all the time. As I say I work a lot with developers. Not just attracting them, but they’re always in constant contact when they start going because they either need help or advice or encouragement or updates on things that are going on. It makes them comfortable that a. you care, and b. they feel they’ve got a bit of a helping hand.

We don't make the decisions on whether something passes or a planning approval or this or that or anything else [the County possesses these functions] but we can certainly help them through the process and suggest "you might want to do this, do that etc". MB

A new interest in places like Bancroft among larger developers, as mentioned in Chapter Three, was not perceived as a position from which the Town could extract wider public benefits, but as an opportunity to create a snowball effect of developer interest. In small town Ontario, developers tend to "hold the cards" in these relationships:

It's nice to tell people "we've got lots going on, we've got this happening here and that happening there". It just becomes another selling tool as opposed to a bargaining chip. MB

This position is easily justified given the reality in which the mayor operated, with high tax rates having negatively affected the town's appeal for several years. A concessionary approach to the needs or wants of developers is further reflected by the existence of tax breaks on new buildings:

The property tax incentive that we have for people to come here initially, they might look and say "well your taxes are pretty high" well we're pretty well giving them for the first five years about 50 percent if not more of their property taxes back. The hope is that in this time period we can grow the assessment base big enough so when the program ends, five years, the tax base is grown enough. MB

Development fees have also been waived, in a move driven by the fear of losing out in a competitive environment. A vision of future prosperity - or at least stability - takes precedence over immediate social concerns (i.e. reducing tax or water rates for long suffering residents). The deputy mayor explained the Town's logic regarding development fees:

The one concern we have is that we're the hub and we don't have any development fees. We did have a few years ago. We got out of them because if we charge \$1000 for development fee all of our surrounding municipalities won't

charge anything so therefore they can build on the outskirts and have the advantage of being next to town. Unfortunately, we're working at it but our taxes are about 70 percent more than the surrounding municipalities. DMFM

The mayor expressed a hope that housing opportunities would “trickle down” within the community, reflecting a commitment to supply-and-demand economics underpinning his council’s approach:

What we're hoping is... as people migrate, maybe move up in the world we'll create a greater supply of housing that will open up opportunities at the lower end of the spectrum. MB

This claim is likely to be a post-hoc justification of the council’s approach. It is unlikely that increased supply will push down prices at the lower end of the market, given housing’s unique status as a commodity. If real estate has become permanently more desirable in the region, North Hastings properties’ status as an asset - valuable for individuals’ personal equity or entrepreneurs’ profit-making - will ensure demand remains high at all price points.

An expressed commitment to “business principles” from the present mayor was less pronounced in the two former Mayors of Bancroft interviewed. The present mayor described the importance of business experience in politics in the following terms:

You cannot lose sight of the long term sustainable path. That's where you've gotta go. I'm hoping, I'm seeing a lot more people with business experience that are getting into municipal politics at other municipalities. I think it's extremely important that, it's not that we know the be all and end all. It's just that we understand the basic principles of survival and getting ahead. MB

Through considering the ASID analysis’ focus on the “variation, selection, and retention of specific discourses” (Jessop, Moulaert and Mehmood 2016 p175) related to changes to the practice of governance, it is clear that a revived commitment to “business principles” chimes harmoniously with the fundamental institutional characteristics of the municipal corporation. As argued by Ontario municipal governance scholar Douglas (2005):

“the ideological and technical underpinnings depicting the municipality as a “business”, and advocating an apolitical culture within the organization are alive and well to this day” (p233).

Indeed, the strategic direction taken by the Town under the mayor’s leadership was characterized, in his own words, as politically neutral:

I think as a politician, and I work very hard at this, I stay out of the left right centre discussion... You don’t want to create an environment - whether it’s me or somebody else where someone is eliminated or endorsed just because of the political view... the majority of the population is not engaged with the day-to-day workings. They take for granted that they’ve got a good road to drive on or that they’ve got a library to go to or an arena to go to... I find that community engagement on a political level, there’s some, but it’s pretty low. Is that a sign that people are happy or is that a sign that they’re fed up? ... we have people who are more right-leaning and more left-leaning, but I must applaud everybody on council. They pretty well try to keep it to the business of the Town. And I think that’s the important thing. MB



Figure 58: Signs For Municipal Election 2022 (Photograph by Author)

There has been a acknowledgement locally - belated, in relation to the transformations ushered in by the Ontario Conservatives at the turn of the millennium - that boosting property taxes represents the municipal corporation's only real means of self-empowerment as a subordinate entity within Ontario's governmental hierarchy. Conditioned by this structural dynamic, and motivated by narratives of misfortune - generated by the withdrawal of the mines, the water and wastewater crisis, missteps related to the Building Bancroft proposals - it is argued here that a form of "structured agency" has emerged which rationalizes an aggressive pro-development stance as the sole alternative to fiscal crisis.



Figure 59: New Development on Old School Site (Photograph by Author)

8.8. Rural-Urban Entrepreneurialism: Real Estate Expertise in Council

The mayor's aggressively pro-development approach reflects a structural need, in the Town of Bancroft's difficult circumstances at least, for the expertise of individuals capable of actualizing the municipal corporation's property-tax generating potential. A realtor and former OREA representative - encouraged by the mayor to run for council - has aided Bancroft's development-first vision. The councillor recalled:

He called me and said "hey... I know you mentioned something about running. You might not even have to campaign we have one spot left open I think it would be really good to have someone from a business side sitting on council right now". He said "I think we're going to be seeing a lot of growth we're going to do a lot of conversations about housing we're going to do a lot of conversations about zoning it would make sense, I think you'd be a good fit for council". He said "your name needs to be in with one hundred bucks". RC

The mayor, in turn, explained the value of accessing the Realtor's expertise:

I always use her for a read on the market. "Whats going on? what do you see?" I don't care what field you're in, talking to the people who work in it day to day. They know the answers long before they're published or the press release comes out so they see the trends coming etc.... All information is good information. I wouldn't say it gives you a decisive edge it just allows you to read the tea leaves a little better. MB

The Councillor and Realtor described their role in the following terms:

When it comes to listening to rezoning, understanding the markets of real estate, understanding why we need new housing, understanding what the demographics mean to waste and water, some pretty common sense understandings actually about housing. So when I sit at the table and we're making decisions about rezoning, I always give my opinion but I say I'm not an island in this circumstance. RC

The former OREA representative articulated several of the ideas put forward in the Association's "Small Towns Big Opportunities" (2021) report: mutual benefits for small municipalities, the real estate industry and the province at large can be obtained

by steering development towards communities outside of Ontario's traditional urban heartland. OREA, led by former provincial Conservative leader Tim Hudak, has real influence at Queen's Park to transform small towns under Doug Ford's developer-friendly regime.

The Councillor and Realtor highlighted the urgent stakes of present actions. As was also the case with other local government actors, crisis conditions were invoked with regard to the current approach:

This council we have right now, everybody is well aware that if we don't grow, we're dead. We were on the verge of being a Bancroft community, er, a bankrupt community, actually not that long ago...it doesn't happen just with me alone, but I am one of those thinkers that we do need to change, we need more houses we need more infrastructure we need more growth. I'm not the only councillor in today's mix that is of the same mind. RC

Magnusson (2015), in discussing theories of the form and function of the local state, considers the proposition that the municipality should be considered a special purpose agency, akin to a school board, for serving and regulating the property industry. This argument points to the fact that municipalities' role in attracting builders, realtors and developers is not dissimilar to school boards' role in attracting teachers and parents. Magnusson concludes that this is only a partial view of the local state. While real estate interests are powerful in the formal channels of local government, and innate structural tendencies of Ontario's local governments can be harnessed in service of raising revenues, councils' representative function for communities should not be neglected. The local state still possesses the capacity to be a "locality organizing itself politically, exercising state power, and struggling for recognition as a distinct polity with its own government" (Magnusson 2015, p109). As demonstrated in Chapter Seven, political forums outside of official channels in Bancroft are active, and represent an important counterpart to the local government in channelling political sentiment. It is crucial, therefore, in the Bancroft case, that the representative function of the local state remains active and engaged.

Through the dynamics discussed herein, the accentuation of a local “real estate state” (Stein 2019) dynamic in which developers’ economic interests are supported by the vulnerability of planning departments to financial opportunities, is taking place. The next section will explore the degree to which alternative courses of action *could* be pursued, given powerfully structuring conditions outlined above.

8.9. Addressing Poverty at the Local Level: What Can the Town Do?

The “rising tide” of in-migration and developer interest cannot be seen to “lift all boats” in Bancroft and North Hastings, as intensifying hardships are experienced by a significant proportion of the population. This section will assess the role of the Town in managing social polarization and social exclusion, before describing how a range of non-governmental social organizations within North Hastings play a role in supplementing those traditional functions of government.

Interviewees argued that lower-cost housing opportunities may open up as a result of increased market rate development. A subtext that the Town will be in a better place to address social issues at an unspecified point in the future - when financial peril has been staved off - permeates local government interviewees’ discourses around growth and development. A strong concern for poverty and displacement exists among many lower-tier actors, but the perceived “politics of the possible” (Martinelli et al. 2013) powerfully dictates agendas. As Leitner (1990) also highlights, in a discussion of Peterson (1981):

“the local state can show little concern for redistribution because of the need to retain those who contribute most to the local revenue base” (Leitner 1990 p150).

The powers available to the lower-tier in service of alleviating poverty are severely limited. Social housing, shelter services and welfare are managed at the county level. Contributing factors to the impoverishment of town residents, like high

water and wastewater rates and property taxes, cannot be altered by the Town Council without subsidization by other tiers of government, or risking returning to a state of fiscal dysfunction. With regard to housing: bringing Springdale on board for the housing component of the NHIP - as an “outside the box” solution to exorbitant housing costs - was far from the path of least resistance for the Town. While the Province is not motivated to finance new waves of rent-geared-to-income social housing, however, local political initiatives will barely scratch the surface of the problem.

Inclusionary zoning may be a way forward, as suggested by a letter from the NHCT to county managers and lower-tier mayors, which demanded 25 percent rent-geared-to-income units in new rental buildings in North Hastings (*Housing Letter* n.d.). This tool is now available to municipalities in Ontario, but implementation would be controlled by the upper-tier. A reluctance to using these powers at the county level, can be attributed to fear of missing out on development altogether. The upper-tier are subject to their own financial and ideological pressures, while their prioritization of Bancroft’s own specific needs may be affected by their physical distance from, and insufficient integration into, the communities of North Hastings (See Chapter Five Section 5.7).

Some social welfare measures have been achieved by the lower-tier government, such as the opening of a warming centre in public buildings during the winter of 2022. Sufficient political will was raised to realize this outcome, despite County Housing Officials pointing out in an interview how “*volunteers, in kind donations of food. Rental space for free, utilities*”(CH1) were typically very difficult to mobilize. The Executive Director of the NHCT, however, criticized the warming centre on the basis of limited opening hours, lack of support staff and supplies, and uncomfortable conditions (EDCT).

The siloing, and occasional mutual antagonism, of broadly-defined governance organizations in the town is not beneficial for finding creative solutions to address

poverty locally. These dynamics are at play with regard to the Town's relationships with the NHCT, and the local BIA. The NHCT is well connected to individuals and organizations, locally and regionally, with innovative ideas for change. Community Land Trusts in Bancroft, for example, have been proposed by the NHCT for several years and, with the securing of a new building on the outskirts of the town, it is a model that is set to be implemented.

A report by ecological economist Shaun Sellers, prepared for the NHCT, describes the idea in the following terms:

“Community Land Trusts (CLTs) or housing trusts... [are] considered to be more of a ‘commoning’ of land. A housing trust tied to a land trust removes land from real estate markets and redefines relationships of the people to the land through responsibilities to the community and to the future.” (Sellers 2021 p7)

Sellers argues that “capital sequestration” - letting capital rest in community-owned housing assets (in a neat parallel with carbon sequestration) rather than actively being channelled into other avenues for accumulation - represents a means to provide permanent affordability while also transforming social relations in the community. Sellers’ report envisions many land trust-properties in the region, augmented through social connections between inhabitants and overarching coordination by local institutions. Sellers suggests a leading role for the NHCT, or an affiliated organization:

“A community-led property management group could be a cooperative that holds the lease for multiple properties in the North Hastings area, and could manage the upkeep, standards, and quality of housing for folks who prefer renting housing. This rent would be low through the removal of sites of profit-making from the provisioning system” (ibid p19).

Alongside public banks and Community Investment Funds (a system of pooling the capital of private individuals), municipal governments are cited as parties who

could, potentially, finance acquisition of properties and “hold the risk for investing in transformation” (ibid p20).

In Hastings County - in Belleville as well as Bancroft - BIA members positioned their organization as a progressive counterpart to the elected council, outwardly expressing a strong desire to use their limited powers and resources to address social issues, while also pushing for a modernized approach to economic development. Tiny homes - something the local government could engage with more fully through zoning reforms and provision of Town-owned lands - were cited as an option to address housing issues:

Instead of kicking people out of the town to beautify it, why not buy some land - the Town has enough money, put up tiny homes. Cambridge started to do that, have somebody on site, have rules in place and try to help these people give them a sense of purpose. Help them make a bit of money, help them understand what makes them tick so they can get on with their lives. Move out of that tiny home, and prosper like everyone wants to. But instead things are swept under the rug. ITBIA

While the suitability of tiny homes to the northern climate was questioned by County Housing Officials²³, this form of housing was proposed as a component of a broader social responsibility:

One of the things that the BIA here would love to see is something along the lines of tiny homes with a licensed therapist and maybe one or two people where they actually try to improve that person's way of life so they can stand on their own two feet. ITBIA

Belleville's BIA had already undertaken initiatives to serve vulnerable people on the streets:

²³ The model has received criticism for reasons ranging from generating stigma for inhabitants, to inefficiently utilizing large plots of land under typical zoning norms. It can be argued they normalize excessively small dwellings as a “fix” where political and economic solutions are - in theory - available.

The downtown Belleville BIA, we have taken on... an outreach social worker. Who supports the vulnerable population in downtown Belleville. We have a lot of homelessness around here. ... So we took it upon ourselves because nobody else was doing it... This is not about wiping them out, or [sweeping them] under a rug. It's about connecting them with the resources that are already available in the community... They're part of the community too. This is their downtown too. MM

BIAs, funded by levies on downtown businesses which are then distributed by the Town, can play a limited, but useful, de facto role in bolstering the social welfare functions within broader networks of local governance. Private businesses' means are limited, however, and their motivations are necessarily self interested, to a degree. Ideally, sufficient income tax-funded services would be provided by the state under a rationale of universal public welfare, organized in such a way to allow for a strong institutional presence in North Hastings.

8.10. Urban-Rural Connections and Non-Governmental Social Organizations

The proliferation of extra-governmental agencies, which supplement the local government's social welfare role to a significant extent, is linked to Bancroft's proximity to major cities. The BIA, to cite an atypical example (due to their later worldwide proliferation), was started not long after the first ever BIA was set up in Toronto in 1970, by an ex-urban in-migrant to Bancroft (*"The BIA's been established here since the '70s. For a little tiny town [it is remarkable]" EE*).

In the following interview quote, a local Economic Expert claimed that Bancroft, due to its attractive natural characteristics and proximity to cities, benefited from an class of educated, yet under-employed residents:

I think that certainly a lot of our services were borne out of historic issues and a sort of combination of the fact that people who come here are a mix of Ottawa and Toronto and so we have a lot of well educated people who are not employed. They do seek out grants and start programs that are needed, I'm not saying they're not needed. EE

The fallout from economic restructuring is argued to have influenced the establishment of social organizations in the town:

Back when we look at the closure of the mines, because they were quite a signifiant industry here, and that's a rough and tumble industry, the same as logging. And so, with that comes associated social issues, certainly at the close of the mines that's when the local women's shelter opened. We've had a really well established women's shelter and programs since the '70s here. EE

The Executive Director of NHCT theorized that a lack of co-ordination and co-operation between government and community agencies was connected to a wider post-industrial culture in the town:

Decades ago, when the mines closed and jobs dried up and now there's no, there's not a lot of meaningful employment opportunities where you could make a decent wage, so always having to scramble and fight for you survival individually, I wonder if organizations have somehow internalized that as well. This is just a theory I hold, I have no idea if it makes any sense. EDCT

At the dawn of the water and wastewater crisis, a prominent councillor proposed cutting Town funding to community groups to save money. The perceived importance of these groups was reflected in comments by the deputy mayor at the time (now serving as mayor), who responded:

“community groups are the heart of our town and they accomplish great things, usually on limited budgets...They provide programs and events for far less that the town would be able to, Quite often it is for our youth and the less fortunate. To eliminate the small amount of funding the town provided is shortsighted in my opinion” (Pearson 2016)

Counter to this, North Hastings social organizations were criticized in the following terms by an interviewee:

Very few of them had mission statements, or operating, by laws, or kept minutes of meetings. It was very loosey goosey. I can tell you that that was and remains a stumbling block. There are still some and they're falling by the wayside. People are no longer supporting them as much as they have in the past. EE

This lack of support appears to not be the case for North Hastings Community Trust, which receives significant ongoing donations. A large new premises - which, as previously mentioned, is slated to be home to the town's first Community Land Trust - was gifted to the organization, reportedly in this case by a "local" benefactor:

This thing is like \$1.5million ... we're just in awe and saw so much potential and were filled with so much hope at a time where, well the world's been hard... Not only did they buy us the building they included the funding to finish construction... it will be the first CLT [Community Land Trust] in our county and as you know there are very few rural CLTs. The building - even though it's not completed, included five apartments - so the main floor is massive... we're building offices and community spaces and our hope is to also have a community kitchen and then there's tonnes of work space. Workers space, there's a lot of room to grow food. We want to have greenhouses, gardens, yeah it's a huge, huge building. EDCT

A significant amount of financial support for the NHCT was also reported to come from cottagers:

We did do a call out two years ago saying we need to continue to grow and need help. We raised \$360,000 which is kind of unheard of in a community so under resourced but we have huge huge support from people here who do have access to wealth, people in Toronto and people in Ottawa and we've put out a couple of newsletters and each time we put a call out a lot of support comes in. EDCT

Experiences, and relationships, from time spent the city also shape the perspective of the Executive Director of NHCT:

I think because I moved from Parkdale [Toronto], my stomping ground... I know the land trust model there, I've been able to get lots of information from them. EDCT

This life trajectory was argued to have contributed to the NHCT's proclivity for direct activism:

[In Bancroft] there has never been a history of challenging and activism it has been received really poorly and I mean I know from being in an urban environment, pressure can make change. EDCT

Social organizations - often reliant on urban-rural connections for personnel and funding - supplement the structural deficiencies of formal government. To an extent, they can counteract the imbalanced political spatial structure of Hastings County - which has existed since the creation of the northern townships (see Chapter Five). If Bancroft is outlier for its deficiencies in appropriate powers and resources, it is also distinctive for the amount of influence in-migrants exert. Many cottage country towns harbour a fluctuating population of educated ex-urbanites, but few simultaneously experience such an acute need for social services, and - at times - alternative forms of leadership.



Figure 60: New Home Of NHCT (Photograph by Author)

The NHCT often takes on a leadership role - as expressed in self published material and in interviews with the Executive Director - which communicates a wider mission to be part of a positive social transformation beyond the boundaries of North Hastings:

[People] want to be connected to the community. I think we all need housing we need food but we really need to belong. Everybody. Our networks are vast. We have hundreds of people connected that want to be part of what we're doing. We have people who make sandwiches twice a week, we have shoppers. We have a whole communication team now. EDCT

A holistic, “healing”-centred narrative (“*we’re living at a time that feels quite precarious and we all want to hold onto something that feels good and makes us feel part of something*” EDCT) contrasts starkly with the discourses emanating from the Town Council, centring a practical deployment of sound business principles. Both the formal government and the alternative political coalition are influenced by Bancroft’s particular development trajectory under existing institutional structures. To bring the community together, the contradictions inherent to the present moment must, eventually, be reconciled.

8.11. Conclusion

Many phenomena have been described in this chapter which reflect a shift in the culture of local government towards the strategic centring of growth, motivated by the aim of maximizing agential capacity. I have shown how the flagship NHIP project has helped legitimize the present council’s approach and create positive momentum utilizing, in part, the symbolic success of “achieving” affordable housing. Relatedly, strategic planning was shown to communicate a new outward-looking approach - both to internal and external audiences - and a maintain consistent vision over time. Furthermore, I have argued that today, a “business mindset” is practically required for disempowered and underfunded municipalities like Bancroft, as they fight for fiscal survival. Local leaders exercise their skills in business, real estate and planning

effectively to harness the benefits of the political apparatus - the lower-tier municipal corporation - that they occupy.

The *municipality's* interests are, however, separated from much of the *community's* interests - i.e. achieving fiscal stability, and secure housing tenure, respectively - within existing governmental structures. Urban-style displacements (Walks and Soederberg 2021) are taking place in significant numbers, at the same time as Bancroft moves towards being an investment-friendly place for developers. Into a vacuum of social responsibility, the formal local governments in Bancroft and North Hastings are supplemented by external agencies to provide social services and a wider sense of community building. Similarly to Springdale, the affordable building company, non-governmental social organizations providing social support occupy a precarious position. Charity plays an important role in ensuring limited and conditional regulation of an emerging property-driven political economy. Connections formed, in part, through cottaging and in-migration have contributed the personnel and funding behind a diverse range of local organizations which make important contributions to a broadly defined notion of "local governance".

The present-day "entrepreneurial" style of government, contrasts with previous generations of Bancroft politicians who managed the maintenance of the municipality first and foremost, while significant levels of private industry - in forestry, mining and manufacturing - powered the local economy. The decline of this "industrial" period, described in Chapter Six, has impacted municipal revenues detrimentally and contributed to the patterns of social exclusion evident in the area today. Nevertheless, an enduring rural economic culture and forestry-supportive land use regulations remain, juxtaposed with intensifying political and economic dynamics of the municipal space described in this chapter. The concluding chapter revisits this schism - as the central theme of the dissertation - and revisit the central research questions.

Chapter Nine - Conclusion: Towards a New Structured Coherence in Bancroft and North Hastings

9.1. Introduction

In this dissertation I have argued that urbanizing transformations to non-city spaces within Southern Ontario's urban field have intensified the need for new political arrangements at the (sub) regional scale. Tendentially - under the existing political arrangements which characterize Ontario's municipal system - the structured agency of local governance actors shapes a socially and economically unsustainable development trajectory, as traditional rural cultures - supported by provincial regulation and land use patterns - experience exacerbated displacement pressures. This argument broadly summarizes key findings from the three research questions set out in Chapter One, which will be unpacked more fully over the course of this concluding chapter.

9.2. Research Question One

The first research question sought to identify how the structured agency of local governance actors has shaped the Bancroft-centred region's development trajectory. In a first cut response to this question, we found that, first, a new economic space, shaped by twenty-first century technological and socio-cultural factors, represents a profoundly altered context in which local governance takes place. A shifting role for "countryside" spaces within Southern Ontario's urban field - driven by the rise of high-speed internet as a dominant communications technology and consolidated by the transformations in work and social life in the pandemic period - has created a new structural situation for small local governments, with attendant challenges and opportunities. A key opportunity is capitalizing on newly lucrative property tax revenues. As a consequence, manoeuvres by economic and political actors centred upon the closing of rent gaps (in relation to neighbouring cottage areas, and by virtue of disinvestment in traditional productivist practices) are newly influential in this space.

A succession of recurring revolutions in function for spaces outside Ontario's major cities - the construction of the colonization roads (1850s), railroads (late nineteenth century), and highways (Great Depression period) - are comparable to present-day transformations, similarly driven by infrastructure development.

Secondly, I argued that a new actualization of agential capacity, relative to the traditional operation of local governments in this context, can be seen in the strategic direction the Town of Bancroft has taken, since the late 2010s. The local regime's approach is marked by attempts to "invert" the historic problem of a disadvantaged structural situation by shifting these pressures upon internal culture of growth-oriented entrepreneurialism. The millennial provincial political restructuring period - as fiscal pressures have been shifted downwards within the governmental hierarchy - has belatedly influenced the culture of local government in this manner. Opportunities related to new development and the recapitalization of existing real estate influence and facilitate this shift. An alternative left-wing politics has intensified outside of formal channels of government but, unless reconciled, these divergent trajectories will continue to harm social cohesion.

A second cut, and more comprehensive, response to various aspects of research question one involves a more systematic engagement with and elucidation of the relevant key terms in light of the findings of the research.

9.3. Political Structures Impacting the Practice of Local Government

A number of features specific to the system of government in North Hastings - originally imposed by British colonization - can be seen to profoundly impact local government actors' agency and agential capacity. The structural features of state institutions are largely consistent over the period of time studied, though they have occasionally been subject to reform. The strategic selectivity of local institutions results from the "levers" available to facilitate or constrain particular actions and, relatedly, is

also shaped by institutions' endemic cultural features. The following political structures are particularly influential on governmental actors' agency and agential capacity:

The Colonial Municipal Corporation

Since their creation - shortly after local governments were rolled out generally with the Baldwin Act - North Hastings municipalities were rudimentary entities with limited powers. They were designed to foster a "business-like culture" (Douglas 2005) which has influenced the practice of local government from its inception. This dissertation has shown how this culture has intensified in recent years under conditions of increased responsibility and financial jeopardy for municipalities. Property taxes have always been a key source of revenue for local governments, but presently the dependency is exacerbated.

Vertical Political Relationships with the County

North Hastings suffers from a relative lack of empowered local decision-makers within the County of Hastings; an enduring peripheral status exists for lower-tier northern municipalities. Services are operated out of Belleville, 1.5 hours away, limiting influential actors' direct experience of conditions in the north. Furthermore, Bancroft and the other northern municipalities have only one vote at county council on major planning decisions. Budgetary injustices were claimed by a former mayor, who argued that tax revenue generated by economic activities in the northern parts of the county were not being returned in spending.

Vertical Political Relationships with the Province

Provincial funding for infrastructure drove a period of growth for the Village of Bancroft in the immediate post-war period. Subsequently, influenced by neoliberal ideology, the Province has subjected lower-tier governments to major downloading of responsibilities and costs. As a "creature of the Province", the municipality had no

recourse for the impact of the Province's actions during water and wastewater crisis. Latterly, however, the Town has had success unlocking provincial funding by fulfilling particular criteria - reflecting the Province's role as a gatekeeper in the realization of major municipal strategies - to develop the North Hastings Inspiration Place.

Horizontal Political Relationships

North Hastings is a fragmented region of municipalities with competing interests. No larger, integrated vision exists for the region. A dynamic is present whereby economic strain is placed upon the hub of Bancroft, while outlying municipalities enjoy a "*false tax scenario*" (MB) in benefiting from the Town's services. The Town of Bancroft has attempted to encourage the Province to amalgamate lower-tier municipalities in the county to their advantage, but was unsuccessful with its bidding.

The "Second Nature" of the Municipal water system

This system differentiated Bancroft from other local municipalities in terms of operational complexity, and resulted in greater commercial capacity and social service responsibility for the Town within the region. Issues of regional integration were reawakened with the expansion of the system in the mid 2000s. The deficits resulting from water and wastewater responsibilities in the twenty-first century represented a major shift in the lower-tier municipality's structural situation in a financial sense.

9.4. Technological and Environmental Milieu Impacting the Practice of Local Government

The structural situation of local government actors is shaped significantly by a larger technological and environmental milieu, which combines and interacts with the underlying political structures previously described. The viability of the municipal

political structure - to regulate and reproduce community life - is profoundly affected by internal economic conditions which result from:

A Powerful and Increasingly Influential “Urban Field”

The urban field (Friedmann and Miller 1965) is generated by prevailing space-time norms of transportation technologies (i.e. automobility). Today, in-migrants still want the city to be physically accessible, and evidence suggests the urban-regional scale remains all-important to the present-day evolution of Bancroft and North Hastings. The advent of high-speed internet has, however, altered social and economic life within the urban field, particularly during the COVID period. By raising demand for ex-urban residence in North Hastings, and by allowing local housing options to be a more viable competitor to city-based alternatives, remote working has influenced the escalation of house prices in the region, and made property tax revenues more lucrative for municipalities. At the same time, the emergence of a dispersed “Zoom town” around Bancroft raises service demands for the Town without necessarily capturing property tax revenues within municipal limits.

The Underlying Geographical Terrain

An enduring peripheral economic and political status was influenced by the lands being hard to settle in the period when Canada’s multi-level political geography was being established. Like neighbouring jurisdictions Muskoka and Haliburton, the region’s myriad lakes and attractive landscape predisposed North Hastings to rural recreation practices, but a cottage and tourism economy was slow to develop due to the dominance of lumbering, and by virtue of the region’s relative inaccessibility until better quality highways were built in the 1930s.

The Local Resource Base

Mineral and forest resources have defined the larger economic context the local governance actors inhabit. Variable political arrangements - such as the federal regulations which facilitated a viable uranium mining economy in North Hastings, or the provincial regulatory norms which allowed relatively uncontrolled lumber harvesting until the 1980s - interact with underlying conditions of scarcity or abundance. Stress is placed upon the welfare function of local governments in the absence of a strong economy, and commercial taxes are no longer available from large industrial operations that have ceased to operate.

9.5. The Structured Agency of Other Governance Actors

In this dissertation, “governance actors” were defined broadly, to encompass the range of agents overseeing social reproduction and economic development in the region. These variously complement, supplement, dominate or contradict the formal local government’s role. In particular cases, these actors could be seen to operate in reaction to the structurally determined strengths, weaknesses and biases exhibited by formal political apparatus. Outside of the local government, I identified three important groups of actors:

Non-Governmental Social Organizations

I argued that these organizations are necessary, more than any time in the post-war period, to “regulate” the imbalanced political economy of the region and maintain social cohesion. North Hastings Community Trust has been highlighted as a particularly influential organization, albeit one which experiences a conflictual relationship with the local government. The necessity for, and viability of, these non-governmental social organizations stem from limited formal political powers and resources at the lower-tier. I showed that North Hastings’ presence within a powerful urban field influences a relative profusion of such organizations.

Private Consultants

These actors have exerted significant influence on the County's "Wildly Authentic" plans. The use of business-minded private consultants reflects municipalities' insecure situation, yet aspirational outlook, in the present day, and the proliferation of "free market competition" within the political sphere. Consultants are regularly used at municipalities like Bancroft due to limited human resources, often providing highly "strategically-selective" advice. Bancroft council hiring its own in-house "consultant" - the Municipal Advisor - represented an institutional shift of sorts, helping reposition the Town on a more economically viable development trajectory.

Wealthy and Powerful Individuals

Private actors from outside local government have been shown to have an outsized role in small town development trajectories. These figures have engaged with Bancroft and environs due to a variety of reasons: local origins, connections established through cottaging, or the seeking of economic opportunities. Across the broad historical period reviewed, diverse figures such as Billa Flint, Father Maloney, and Grenville Martin have influenced local communities' fortunes substantially. John Weir and the "Building Bancroft" team, meanwhile, brought a potentially transformative project to the brink of realization, but lost the trust of the local government and community, thus demonstrating limits - in a twenty first century context, at least - of the power of non-governmental actors.

9.6. Features of the Regional Development Trajectory

The broad features of North Hastings' post-1940 development trajectory are represented in Figure 61. Here, as in previous graphs, population is used (with acknowledged limitations) as a rough proxy for economic vitality. North Hastings' population trajectory is shown to have grown more unevenly than that of Hastings

County on the whole, and this trajectory can be seen to map onto key political and economic periodizations in the region.

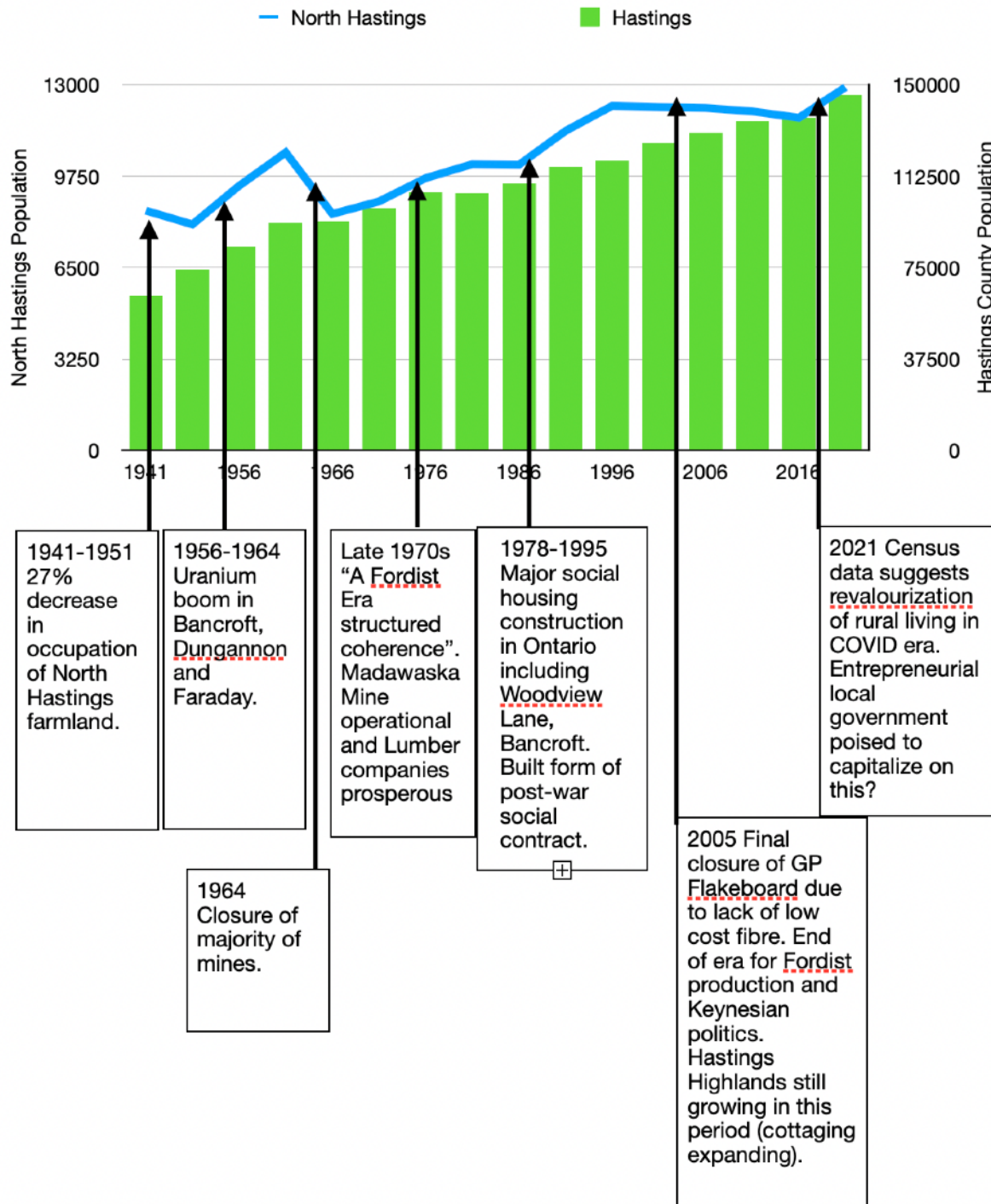


Figure 61: Annotated "Development Trajectory" By Population Since 1941 (Diagram by Author)

Terminology and analytic tools from Martinelli et al's (2013) framework for urban and regional development trajectories are used to supplement and explicate the graph. The ASID "thematic synthesis" - Agency, Structure, Institutions and Discourse - frames the analysis of the case study. The main "story" (Martinelli et al. 2013) of the development trajectory centres upon how agents of local governance are affected by the evolving, imbalanced, relationship between the hub community and outlying territories, in a changing multi-scalar landscape of governance. "Moments" of significant local *agency* are revealed, to complement the analysis of *structural* conditions presented thus far in the conclusion. Three main "periods" are identified: a period of "structured coherence" following the turning moment of the mid-1950s, a period of millennial decline, and period of "entrepreneurial" revival in response to recent crises.

1) Period of "Structured Coherence" following the Turning Moment of the Mid-1950s

An important "turning moment" arrived in Bancroft and North Hastings in the mid 1950s. Following Martinelli et al. (2013) turning moments:

"are events that precipitate, or short periods that condensate, changes in institutions, accumulation or discourse, i.e. mark changes in trajectories. They are generally used to define periodizations" (p53).

In the 1950s, central status within the region was consolidated through development of a water system. Increased responsibility and operational complexity for the local government differentiated Bancroft from the surrounding townships. The water system served as a pre-requisite for large scale retail, major institutional buildings, and social housing to be developed in the municipality in upcoming decades. A "suburban" standard of living, first available to the managerial classes of the new mines, represented a major shift regarding the local "mode of social regulation", an important feature of an emerging Fordist "structured coherence" in the

mid-twentieth century. Around the same time as the development of the water system, a drastically altered political structural context for the village of Bancroft arrived with the creation of an enlarged municipal territory in 1956. Bancroft's modernizing moment contrasts with a prior status - described in Chapter Five - as a settlement within a relatively unorganized, technologically underdeveloped periphery, supported by an economic base of struggling farms and speculative mining enterprises.

In the 1950s and early 1960s discourses of progress and optimism were pervasive in lower-tier government circles; the sense of Bancroft being an "emerging city" (*The Great Water and Sewer Debate* 2018, French and French 2003) would have an enduring legacy in bestowing outsized community assets (Town of Bancroft 2019) and a hub function upon the municipality. The Province, which provided Bancroft with one of Ontario's first small town water systems in the village's "boom" years, shared the optimistic outlook of the lower-tier government, undertaking modernizing initiatives, and prioritizing public welfare. While the closure of most local mines in the early 1960s threatened the mood of optimism, A period of stabilization took place from the mid-1960s to the 1990s, supported by provincial and federal regulatory measures which preserved a strong productivist economy (See Chapter Six Sections 6.2 and 6.3).

A supportive role for the Province in regulating the vacillations of the local economy was also evident in the social housing construction which took place in Bancroft from 1978. An attitude of benevolence towards the municipality from the Government of Ontario, however, began to wane with the policy of withdrawing public sector employment (at the MNR and MTO) from Bancroft in the 1980s. Moreover, by the end of the Fordist period, the dismantling of higher-level institutional norms shifted many provincial responsibilities - including housing - to the municipal level.

The environmental context of the local resource base played a major part in conditioning the region's development trajectory over the course of the late twentieth century. Early in this period, natural resources were readily available in an era of strong

demand (the Cold War ensured a demand for uranium, while a growing population maintained a robust market for forest products). Towards the end of this period natural limits were run up against, as a dwindling lumber and uranium ore resource base grew less competitive in the open market. Major institutional shifts, which had conditioned the economic viability of local resources, also precipitated the demise of the “coherent” Fordist period in North Hastings. Uranium mining ceased, while the Province restricted lumber harvesting significantly, to preserve the resource base for the producers and consumers of the future.

Local history literature and interviews have revealed a particular form of local government agency in the immediate post war period: successful municipal governance consisted of administrative competence rather than strategic vision, a status quo which was enabled by the strong productivist economy, and supported by the provincial and federal regulatory measures. There were relatively few governmental expenses at the lower-tier level: installation and incremental upgrading of water systems was undertaken by Province (as described in Chapter Seven), and roads, housing, and social services were also funded extensively by the Government of Ontario. Taxes generated by strong local industries funded local infrastructure expenses. Widespread affluence existed in a community with a high employment rate, meaning that Bancroft did not need much social welfare support from other levels of government, in contrast to recent decades.

While, from the perspective of lower-tier government agency, Bancroft’s development trajectory was largely path-dependent in the 1960s and 1970s, much work was taking place by local activists, employers and by actors within higher levels of government, to maintain the viability of the Madawaska mine until the early 1980s. While mayor and council of Bancroft of the late twentieth century had a less active role in shaping the development trajectory than their twenty-first century counterparts, other forms of agency were significant at different scales and in different arenas. As argued by Martinelli et al. (2013): “socio-economic stability and security are not the

outcome of an invisible hand, but the result of concrete human agency and collective institutionalization” (p6).

2) Period of Millennial Decline (1990s-2010s)

As the 1990s progressed, the Town of Bancroft and the North Hastings region came to inhabit a more challenging structural position in several respects. The productivist economic context in which North Hasting’s settlements are embedded looked dramatically different to that of the 1970s: all mining operations had withdrawn, many sawmills were struggling and had begun to close down at an increasing rate. In many ways, the closure of the Flakeboard factory - finally in 2005 - represented the end of productivism occupying a dominant position within the local economy.

In the late 1990s, the discursive transformation around good governance at the provincial level promoted the perception that austerity in government spending was necessary, and the understanding that local municipalities must “fend for themselves”. This precipitated major political structural transformations: in the era of the Mike Harris Conservatives a comprehensive wave of amalgamations and downloading initiatives took place. This moment represents a critical juncture for the local government of Bancroft. While Toronto-based accounts of amalgamation identify its destructive and undemocratic nature (Keil 2000), amalgamation presented an opportunity for the Town of Bancroft to achieve a political territory commensurate to the responsibility and influence it had attained in the post-war period.

Unfavourable amalgamation outcomes transpired - from the Town’s point of view - which reinforced a growing discursive current of being “hard done by”. Hub status became seen as a burden and Bancroft, increasingly, saw itself as victim of forces beyond its control. Later, evidence of the longstanding power differential between the municipal government and the Province was underlined by outcomes during the water and wastewater crisis, and local discourses of injustice and victimhood grew stronger. Despite a growing impetus for change, driven by these

narratives, a slow adjustment to the new structural position is evidenced by the actions of lower-tier local government actors. Unused to emerging “sink-or-swim” political imperatives the local government continued to take a largely passive approach to shaping Bancroft’s development trajectory. Mistakes were made by local officials with regard to lack of action on mounting deficits.

The cessation of the productivist economic hegemony in the region, and the final days of an associated “managerial” governance culture, are the defining features of the period between the early 1990s and the early 2010s. The early Twenty-First Century also marks the incipient stages of a new period, however. An emerging technological paradigm - the internet age - transforming social and economic life in Bancroft and North Hastings was in its infancy, but not yet radically impacting the structured agency of local governance actors. Concurrent to, and influenced by, this technological advance, the re-presentation of rural space - evident in the place branding successes of Prince Edward County, which began in the 2000s - began to take place.

Another important feature of this period was the arrival of new non-governmental organizations on the institutional landscape following the withdrawal of the mines. The importance of organizations like the North Hastings Community Trust, represents a shift in the regulation of the local economy towards institutions outside of formal government, increasingly funded by grants and charitable donations rather than tax dollars.

3) Period of “Entrepreneurial” Revival in Response to Crisis (Late 2010s to Present Day)

The period since the late 2010s is argued to represent a probable new *turning moment*: a new settlement has been established around the features of an entrepreneurial government, newly desirable real estate “resources”, and an engaged charitable sector.

Unsuccessful efforts at inducing municipal amalgamation in Bancroft's favour in the millennial period have been followed with attempts to lobby the Province in support of this goal in the mid to late 2010s. Unsurprisingly, given the Province's recent reluctance to undertake amalgamation, no success has been forthcoming on this front. In response to ongoing frustrations, a transformation in both the deployment of agency and the maximization of agential capacity has taken place: an important "path-shaping" moment, following decades of path-dependency in local government actors' structured agency. Interview data with present-day officials demonstrates that lower-tier government are creatively stepping out of prescribed boundaries to deal with the Town's financial pressures. I argue that Bancroft is a pronounced example of entrepreneurialism in the small town governmental context, due to particularly difficult structural circumstances.

Changes to the institutional culture at the Town have been supported by bringing in professional experts, within and adjacent to the local government (alongside a growing dependency on outside consultants, typical of lower-tier municipalities). In the absence of provincial guidance, an increasingly business-minded approach has been arrived at by the Town. A discursive shift towards "Making our Future", in and around the municipal government drives a new "intersubjective production of meaning" (Martinelli 2013 p56) - regarding the purpose of local government - among lower-tier, county and provincial actors. Despite exacerbated need, the Town is not, however, empowered to fulfil a more comprehensive role regarding social welfare; a continuing strong role for non-governmental social organizations is necessary and increasingly "locked in" due to conditions created, in part, by the local government's own growth-oriented strategies.

If structural "push" factors - with regard to the adoption of an entrepreneurial culture of governance - are evident in the crisis of local government finances following the water and wastewater debts, then "pull" factors can be seen in the increased appeal of small towns, the rise of remote working, and the concomitant rise in local real estate values in the COVID and post-COVID periods. COVID was spoken about in

nearly universally positive terms by interviewees (regarding municipal interests, at least), and has brought about unprecedented developer interest in North Hastings. Pursuit of a newly entrepreneurial direction originated as strategic decision in response to adverse conditions, but a strong “tail wind” of societal rural revalorization has supported the government’s emerging strategic orientation. Institutional shifts at Hastings County regarding the economic development functions of government have developed in tandem with this societal rural revalorization. A culture of salesmanship and image-making - which echoes that of the powerful real estate industry - is evident in the new modes of governance at the county level.

In this period, the contemporary landscape of provincial-to-municipal funding opportunities has had an effect in structuring the agency of the lower-tier government. The Town’s successful engagement with Province - “checking the box” of affordable housing, as described in Chapter Eight - and the collaborative, coordinated approach of key local actors, represented a marked contrast with the prior period of conflict. The significance of the cultural shift in this period means that, using Martinelli et. al’s (2013) terminology, the realization of the North Hastings Inspiration Place represents an *Emblematic Moment*.

9.7. Research Question Two

We may now turn our attention now to the second research question, which asked why uneven development is evident between political jurisdictions in the Central Ontario Lakelands. The explanation of Bancroft and North Hastings’ development trajectory provided thus far in the conclusion has offered a partial response, identifying many challenges at the level of the individual case. Multiple factors shaping enduring *relative* disinvestment in the North Hastings region have been highlighted throughout the dissertation: occupying a relatively “out of the way” position in relation to major infrastructure networks (Chapter Four), falling behind in the development of the tourist industry - and, importantly, an attendant strong market for recreational real estate (Chapter Five), the longstanding dominance of forestry - a low paying economic sector

which often precludes other forms of development - in patterns of land use (Chapters Five and Six), high taxes in Bancroft as a result of political dysfunction with regard to the water and wastewater crisis (Chapter Seven), and the social, economic and environmental fall out from the withdrawal of the uranium mining industry (Chapter Six).

Within this disinvested milieu, I have shown how forms of recapitalization have taken place. Evidence of a coordinated “return of capital” (Smith 1979) by the real estate sector and adjacent interest groups was presented in Chapter Three. The “Wildly Authentic” campaign, meanwhile, re-presents the space in an aestheticized manner, seeking to appeal to the consumption preferences of the post-industrial creative class. This rebranding, representing a shift in economic development strategic thinking, seeks to extract value from the “rural” landscape in new ways, and shapes the ongoing churn of socio-economic spatial differentiation across the province.

In the dissertation I have also identified a number of means by which advantages and disadvantages are reproduced for political jurisdictions - with regard to the exercise of effective governing agency - over the course of a development trajectory, which will now be highlighted.

9.8. Explaining Divergent Trajectories Between Municipal Jurisdictions

“A Stream of Contention”

Each moment of crisis creates a disadvantaged situation for new rounds of decision-making for local governance actors, referred to by sociologist Charles Tilly as a “stream of contention” (Tilly 1994, Weinstein 2017). Reactions to adverse conditions, for example, limit prioritization of positive development strategies by local governance actors. Bancroft and North Hastings have experienced significant economic challenges throughout the timeline of their development trajectory. Various moments of “acute” stress (e.g. the closure of mines, immediate environmental impacts of mining, the water and wastewater saga) have been described in the dissertation, which - interpreted as a

succession of blows to the local economy - have, in summation, contributed substantially to the relative poverty of the region. Staffing deficiencies exacerbate the lack of capacity for pro-active measures to positively impact development. Less well resourced municipalities, moreover, suffer from a constant need to improvise, are disadvantaged in applying for funding opportunities, and struggle to engage in long term strategic thinking.

Class Privilege in Development Trajectories

An important factor in accounting for the uneven development of the Central Ontario Lakelands is reflected in interviewee comments that forestry was *the* dominant economy for a longer period in North Hastings than other cottaging areas. It is argued here that the rural economic culture associated with forestry - and, to a lesser extent, agriculture - established an enduring working class character that is less well connected to power than neighbouring jurisdictions. A position far down Ontario's "urban hierarchy" has created persistent challenges.

The endurance of important productivist spaces late into the twentieth century precluded their recapitalization under rent gap dynamics (Phillips 1993, Darling 2005) for a significant period of time. The recent recapitalization of post-productivist spaces, under the growing recreational-residential economy has, belatedly, brought larger numbers of relatively affluent city-dwellers into the region. These in-migrations have, and will continue to, influence the internal political milieu of the region. They have created more personal connections - an important factor in small town development - between North Hastings and high level political and economic interests. This was the case with John Weir of "Building Bancroft", while connections with wealthy ex-urbanites have significantly aided the funding for non-governmental social organizations that help alleviate poverty.

Elite individuals in Canada's early history - Berczy's "men of higher influence" (Isin 1992) - were argued to boost the importance of particular settlements. Outside of

the instrumental role played by Billa Flint, the presence of provincially-significant actors in local development (beyond staples extraction), has been limited in Bancroft. The establishment of elite tourism in Muskoka, as described by Watson (2017), took place early in Canada's development and populated the region with many influential (albeit often part-time) residents. Within the limitations of a single case study format, evidence suggests that the cited advantages for a place like Muskoka have multiplied over the course of historical development.

Anchoring (or lack thereof) in a Transient Economic Space

In comparison with a region like Muskoka, North Hastings has - at times - more fully resembled an underdeveloped Innisian space of staples production. A key economic actor like Grenville Martin was able to invest in improved living conditions for workers in the post-war period, but this development was contingent on the economic health of the lumber economy. More extensive local government presence in a community, and a denser landscape of governance institution, by contrast, would "anchor" local economies over time to a greater degree.

It is hypothesized that a relative lack of regulatory or institutional anchoring at the local level has been a factor in the liminal socio-economic character of North Hastings, as different economic spaces - lumbering, agriculture, mining - have risen and fallen. The fact that resident populations declined both at the start of the twentieth century (See Chapter Five) and at the start of the twenty-first (See Chapter Three) can be seen to represent these liminal characteristics. Evidence of linear advancement is scant - economies have been built and destroyed several times - but rescaling and restructuring processes result in the region increasingly resembling a "quasi-suburban" (as claimed by Luka and Lister 2012) space for the GTA or Ottawa.

Recursive Political Structural Advantages and Disadvantages

The enduring structural dynamics described in previous sections - whereby the Town of Bancroft suffers from a relative lack of property tax revenue - contribute to a lagging economy (to the degree that local government revenues are effectively reinvested into economically productive community assets). Bancroft's relative lack of property tax revenue is, to a significant extent, due to a small proportion of North Hastings' lakeside real estate falling within its boundaries. Despite the Town's stated misfortune regarding its property tax base, a dynamic interplay between local economic conditions and municipal boundaries is indicated in examples cited within the dissertation.

At times of economic growth, Bancroft had powers and territories adjusted in its favour. Bancroft was incorporated as a village during what has been described as Ontario's "urbanization phase" (Cotton 2019), and was dramatically expanded as a municipality in the uranium mining period. Unsatisfactory outcomes, for local politicians, regarding amalgamation were seen in the millennial period, due to Bancroft's debt-saddled status as a declining productivist centre. This was a pivotal moment as it prevented Bancroft from achieving an appropriate regional political influence, and deprived the Town of the property tax-generating powers of prime lakeside lots (by the millennium this source of revenue would make a substantial impact upon municipal finances, and the structural position of local government actors). The existing division of municipal boundaries, therefore - created through periods of political syncretism, or lack thereof - reproduce economic advantages and disadvantages, in theory.

The rising significance of lakefront property values, and the declining significance of industry and productivism, have "altered the playing field" with regard to Bancroft's accrued advantages, however. Particularly given Twenty-First Century neoliberal imperatives for municipalities to "fend for themselves", unfair burdens remain

for the Town of Bancroft, while outlying municipalities attempt to protect the revenue advantages they have come to enjoy.

9.9. Research Question Three

We have now arrived at the point where we can revisit the third research question which posed how the concepts “urban” and “rural” should be used to most accurately describe the dynamics of change in this space. Prominent challenges from a number of perspectives to the epistemic value of the concepts “urban” and “rural” were outlined in the introductory literature review. From the point of view of this research project and its concerns - i.e. a social scientific exploration of local political and economic change in a small Canadian town, covering the period since colonization - I argue that the concepts are particularly relevant in two interconnected senses. First, “urban” and “rural” describe a political tendency, a degree of acuteness, or direction of travel, regarding collectivity in the organization of space and resources. Second, they should be conceived of in a historic sense as a more absolute, fixed reference point for particular kinds of economic cultures.

Responding to the question of the “dynamics of change” posed by the research question, we can conclude that *urban political dynamics* are evident within Bancroft and North Hastings; the predominant questions thrown up by economic change and regulatory processes at the local level are of an urban nature. Most prominently these questions concern collective management of infrastructures, and how to deliver appropriate services. A structural tendency towards growth or intensification as a concern for local politicians, accompanied by a drive to increase strategic agency, are argued to be characteristics of the “urban” in this sense, within the Canadian context. Bancroft should be considered an urban space - and urbanizing significantly - and this should be recognized to a greater extent in the set up of local government structures. Conversely, “the rural” captures a notion of political self reliance and a tendency towards limited collective organization, as may be seen - in a relative sense - across outlying jurisdictions in North Hastings.

A second key finding for this research question, identified a fundamental division - when considering restructuring of this space - is between an economy related to the growth and maintenance of the town itself - dependent on “urban political dynamics” - that have recently intensified, and the generational spatial practices for which the town provides a residential base (the “rural economic culture”). A key dynamic to restructuring is the intensification of the *residential-recreational economy* and the weakening of the *rural economic culture* which retains a presence in the area, due to inherited fixed capital, family traditions and land use patterns. It is however, argued, that intensification of *residential-recreational economy* drives a bifurcation of social and economic life in the region.

Finally, we have identified that, in practical usage, the concept “rural” is frequently deployed as an ideological obfuscation that works against the interests of municipalities such as those in North Hastings. The projection of an unspoiled “rural idyll” onto the spaces of North Hastings by city dwellers disrupts the longstanding economically and culturally important productivist tradition, and creates conflict. Imaginaries of social isolation among cottagers - an important manifestation of these ideologies - deny the connectivities of political organization and interdependencies regarding metabolic processes underpinning the region as a functional unit.

In the subsequent sections, these conclusions will be expanded upon with a comprehensive summation of the “rural” and “urban” inflections of social and economic change discussed in the dissertation.

9.10. Everyday Uses of “Urban” and “Rural”

The concepts “urban” and “rural” have been used in a number of ways throughout the dissertation. Interviewees and other cited sources have sometimes made colloquial use of the terms. “Urban” refers to features such as high population, a “built up” environment, the presence of industrial and post-industrial jobs, and social

diversity. “Rural”, meanwhile, often connotes a predominance of “natural” landscape features or a sparse population, productivist jobs and social homogeneity.

Rural as an “imaginary” has been an important usage within the dissertation. In Chapter Four, the space of North Hastings was sold as quintessentially “rural” - unspoilt, rustic - but it was argued that this vision was produced by city dwellers for city dwellers, and it encountered some resistance from more locally-rooted perspectives. The rural imaginary, while valuable for understanding specific phenomena taking place in the region, can be seen to be an ideological - and inconsistent - instrument which obscures genuinely rural interests, based on objective social, economic and political processes observable in the region.

“Urban” and “rural” are important practical designations for governmental actors. “Rural” as a governmental category applies to Bancroft in certain instances, and often designates a need for support in service provision (e.g. “rural and remote” medicine denotes a range of subsidies and programs). In the dissertation, the “urban” functions of Bancroft have been particularly significant: the term describes the role as a service and commercial centre that are institutionalized within the planning framework of Hastings County, owing largely to the Town’s water and wastewater network.

The Lefebvrian notion of urbanization as a process has been a frequent reference point. A general transition can be seen within the dissertation, from North Hastings as a “rural” to an “urban” space: beginning with the history of colonial settlement, passing through the expansion of an endogenous industrial capitalism within Ontario. The features of this process in the context of North Hastings County - filled out from a theoretical idea to a concrete succession of historical moments over the course of the dissertation - will be expounded upon in Section 9.11. Here, I argue for the primary significance of the concept “rural” as an generational economic culture in this particular geographic context (a small Canadian town with a mixed productivist and post-productivist economy at the fringe of the urban field) and given the analytic

approach of the research (a social scientific inquiry into local politics and economic change).

9.11. The Rural Economic Culture vis-a vis a Lefebvrian Interpretation of the Urbanization Process in North Hastings County

Establishing a process-oriented account of today's rural economic culture within North Hastings reveals a lineage of social, political and economic forces acting upon the region. The ideas of Lefebvre (1991[1971], 2003[1970], 2022, Schmid 2022), alongside those of Brenner and Schmid (2015), inform the following reading of North Hastings' process of "urbanization" in relation to a "residual" and "originary" rural economic culture.

A Lefebvre-inspired materialist conception of "rural" and "urban" acknowledges the urban characteristics of the "models" - including the political-legislative structure of the municipal corporation - which were mapped onto hinterland spaces at the time of the Baldwin Act. These incipient "urban" structures became imposed upon Algonquin territories concurrently with the development of the colonization roads, resulting in the creation of twelve new municipalities in northern Hastings County. The spatial practices of logging and agriculture - modelled on practices developed in Europe - provided a foundation for a local rural settler culture, the remnants of which comprise today's rural economic culture. While Lefebvre points to the urban characteristics of the colonial North American countryside from its incipient moments, I have argued here that inherited economic-cultural characteristics, in combination with a significant "lag" in relation to the economic culture of the North American cities' allow "rural" to be a useful marker in this context.

The region was an operational landscape (Brenner and Katsikis 2020) for city-centred processes for much of its early existence as a colonial space, feeding burgeoning industrial growth in Southern Ontario while also providing raw materials for Europe and the USA. Bancroft saw considerable development occur when it became

connected to the industrial centre of Belleville by rail lines. By the time of North Hastings' uranium boom in the mid 1950s, the region was integrated into a globally extensive urban fabric. Practical limits remained, however, to the space-times of capitalist urbanization: close proximity to the major cities of Southern Ontario via the transportation technologies of the day facilitated North Hastings' uranium economy (under regulatory measures by the provincial and federal governments to make the region viable). Within a national-scale industrial economy, a sudden mushrooming of infrastructure-dependent modern living standards emerged in and around Bancroft, a transformation of a type - albeit on a smaller scale - akin to Lefebvre's case study of Moux, France (Lefebvre 2022[1960]).

As the urban fabric intensified and extended, North Hastings lost the privileged status which accompanied being spatially contiguous with Ontario's major cities. Remote spaces such as northern Saskatchewan became more economically viable for uranium mining, as a new operational landscape for urban capitalism. Schmid (2022), in his exposition of Lefebvre, articulates the locational logic determining productive industrial spaces under capitalism, a logic which ultimately deprived Bancroft of its principal late-twentieth century *raison d'être*:

"Places become randomly available; they are homologous and differ from one another only in the degree of their distance from one another...the costs of overcoming distances, of transporting objects, and of information become primary" (Schmid 2022 p159)

In Lefebvre's terms, at this point the town should be interpreted as being predominantly subsumed by "the urban" (as a stage of historical development, which surpasses "industrial" society). Concurrently, as this rescaling of the operational landscapes of urban capitalism has proceeded, Bancroft has become subject to the processes of "urban concentration". Upon the evidence explored in this dissertation, presently these forces are more relevant to the town and region than the forces of "urban extension". Facilitated by the intensification of the urban fabric through high-

speed internet technologies, new economic practices - within the local context - exist cheek by jowl with the longstanding rural economic culture: the “residue” from a formerly dominant economic space with an enduring legacy upon spatial practices in the region. Drawing on Lefebvre’s analytic regressive method (Lefebvre 2022 [1953] p69), the relatively consistent economic practices exhibited by sawmills and small scale harvesters - dating back for over a century - can be seen to have endured in a profoundly altered economic landscape, one now dominated by real estate capitalism, and featuring a rescaled and relocated productivist economy.

The forces of concentration produce deleterious effects for the longstanding working classes of North Hastings, mirroring the destructive gentrification phenomena described by Schmid (2022) with regard to neoliberal-era city spaces:

“Entire inner cities were thus transformed into privileged spaces of the global urban elites, while countless people... are displaced, evicted, dispossessed, and expropriated from the social networks and urban [read rural] values they themselves helped create” (p226).

Next, these unequal socio-economic tensions will be described in more grounded terms with reference to an observable “urban economic dynamic” in Bancroft and North Hastings.

9.12. The Urban as an Economic Dynamic

North Hastings and environs sustain a fragile, relatively small scale and familial forestry culture that contrasts with the major corporate lumber companies which dominate many other Canadian regions. The presence of Crown Land nearby - argued to operate as an ongoing “sea of productivism” in Chapter Six - helps sustain this culture. Juxtaposed with Crown Land - public land used for recreation and lumber harvesting, which prohibits development - are the lots and subdivisions governed by municipal corporations.

Municipal powers have been shown to be limited with regard to a socially holistic approach to governing at the local scale. A primary function for municipalities, however, is the regulation of land use within the capitalist land market; they are gatekeepers for patterns development and growth within localities. As has been described, while a tendency to encourage growth is inherent, specific present-day political pressures - the nature of horizontal political fragmentation, vertical political relationships (particularly post-“downloading”) - alongside wider social, technological and environmental circumstances, have made the pursuit of growth all the more alluring. Thus, a range of economic activities - construction, commerce, recreation - congruent with a *residential-recreational economy* are structurally favourable, while practices related to the *rural economic culture* experience increasing challenges.

I have argued in this dissertation that the rural economic culture faces existential challenges in sustaining itself in the long term, due to competition in a global economy for forest products, a dwindling resource base, and challenges recruiting workers, alongside the issue of more lucrative uses emerging for expansive forested lands. In Chapter Six, a direct transition towards a residential-recreational economy was recounted in cases of lumbering land being sold off for residential or commercial purposes. In Chapter Four, it was shown how community members utilize extra-economic transactions for food and services - to the limited extent possible - in perpetuating the local rural economic culture. This is particularly necessary in a region increasingly impacted by the rising exchange values generated by urban economic dynamics.

9.13. The Urban as a Political Dynamic

Deeply connected to the economic dynamics which sustain the Town of Bancroft and support forms of residential-recreational growth are what can be described as urban *political dynamics*. The predominant questions thrown up by economic change and its regulation within existing political structures are of an *urban*

nature in that they pertain to issues of contestation and collectivity. Political interventions are needed to ensure the reproduction of labour power under capitalist social relations (Castells 1979), and presently Bancroft is confronted with several questions of an urban nature.

The “urban question” around water and wastewater revolves around a key calculation. In considering an ideal boundaries for a local government territory an equilibrium should be found: the economic “pressure” municipalities experience to recoup revenues must be balanced with a more diffuse political “pressure” to “right-size” the territory regarding service provision. The calculation is complicated by the fact that the funding of water and wastewater services is not equitable, when bedroom communities in neighbouring municipalities - home to spacious “off grid” residences - benefit from Bancroft’s tax-payer subsidized hub functions. Additionally, the emergence of a hypothetical “digital city”, or “zoom towns” puts further pressure on the hub and confounds conventional means of providing local services. Moreover, the Town’s vertical relationship with the Province has been distinctive - as described in Chapter Seven - the heightened responsibility and vulnerability brought by downloading resulted in particularly disastrous outcomes for Bancroft. Urban-style struggles result from unsatisfactory responses to urban questions, as the crisis of water and wastewater financing has driven activist struggles around collective consumption issues in the municipality of the Town of Bancroft.

Local “urban questions” extend beyond those related to water and wastewater, and demonstrate a need for more comprehensive forms of collective consumption in the locality. The importance of non-governmental social organizations in the town - representing this need - has been argued to mitigate many problems related to displacement and social exclusion. Relatedly, the Town Council shows a deep concern to develop broadly defined “urban quality services” to maintain community cohesion.

The reassertion of the local government’s agential capacity, identified in Chapter Eight, must be considered a response to the “gravitational pull” of the urban political

dynamics described above. Furthermore, a growing political imperative to resolve contestations around socio-economic identity - evident in the discussion of “Everyday Lives of the Rural” in Chapter Six - must be seen as an associated phenomenon.

In the Town, the acuteness of these dynamics - which exist in all manner of localities managed by municipal corporations, outside of minimally networked and serviced *rural* areas - correspond to the Town’s outlying characteristics. Observing urban political dynamics in this small town context indicates that “urban politics” can manifest in the absence of stereotypical urban physical or social features. As Schmid (2022) writes, with reference to Lefebvre’s notion of centrality:

“Centrality can therefore be defined as neither attached nor detached from a material morphology. It is a field of relations that encompasses especially the relationship between space and time” (p215).

It should be noted that the “urban” dynamics described herein are not claimed to be universal, but particular to the colonial political structures imposed upon the space now known as Canada. The question of whether the global transformations described in Section 9.11, and the local dynamics in 9.12 and 9.13, should be conflated as a singular “urban” process - operating at different scales - remains open. Here, they are presented in separate terms, drawing on distinct conceptual lineages (though they appear to be congruent in many ways). A tendency towards “urban” intensification, nevertheless, clearly exists in the case of Bancroft and North Hastings, with regard to a number of interpretations of the term.

9.14. Reclaiming the Rural

In the Bancroft case it is important to assert the urban nature of prevailing political economic dynamics due to its invisibility in the eyes of many observers. The “rural” exists as a powerful ideology which often, in its practical deployment, disempowers the town and region. Recognizing the fundamental urbanity of political

and economic processes in Bancroft and environs might help guide future restructuring processes in the interests of equitability. Here, the theoretical argument mirrors the sentiments of many interviewees within local government: the Town needs greater formal recognition as an urban hub.

Examples of ideological obfuscations regarding “the rural” are recurrent throughout the dissertation. In Chapter Four, the initial formulations of the “Wildly Authentic” campaign by the County were argued to represent a fetishized “rurality” for city-dwellers, which was not relatable for local community members with ties to the rural economic culture. In Chapter Five, the limited powers granted to rural townships, - described by Isin (1992) - at the time of the Baldwin Act, set into motion many of the issues Bancroft experiences today. With regard to the water infrastructures discussed in Chapter Seven, a lack of future-oriented vision with regards to infrastructure development - in contrast to places understood to be cities - limited “rural” Bancroft’s growth potential throughout its development trajectory. Interdependencies of economic exchange are frequently viewed solely from the “urban” perspective: the EDCT’s comments in Chapter Six argue that an “urban” reliance on the “rural” is insufficiently recognized in the institutionalization of political and economic structures.

In order to preserve the “rural” - as an inherited economic culture - recognition of the “urban” dynamics - in the senses identified in sections 9.12 and 9.13 of this conclusion - is necessary. If designed today - considering commonalities and reciprocities of social and economic processes, and technological norms - a system of local government for the Bancroft-centred region is unlikely to resemble existing arrangements. This dissertation has centred on “diagnosis” and “prognosis” related to social, political and economic issues in North Hastings, without offering comprehensive details about “treatment”. What follows, however, are some broad features of an arrangement - deeply hypothetical given the clear practical and ideological constraints, as outlined throughout the dissertation - acknowledging the dominance of *urban political dynamics* - as have been explained more fully in this conclusion - but seeks to recalibrate an equilibrium with longstanding *rural economic cultures*.

9.15. Towards a New Structured Coherence?

Harvey's (1985) popularization of the concept of "structured coherence" emerged at the tail-end of the heyday of the welfare state in advanced economies. It may appear more difficult to envision in a landscape of widespread public sector austerity and unstable employment, but identifying some features of a hypothetical "new structured coherence" indicate a necessary direction of travel for a more functional region. At present, the predominant structured agency exhibited by local governance actors results in the pursuit of strategies which increase social polarization. The "new structured coherence" sketches out a form of political space in which polarizing dynamics, and divergent internal political trajectories, are moderated. It is designed facilitate forms of social and economic regulation based upon a reinvigorated local state, and enable a move away from deepening dependency on charity.

Evidence from the dissertation reveals two main processes in North Hastings:

- 1) A partial and tendential restructuring towards a function as "consumption countryside" (Marsden 1999) is developing in the outlying municipalities, through four-season cottage refurbishment and in-migration (See Census Data in Chapter Three and qualitative descriptions in Chapter Six) .
- 2) Intensification of Bancroft as an "urban" hub (see Chapters Seven and Eight).

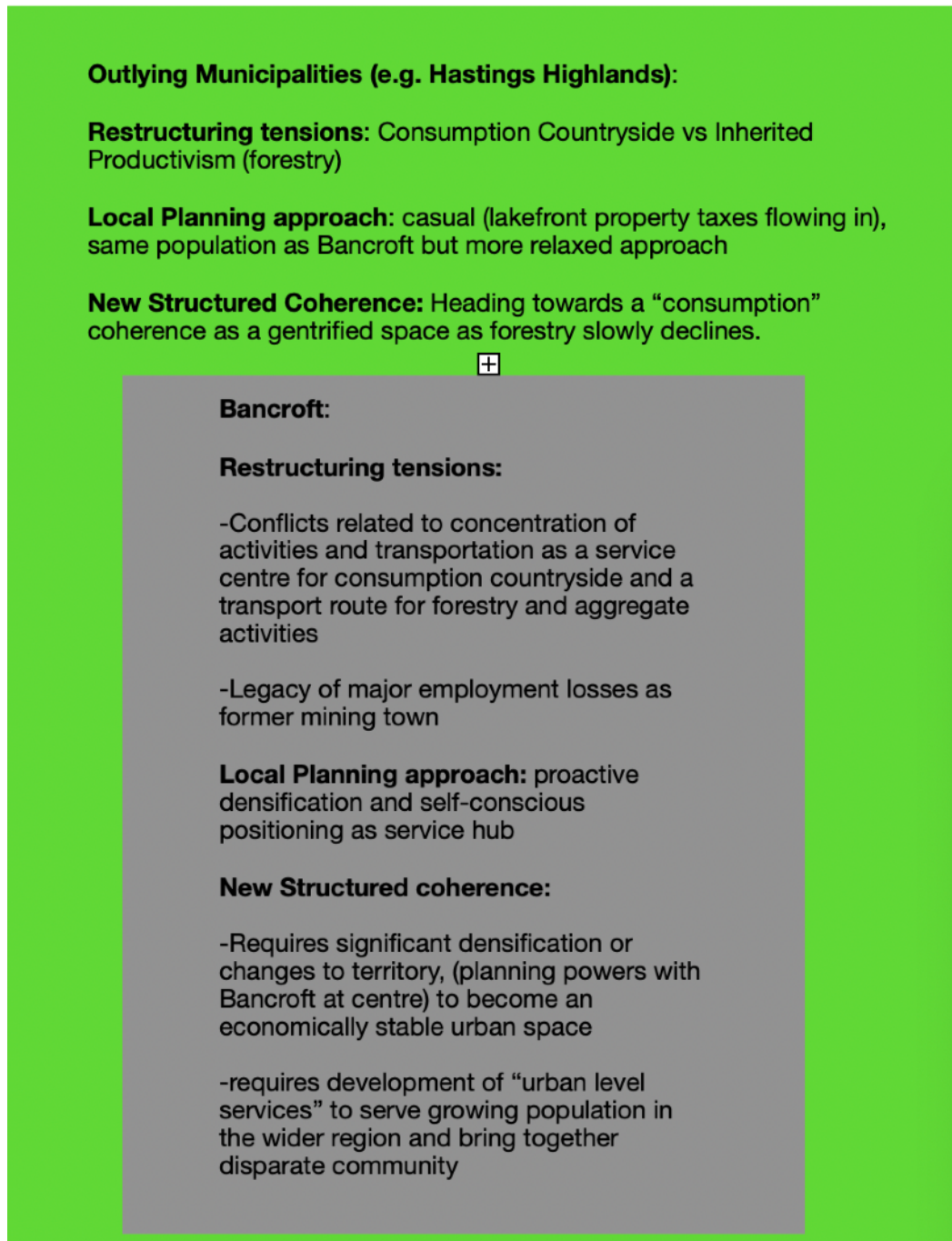


Figure 62: Differentiated Patterns Of Restructuring In North Hastings (Diagram by Author)

Present trends indicate a probable near future for the Town of Bancroft where economic shortfalls in the municipal budget continue to shape patterns of development. The water and wastewater deficits, and their negative impact on development, combined with insufficient property tax revenues, and the decline of

commercial taxes all contribute to the Town's disempowered position. To attempt to remedy this, a tendency towards higher density housing construction is emerging. Bancroft, emerging from a fiscal crisis, is not in a position to demand "upscale" forms of development. By intensifying - in terms of residential housing units - it will need to make compromises and it is unlikely to develop along the aesthetic lines of regional equivalents like Bracebridge or Haliburton. The town is unable to offer the ideal cottage country "rural idyll" for in-migrants. Increased functional, high density housing will be added to a landscape of ongoing productivist activity, heavy traffic and large-scale retail downtown. The large, luxurious lakeside houses which do constitute the "cottage country ideal" are functionally integrated with Bancroft, despite isolationist imaginaries to the contrary (and the sub-optimal collective arrangements regarding the management of wastewater described in Chapter Seven).

A key component of a new "structured coherence" - within an emerging property-driven economy - would require the spaces of the region to be less divided by political separation and fragmented infrastructure. Hastings County is set up as a collection of rural municipalities of equal standing, which makes it difficult to prioritize Bancroft as the clear centre of the north. Its "urban" role, however needs to be recognized by higher levels of government through either political amalgamation, increased funding, or infrastructure sharing arrangements.

Greater political unity should be accompanied by efforts to foster a shared collective identity. Political unification would, in theory, provide a basis for redistributive initiatives to soften the sharply contrasting experiences of life in Bancroft and environs. A larger political territory would encompass a wide array of imaginaries and inequalities between residents. Within this expanded constituency, productivist cultures should not fall victim to efforts to capitalize on rent gaps related to the recreational-residential economy, through development agendas, or image-making initiatives. New "sociological and psychological attitudes toward working, living, enjoying, entertaining" (Harvey 1985 p140) that might sustain a structured coherence should - to the extent they can be engineered through the practice of governmentality - unify the many

divergent sensibilities of residents who all rightfully call this region their home. While branding is sometimes perceived as a frivolous or spurious exercise, I argue that an appropriate unifying brand for a unified political territory could be (wildly) productive for an “accidental hub” that suffers from unsuitable contingent political boundaries and interrelationships outlying areas which actively deny their place in a larger whole.

As referred to in Chapters Three, Six, and Seven, higher levels of in-migration to the region, and the emergence of a dispersed “zoom town” around the hub, are generating an increased need for “urban” services in Bancroft. The outlying areas that are developing in a low-density, aestheticized manner will increasingly need retail stores, hospitals, IT businesses, cultural facilities etc. for which particular infrastructures and a relatively substantial local government are either necessary or greatly beneficial. The likely displacement of low-income people from municipalities across the region due to extreme house price escalation in lakefront areas puts demand on social infrastructure such as emergency housing and social housing only offered (to a limited extent) in Bancroft. Housing is the most pressing of a number of important present day social issues. A municipal role underpinning a widespread community land trust system would keep the local government engaged with issues related to social exclusion and ensure systems of housing provision are democratically accountable.

Many earlier political forms of regulation under a Fordist structured coherence (Chapter Six) existed at the federal or provincial levels, but as the responsibility of local governments within multi-tiered governance structures has intensified, the regulation of the local economy depends, correspondingly, on changes that must take place at the municipal level. Structural territorial changes, community building around a collective sense of place, and the bolstering of locally-rooted social, commercial and cultural services cannot be realized by the actions of the local government alone. They are necessary, however, for the creation of a coherent, socially and economically sustainable rural-urban community.

9.16. Policy Implications

Several aspects of the hypothetical “new structured coherence” have practical policy implications. This section outlines these important arenas for political intervention, framing key conclusions of the research in these terms.

First, the issue of regional coordination is reawakened by the emergence of the “Zoom town” spatial form, which exacerbates longstanding pressures on the region’s hub without generating a corresponding rise in revenues. Formal political amalgamation of North Hastings municipalities would provide an appropriate response to the unfair pressures experienced by Bancroft. Given the unlikelihood of realizing amalgamation, a more plausible alternative would be the establishment of equitably funded, publicly accountable regional agencies to provide much needed social services and co-ordinated North Hastings-wide economic development initiatives. Much evidence has been provided for the significance of North Hastings as a *regional unit* in the dissertation - on historic, economic and cultural grounds - and increased institutional thickness at this geographic scale would be commensurate to increasingly metropolitan social and economic characteristics. Infrastructure sharing arrangements could also be made in the absence of political restructuring measures. Re-establishing region-wide usage of Bancroft’s wastewater system is the fairest and most environmentally responsible way forward for North Hastings municipalities. Bancroft’s water system, meanwhile, has the capacity to reactivate nearby industrial facilities in Bird’s Creek, Hastings Highlands. This eventuality would provide an opportunity for Bancroft to receive revenues for water services, while the promise of shared economic growth through industrial development may unify the fragmented region.

Another key issue the splintering and siloing of key actors involved in local governance. Key actors operate in separate spaces with distinct institutional cultures (i.e. lower and upper tier government, non governmental social agencies, BIA, consultants, forestry, Algonquin leaders). A greater number of spaces of interaction should be promoted between key actors in local politics. Collaboration is needed to

overcome the most significant structural limitations of the formal municipal government: regarding social welfare provision in the north of Hastings County, developing a modern and inclusive digitally-literate economic trajectory, and raising awareness of the role of nearby public land in the local rural economy. Greater political participation, particularly with regard to bringing younger voices into politics, would aid the bridging of these worlds. Town Hall meetings, as promoted by NHCT at the time of the water and wastewater crisis, provide a blueprint for community engagement which should be widened include a full range of governance actors. Volunteer support and donations received by NHCT reflect a high level of engagement from diverse section of the public, who are not necessarily represented at the ballot box, legitimizing a prominent voice in local politics for the organization. The Issues identified in Chapters Four and Six around an incoherent sense of place might also be remedied by a more inclusive and engaged local democracy.

9.17. Academic Contributions, Future Research and Concluding Comments

The dissertation contributes to current discussions in rural geography on rural transformations in a post-COVID 19 world. An early portrayal of political, social and economic change in the post-pandemic countryside in Ontario is provided, as North Hastings is brought into the metropolitan space economy of Southern Ontario to an unprecedented extent. New empirical data on demographic change, and qualitative data on issues facing local governments and communities in the region is presented. The dissertation offers a distinctive analytical perspective, identifying the how the structured agency of local governance strategies conditions socio-economic change. The research therefore brings a new area of focus to rural research in Ontario, and opens up potential dialogues with scholarship on comparable rural spaces in this transformative period.

Contributing to the fields of public administration and political science, a concise exposition of municipal dynamics under neoliberalism is offered by the research, relevant to Canada and nations sharing a similar system of local government.

The analysis of horizontal and vertical governmental dynamics and with regard to the management of essential infrastructures in a small municipality provides a clear demonstration of the pressures driving institutional change. Owing to the outlying characteristics of the Town of Bancroft - a regional hub in significant debt with limited revenue raising powers - the research demonstrates the fractures municipal systems more generally may come to experience, and the sutures they may come to need.

With regard to contemporary urban theory debates, the dissertation contributes the grounded argument that the key processes of what should be considered “planetary urbanization” inhere to geographically specific arrangements regarding land use and local politics. Extending urban theory into the context of rural Ontario, the research substantiates Roy’s (2016) claim that planetary urbanization is a useful concept primarily within the limits of the municipal system imposed by European colonialism.

A final contribution is to local history, as the dissertation synthesizes a large volume of published information North Hastings, combining it with up-to-date interview data to create a uniquely comprehensive account of the political economy of the region since colonization.

The future research possibilities related to this dissertation are many. Expanding beyond the single case - particularly by producing relevant comparisons within the Ontario context - to explore the municipal experience of a post-COVID “rural revival” represents an obvious next step in the development of a research agenda. Updates to the rapidly evolving situation of a hypothetical “post-pandemic countryside” would be valuable, to gain a fuller picture of the enduring substance of emerging trends. The “municipal structuralist” approach developed in the dissertation could be expanded and complexified to encompass larger jurisdictions. How do larger municipalities, through structurally selective governing instruments, within particular local histories and discursive milieus, interact with the processes of in-migration and economic restructuring? Studying recent in-migration patterns to places like Thunder Bay, or the

cities of New Brunswick, in these terms may be a valuable deployment the methodological approach developed herein.

A deeper investigation of the endurance of the forestry industry in places like North Hastings is worthy of further attention, researching other resilient “rural economic cultures” such as that found in North Hastings. Nuanced research around the challenges facing white working class communities who have experienced disempowerment by economic restructuring processes will be valuable going forward. On the other hand, a particularly exciting offshoot of this dissertation would be further research into the “post productivist digital economy” related to recently established high speed internet infrastructures, and how it is changing the social fabric of small towns across Canada. This research could focus on governance implications of such shifts, or comprise of sociological study regarding the changing constitution of communities.

Technological change in Canada’s hinterlands threatens to disturb existing social and political orders in unforeseeable ways. In economically restructuring small towns it is likely, however, that displacement and dispossession via the capitalist urbanization process will continue apace. At the local level, another direction is suggested by the reciprocities cited by an IT professional in Chapter Four, who traded their cutting-edge expertise for the substantial labour time embodied in home made maple syrup. A revitalized sense of rurality should contain the promise of self sufficiency and continuity for longstanding communities, while also fostering dynamism, inclusivity and creativity along a positive trajectory of qualitative development.

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