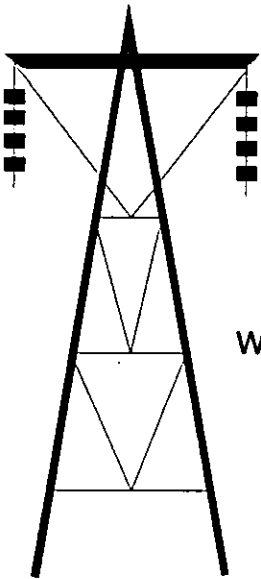
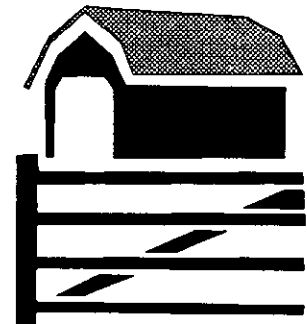


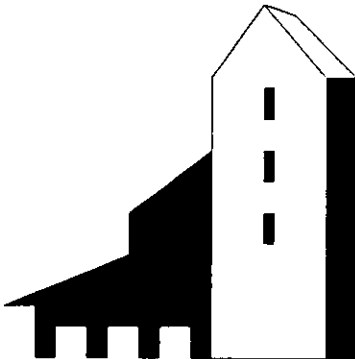
# SMALL TOWNS: CULTURE, CHANGE, AND COOPERATION



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION



JANUARY 1992



**SMALL TOWNS:  
CULTURE, CHANGE, AND COOPERATION**

Western Governors' Association  
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Western Governors' Association

# SMALL TOWNS: CULTURE, CHANGE, AND COOPERATION

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## FOREWORD

Mike Sullivan  
Governor, State of Wyoming  
Chairman, Western Governors' Association

Small towns dot the landscape of our panoramic region. These towns often have poetic names and their citizens strong hands and warm hearts. There are nearly 4,000 small towns in the West and these towns are home for over five million people.

These small towns are changing. New global trading patterns, erratic world prices, space age technologies, and stricter environmental regulations have washed across these towns taking jobs and sometimes people with them. However, these towns are changing much like a river changes course when a rock slide rolls into it, altering their usual course and finding a new way to get to where they are going.

People sometimes make the mistake of thinking that these small towns are all alike. Each town, however, has its unique culture and history. There are logging towns and farming towns, mining and fishing towns, and tourist towns. There are also Norwegian towns, German towns, Hispanic towns, and more. Every occupation and nationality or ethnic background flavors a community and also impacts how that community responds to change.

The Western Governors' Association, with support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, commissioned five papers by scholars in the region to analyze and celebrate the different aspects of community culture and to remind policymakers that these differences need to be taken into account when designing programs to help communities respond to change.

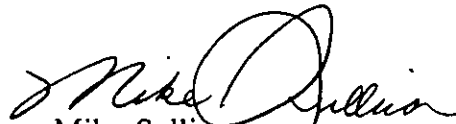
Randy Cantrell's paper leads off this collection with his discussion of cultural festivals. These festivals celebrate the rich heritage of our small towns and serve to strengthen community solidarity. Not insignificantly, these festivals often provide a boost to the local economy.

The next two papers focus on economic change and how it affects occupational culture. **Michael Hibbard** and **Mathew Carroll** provide their views on the culture of loggers and sawyers in the Pacific Northwest. Concerns about the environment and destruction of the habitat for the spotted owl have caused shock waves through timber towns. The culture of the different occupations in these towns is often indicative of how people respond to the changes brought about as a result of these concerns.

The Southwest is the locale for **Isabel Lopez's** paper that focusses on how urbanization is infringing upon traditional death and dying rituals in a small, predominantly hispanic town. These rituals help hold the town together and, as the urban world encroaches, the culture and perhaps the future of the town is threatened.

The final paper in this book was written by **Ruth Murphy** and **Grace McGinniss** of the Community Design Center. Their paper discusses how public policy designed to assist small communities must recognize the unique qualities of those communities in order to be effective.

These papers taken together as a whole, give the reader a glimpse into the changes impacting the lives, the work, and even the death rituals of the people and the culture of small towns in the rural West.



Mike Sullivan

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Western Governors' Association

## **CREATING COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY THROUGH CULTURAL FESTIVALS**

Randolph Cantrell  
University of Minnesota

Many communities in the upper midwest enjoy a rich ethnic heritage. European immigration at the turn of the century, the hiring practices of the mining and timber industries, and the availability of vast tracts of homestead and grant lands supported both the coincidental and the intentional formation of distinctive, homogeneous ethnic communities.

Minnesota is home to many such communities, representing settlement by not only the Germans, Norwegians and Swedes for which the state is famous, but also the Irish, Finns, Czechs, Danes, Russians, Mexicans, Serbians, Slovenians, Dutch and others. These ethnic communities were often further identifiable by religion. German Protestants, Catholics and Agnostics all formed communities to call their own, often within a few miles of each other. Dominant industries, especially farming, logging and mining further identified the populations of numerous towns, contributing to distinctive cultural characteristics, many of which survive to this day. In Chisholm, Hibbing and Virginia, on Minnesota's Northeastern Iron Range, small shops still provide workers with their daily pastie (a traditional meat pie favored as the lunch-box staple of miners), league play is sponsored in both curling and bocce ball, and Christmas is celebrated each January at the Serbian Church. Traditional Swedish maypoles are raised each spring in the small town of Mora, and St. Patrick is honored in St Paul's annual parade. As late as 1970, over 8 percent of all Minnesota's population claimed German as the language spoken in their homes, while in New Ulm (the state's self proclaimed most German community) the figure was an amazing 41 percent (U.S., 1970).

New Ulm's continuing ethnic homogeneity is unusual, however. Minnesotans, like all Americans, are a mobile population, and even in relatively small rural communities today the greater part of local ethnic heritage is found in place names, architecture and cemeteries. In 1980, less than half of Minnesotans identified themselves with any distinct ethnic ancestry, and more identified no ancestry at all than claimed Norwegian, Swedish or even English descent (U.S., 1980). This occurred despite the fact that these Census data were self-reported (meaning that one could be whatever one desired) at a time when ethnicity was highly fashionable.

The occupational heritage of Minnesotans is, likewise, pretty much a thing of history. Despite the state's long agricultural tradition, and the fact that it still boasts the nation's second largest farm population, only about 7 percent of Minnesotans actually live on farms today (down from a peak of nearly one-third), and no county finds a majority of even its rural population on farms. In St. Louis county, in the heart of the state's historical mining and timber region, mining and forestry are among the smallest employing industries (involving 4 percent and 0.4 percent of the labor force respectively). While one should not underestimate the economic importance of these industries, the fact remains that more people are employed in financial services than in the two combined (U.S., 1988).

Of course none of this keeps Minnesota's communities from celebrating their heritage, either ethnic or occupational, and making it the focus of not only various festivals but indeed of their very identity. The University of Minnesota's Tourism Center estimates that the state's 855 communities annually host approximately 1,000 festivals with distinct cultural, ethnic or occupational themes (Sem and Simonson, 1988). The city of New Ulm, which we have seen to have better ethnic credentials than most, sponsors five (six if one counts the German heritage events at the Brown County Fair). The iron range is literally dotted with mining museums, mine tours, and mine related centers for cultural research: certainly more than the number of remaining operating mines. The same is true of logging and farming, in which one can also find live demonstrations of horse and steam technologies and competitions in which both modern and archaic skills are tested (and in which many of the competitors are amateurs).

While many of these festivals do not reflect current cultural realities, they can at least make some claim to historical accuracy. After all, since the town of Tofte was once Norwegian, and logging was once the dominant occupation, celebrating both seems reasonable. However in some cases history may be fabricated to create a theme. The Northwestern Minnesota community of Menahga boasts a statue of Saint Urhu, the patron saint of Finland, and residents celebrate March 16 as the day that the good Saint drove the grasshoppers out of that nation, thus saving the grape crop and, more importantly, that year's vintage. The celebration includes many important "traditions," such as the wearing of purple, and is becoming popular throughout the state. For Menahga the celebration of St. Urhu's day has become a major festival and tourist attraction, despite the fact that the entire tale is apparently a local invention begun sometime in the last twenty-years to provide an alternative to St. Patrick's day for the non-Irish, and that no Census ever found more than 600 Finns inhabiting the entire county (Holmquist, 1981).

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In Kensington, Minnesota, the Our Lady of the Runestone Catholic Church is emblematic of a local claim that Viking explorers traveling via a network of rivers left evidence, in the form of runes, of their travels in Minnesota many years before Columbus sailed from Spain. This tale gives rise to both debate and a number of local celebrations.

In western Minnesota, the town of Benson finds itself surrounded by communities hosting ethnic celebrations. With much of the regional ethnic heritage "taken," Benson's response has been to base its heritage festivals on a mythical race of Gnomes, the descendants of which comprise the modern day inhabitants of Minnesota's "gnome town."

While these examples are enjoyable, as one assumes are the festivals they inspire, they make the simple point that any community can find something to develop a festival or attraction around. Put more eloquently by MacCannell in The Tourist (1976, p.168), "Things that stand out from the others in their class for reasons of being foreign, old fashioned, weird or futuristic can be assembled on any local base, converting it into a place of touristic interest even for some of its local residents."

From a development perspective, celebrations of local culture are most apt to be seen as cash flow propositions, designed to attract visitors from outside the local community and entice them to spend as much money as possible with the native merchants and artisans. In the extreme example, one might think of the annual Black Hills motorcycle rally in Sturgis, South Dakota, in which tens-of-thousands of riders descend on an otherwise sleepy small town to celebrate a culture associated with their chosen mode of transportation (more specifically, that of the Harley Davidson marque). In this case, the event appears to be motivated purely by profits (which are reportedly sizeable), since the heritage on which it is based is not indigenous, but rather imported for the occasion. While the town is no doubt best known nationally for this single event, it is apparently not carried over into the day-to-day lives of most residents during the rest of the year.

While the organizers of cultural festivals no doubt recognize local income as an important benefit of their efforts, there appear to be other important motivations, especially those having to do with developing a sense of local identity. In a 1988 survey of festival managers in Minnesota 93 percent of those responding cited "developing a sense of community" as one of their purposes in



organizing their festival, while only 39 percent saw their purpose as "promoting local retail sales" (Sem and Simonson, 1988). While many of these festival organizers might not recognize it, there are good theoretical reasons to argue that they are correct in their emphasis, and that the social aspects of their work will ultimately have a greater impact on local development than will the immediate economic results.

When pressed to define the ultimate goals of development, both theorists and practitioners tend to emphasize two dimensions or conditions which they hope to affect. One dimension will often be an abstract concept, such as quality of life, well being or opportunity. The other is generally more specific, relating to income, jobs or employable skills. In general, these two dimensions of development reflect an interest in social welfare on the one hand, and economic productivity on the other.

When asked how these goals can be achieved, or what one can do to support them, development professionals tend to emphasize some combination of economic and social activity. In the former arena, job creation, business development, labor force development, grant development and other strategies emerge, while the more socially oriented become involved with a broad array of organizational processes and programs collectively labeled "community development." Structurally, both have their place as part of an interactive system which can be described in four dimensions: differentiation, centrality, flexibility, and solidarity.

While the terminology may vary, it can be argued that in practice the field of community development treats these elements as independent, or causal variables which can be manipulated to increase levels of social welfare and economic productivity in regions and communities.

Structural differentiation refers to the level of specialization of the institutions of the community. The concept encompasses that of the division of labor, but goes beyond simple occupational specialization, referring to "the way that individuals and groups develop particular skills and knowledge that increase their chances of solving particular problems" (Young, 1976). In the community development arena, this is the variable of most interest to the economic developers, seeking as they do to affect the number and type of business establishments within their communities, or to support new skills within the labor force. In the causal terms of our structural theory, as the level of differentiation increases, the levels of both social well-being and economic productivity should be expected to increase.

## Cultural Festivals

Centrality refers to the extent to which a community receives special attention or is accorded special status by larger social, economic or political systems. The location of various elements of infrastructure such as roads, bridges, communication cables, the location of institutions such as colleges or hospitals, and the awarding of all kinds of government and foundation grants are all indicative of the level of centrality enjoyed by a community.

While business development projects seek to increase the centrality of communities by creating ties to large business systems (as in the location of branch plants), economic developers most often manipulate this variable through the acquisition of various grants and through efforts to influence state and national policies related to regions or classes of communities. That is, community development affects the centrality of communities by bringing them to the attention of larger systems in an effort to see them accorded some special status.

In terms of a structural theory of development, as the centrality of a community increases, social well-being and economic productivity are expected increase.

Flexibility refers to the degree to which the boundaries of community institutions are permeable, and allow for interaction and collaborative problem solving both within the community and with institutions outside of the community. While, in our structural model, the concept refers to institutional linkages rather than individual contacts, it can be approximated by what most of us understand as communication and cooperation.

The causal proposition that as the flexibility of communities increases social well being and economic productivity can be expected to increase enjoys wide enough credibility that many practitioners of community development devote their careers to encouraging it. While institutional flexibility is in itself probably not sufficient to create development, its negative aspect, rigidity, is seen as one of the most common barriers to development. Territorial or "turf" battles seem to be the bugaboo of everyone's development project, and, at the extreme, racial discrimination and class antagonisms can simply preclude successful development. While it can certainly be argued that increasing differentiation (eg. new businesses) and centrality (eg. new ties to the world outside) automatically create new communication channels and thus increased flexibility, the threat

imposed by rigid local institutional structures is great enough that virtually every development project recognizes and attempts to minimize it.

Solidarity is simply the extent to which the institutions of the community understand and are committed to a unified purpose or goal. Typically, such a goal involves an effort to improve the community's position or niche within the larger social system. Extreme examples of solidarity are found in social movements, union activity and revolutions. For a community seeking general improvements in the local quality of life, solidarity simply suggests the mobilization and coordination of institutions in pursuit of overarching goals. The generation of solidarity thus requires flexibility in order to support the dialogue necessary to arrive at consensus regarding just what these goals may be. It also requires a certain amount of rigidity, such that the community recognizes some level of common interest with which its members can identify as a motivation for pooling resources and energy.

In the terms of a structural theory, as solidarity increases, social well being and economic productivity can be expected to increase. In practice, the relationship between development and solidarity is probably curvilinear, since extreme solidarity movements can serve to isolate the community from the larger social system and result in self-destructive behavior.

Generally measured by the level of volunteerism, the formation of committees, and local enthusiasm for development projects, the fostering of community solidarity underlies much of the work of community development professionals. It is generally what is meant by the abstract concept "sense of community," and is one of the reasons, stated or not, for every town meeting, community survey and twenty-year community vision.

Certainly many other variables can be argued to affect social welfare and economic productivity. However, all social science theories seek to either control or eliminate competing explanations, thus providing grounds for academic debate and discourse. The perspective outlined here can be generally classified as sociological, and more particularly placed within a body of theory labeled "symbolic structure" (Young and Young, 1973). Implicit in this particular theory is the assumption that certain elements of social structure are sufficient to explain development, and that other variables, such as entrepreneurial psychology, various elements of infrastructure, geography or climate can either be subsumed as elements of social structure, explained as dependent, or are simply irrelevant. In reality, of course, these variables do exist, and indeed can be shown to have some relationship with development. As an obvious example,

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the four dimensions of community structure described above do not tell us a great deal about the people with whom development professionals constantly interact, even when their goals involve institutional change.

Of the variables described above, those in which individual behavior are most evident are the latter two: flexibility and solidarity. They are also the variables that bring us back to the point of this paper, the role of culture in community development, and the value of community festivals in creating community solidarity.

A common culture is, of course, a marvelous platform on which to develop social solidarity. Shared language, religion, occupations and ethnic traditions all contribute to a sense of identity and belonging. It follows that the diversification which accompanies demographic change and economic differentiation can act to significantly weaken social solidarity.

Certainly ethnicity and occupation are not the only bases for local solidarity. Geographic location and local institutions provide communities with an identity, as shown by the importance of the school, and especially "the team," as a focus of community life in many small towns. It is the loss of that identity, more than issues of educational quality or local control, which underlies much of the concern of rural communities faced with school consolidation.

From a development perspective, however, simply recognizing that one shares a place of residence, or even a prep sports interest, with one's neighbors is often not sufficient to create the levels of enthusiasm, dialogue, creativity and volunteerism associated with successful projects. Nor are they characteristics which, barring a rare tournament success, do much to bring the community to the attention of, or provide experience in dealing with, the larger world. It is here that one finds the importance of the community building functions of local cultural events and festivals.

Festivals build local solidarity in two important ways. First, they provide a sense of heritage. Indeed, as we have seen, given the continuing diversification of society most communities can only celebrate ethnic or occupational history, since the present is far from homogeneous. In this regard, the local festival is often as much a touristic experience for local residents as it is for visitors. This is especially true for the young, who are much more likely to identify with mass culture than with the local community (at least outside of their school). Creating

a sense of place and supporting some level of bonding with the community is especially critical for this group, and the experience of the young should be considered a litmus test for virtually any community festival. It is axiomatic that if the kids like what a community is doing, it is doing something right.

Second, festivals can actually create a cultural reality by involving residents in their presentation. The basis for this phenomenon was best described by Erving Goffman in his model of society as performance (Goffman, 1959). The concept of a social performance requires a stage on which to perform, and a back-stage in which the performance can be prepared. In the case of a cultural festival, the music, dancing, food booths and demonstrations of traditional crafts and skills are front-stage activities, or performances. The planning, costuming, training, rehearsals and such are back-stage activities. As opposed to the front-stage performance, back-stage activities are generally seen as more authentic endeavors, or "real life." Back stage activities thus serve to support the formation of group identity and to strengthen both the solidarity and the flexibility of the people and organizations involved. That is, planning for and staging a community festival can create community solidarity as participants cooperate to create a community identity for the outside world.

When the performance involves culture and communities, it is actually possible to blur this line between front and back stage, making the real life of local people an important part of the performance itself. That is, a cultural identity can be woven into the day-to-day lives of residents as a result of cultural celebrations. An interesting example of this phenomenon can be found in Mora, Minnesota. Mora is a community of 2,000 persons in north central Minnesota, which, as its name implies, was originally settled by Swedes. While that heritage has long been used as a local identifier, the community has become typically diverse today. Mora is on the edge of a portion of Minnesota known as "the cutover" or "the jackpines," which is characterized by the historical importance of logging, marginal agriculture, a relatively undiversified economy and generations of outmigration. Like many of Minnesota's communities, Mora enjoys a high level of recreational amenities, and has long sought to capitalize on them through the tourist trade.

In the late 1970's, Mora began to host an annual cross country ski race commemorating the Swedish King Vasa's escape from invading Norwegians. The Vasaloppet (Vasa's run) has been held in Mora, Sweden for many years, and the inauguration of a similar event in Mora, Minnesota was seen as a way to celebrate the community's Swedish heritage and connection to its namesake city.

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The race itself has become immensely successful, attracting several thousand participants and an international slate of Olympic calibre athletes. More important than the event itself, however, has been its impact on the community. The race and its surrounding activities involve much of the community as planners and participants. Volunteers groom and police the course, haul snow into town to cover the finish line on Main Street, feed the competitors, provide entertainment in the form of music, costumes and craft demonstrations for spectators. These back-stage activities strengthen local communications and provide opportunities for cooperative accomplishments. Mora today celebrates its Swedish heritage in its downtown store facades and decorations, in numerous traditional Swedish events, such as the raising of a Maypole, as well as in more typical historical exhibits. Mora's school boasts one of the states more successful cross country ski teams, and student groups participate in various Swedish folk-culture programs throughout the year.

Just how pervasive the Swedish identity has become in community life was demonstrated at a recent Maypole raising, at which two local residents were married in a traditional Swedish ceremony, complete with costumed bride, groom, entourage and guests. When such real life activities are brought onto the community's front-stage, performance and reality become inseparable, and the event transcends the role of tourist attraction. Mora is again, in a very real way, a Swedish community.

The payoff of this extremely effective exercise in creating social solidarity has been felt in real developmental terms, as well. Mora has become one of Minnesota's more recognizable place names, and attracts significant levels of retail trade associated with the race and a number of related events. The community at large expresses considerable pride in its identity, and a high level of optimism regarding its future. The Swedish connection has been instrumental in negotiations with a Swedish based manufacturer of sporting goods concerning the development of a U.S. facility. Mora's "identity" is the focus of virtually all of the city's marketing and business development efforts. Most importantly, Mora's youth express satisfaction with their community.

Mora's cultural identity has supported relatively high levels of social solidarity, which are resulting in some clear development successes. That identity has been defined less by homogeneous values, traditions or language than by the success of a single weekend of celebration surrounding a sporting event with an ethnic theme.

The residents of Mora, or any of the many communities which sponsor successful cultural festivals, may think that they are just having fun, but it can be argued that they are in fact engaged in the development of an institution of critical importance to their community's social well being and economic productivity. On the other hand, what they don't know may not hurt them. If one is to be involved in such important work as "creating community solidarity through cultural festivals," why not enjoy it?

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# ECONOMIC CULTURE AND RESPONSES TO ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN A TIMBER DEPENDENT COMMUNITY

Michael Hibbard  
University of Oregon

## INTRODUCTION

The economic restructuring of the 1980s has imposed a cruel choice on many small communities and their people. When a rural mining neighborhood is transformed into a ski resort, say, or a fishing town into a retirement community, not only does the economic base change, not only does the place look different, but the local culture is transformed. Different sorts of values, behaviors, and attitudes are honored, and long-term residents are at risk of being made strangers in their home towns.

Under the circumstances it is little wonder that people in declining rural communities are ambivalent about the prospect of development and sometimes resist it. They recognize that while change may be necessary, even inevitable, the benefits of change are often obtained only at a great price--the loss of their way of life.

One helpful way of thinking about this dilemma is by examining what has been called the economic culture of a place, the non-economic context within which its economic processes operate. Especially in natural resource and agricultural communities, the local culture--the distinctive social and political structures, environmental characteristics, values, ideas, and belief systems--embodies the local economic base. The special way of life of a particular place grows out of the fact that it is a copper mining town, a fishing town, a grain-growing town, or a timber milling town.

Economic culture strongly influences how a community and its people interpret and respond to the pressures of economic change. When a place and its people derive their very identities from the local economic base, the implication of a new economic base for the community is not just doing something else, having a different mix of firms and job opportunities, but being something else, taking on a new identity.

In this paper I discuss the relevance of economic culture for economic development in rural communities. By applying the concept to Pacific Northwest timber mill towns, I try to show how economic culture gives meaning to people's



lives. I then explore the implications of economic culture for economic development policies and programs both in the Pacific Northwest and in rural communities generally.

## INTERPRETING PACIFIC NORTHWEST MILL TOWNS

### The Cruel Choice

Pacific Northwest mill towns and their residents are trapped. Across the region, many outmoded, labor intensive small town mills are being closed. In part this is a response to the timber supply crisis of the early 1990s. But the longer term cause is that older mills are being replaced by a smaller number of modern, more capital intensive mills. In aggregate, the region has the capacity to produce the same volume of product in 1990 as it did in 1980, but with only three-quarters as many mills and two-thirds as many workers.

From a larger perspective that may be a good thing; the overall efficiency and competitive position of the region's timber industry has been improved. However, mill towns and their residents face a different calculus. The source of their livelihood, the mills, is disappearing. In purely financial terms the intelligent response is obvious. In this era of footloose capital, the rational choice for households is to move to a center of economic expansion and find another line of work; by doing so, they will presumably enjoy increased wealth and a higher standard of living. Similarly, the rational choice for a mill town is to try to develop an alternative economic base, one that will allow the community to break its dependence on the increasingly footloose timber industry.

But there is a price to be paid for this instrumental rationality. From the perspective of a household, moving away in search of prosperity means more than departing a town; it means leaving behind the place that embodies the way of life they treasure. For the town, developing a new economic base means more than finding a new livelihood; it means becoming a different place.

This is a cruel choice for households and communities because it is a forced choice between the prospect of prosperity in a new and alien situation or almost certain impoverishment in familiar and cherished but declining circumstances. The issue was crystallized in responses to a household survey in six Oregon mill towns, communities that had experienced recent mill closures (Hibbard et al. 1987). People were asked about economic conditions in their own household as well as about their perceptions of the situation facing their

## **Economic Culture in a Timber Dependent Community**

community and its residents. Regarding problems in their own household in the last two years, 79.4% of the respondents reported that at least one person in the household had been placed on indefinite layoff; 88.0% said that someone in the household had been forced to change jobs; and in 85.9% of households, someone had moved away to find work. When asked how they thought the economy of their community compared with that of other communities of similar size, just 9.5% thought their community's situation was better; 50.8% thought the local situation was "about the same" as in similar communities, and 39.8% thought their community was worse off. And when asked about the future, 30.5% expected that the economy of their community would be "a little better" or "much better" in five years; another 34.9% thought it would be the same; and 34.5% thought it would be "a little worse" or "much worse".

Given the difficulty they find themselves in, it is not surprising that 16.9% of the residents of Oregon's small timber dependent communities say they "definitely" or "probably" will move permanently away from the community in the next five years, and another 28.4% report that they "might" move away. When age is factored in, the younger a respondent is, the more likely s/he is to say they will be moving. And respondents who have children at home are much more likely to expect to move than those who do not. However, people's expectations about moving contrast sharply with their desires. When asked how they feel about "moving permanently away," 76.7% said they would "prefer" or "greatly prefer" to stay in the community (Hibbard 1989).

The issue could not be more clearly drawn. People in mill towns are faced with serious financial difficulties and are not optimistic that things will get better. They believe they will be forced by economic circumstances to leave their communities. But by a large margin they do not want to move away.

Economic culture helps to explain such broad commitment to places that have brought people to the brink of financial ruin.

## Staples Economies and Economic Culture

The economic base of Pacific Northwest mill towns is a classic example of what is called a staples economy. Staples economies, such as those based on the timber industry, involve the extraction and primary remanufacturing of a product for which the market is outside the region in which the staple is produced. Initial capital for the development of the industry comes from outside the region, and the profit generated by the industry is largely reinvested elsewhere.

At least five factors of the staples economy play a role in shaping the economic culture of Pacific Northwest mill towns. The key to understanding them is to examine the communities from the inside, to try to look at them from the point of view of people who live in them. The quotes below are excerpted from in-depth interviews with laid-off mill workers and their families (Hibbard and Elias 1990, Hibbard and Elias forthcoming).

Chronic Instability. Staples economies are inherently unstable. The markets for industries such as timber fluctuate widely. Mills open and close and lay off and rehire workers in response to the swings between market glut and scarcity. Mill towns and their households have learned to adapt to these characteristic booms and busts by changing their expectations. Good times do not engender rising expectations; rather they are seen as an opportunity to prepare for the hard times that inevitably follow.

"The average wage up here a decade ago was ten or twelve dollars an hour, plus bonuses. We got full medical and dental and paid vacations. In hindsight everybody says, 'Jesus, we had it good'."

"It was always a lot of fun when the mill shut down for awhile. I'd take my family for a vacation. One time I packed up the family and took them to Tahoe and would call back every day to see if there was any news. We were always careful to save up while I was working so we'd have enough money to make it through until I was working again."

"Some of the guys used to talk about striking at about the start of hunting or fishing season (he laughs). We were usually in no hurry to go back to work again."

## Economic Culture in a Timber Dependent Community

But when the local mill closes permanently, people question their judgment in accommodating to the booms and busts imposed by the industry. They feel betrayed.

"It's a crying shame that we can't keep a mill running here. The Willamette National Forest is the largest national forest in the whole Department of Agriculture in the United States. And yet (this community), which sits right in the middle of it, can't keep its mill going. The timber industry itself has to take some of the blame because they're showing that they're not managing the forests like they should be. Even the Forest Service isn't doing all they should be."

"I've gone through two back surgeries from working in this mill. Now this happens. Sure I'm disgusted."

Sites of Production. The residents of staples-dependent communities are very aware that their towns are primarily sites for the local operations of staples industries and that local institutions have little control over decisions that have a major affect on them.

"Yes, I did want (the timber company) to have a sense that this is their community too, even though they don't live here. But I don't want to confine them because that's not free enterprise. That's communism. Yes, we wanted our jobs. Yes, people are having hard times. But that's free enterprise."

"You talk to the old-timers here and they will tell you that (the timber company) said that they had enough timber to last them for the next hundred years. Then they got greedy in the last four or five years and literally raped the ground, took all the trees, and did very little planting."

"(The timber company) had other plans, which was their prerogative--private is private. What they want to do with their operation is really up to them."

The Organization of Production. Staples economies involve a particular organization of production because of their goal of exploiting the staple--in this case, trees. They identify long-term timber sources and move in the necessary technology and labor to convert it into lumber, plywood, paper pulp, and other products. They organize and manage the process, from cutting the trees and moving them to the mill through manufacturing and shipping the products to markets. The sources of timber are often isolated, and so are the mills. Thus, production in the timber industry involves a large number of highly paid, relatively low-skill jobs in isolated communities. It is tedious, dangerous work in which accommodation is valued and autonomy is minimized.

"When I first went to work at the mill I would use bad grammar to make it sound like I didn't have a college education. After a while a lot of the people knew I had my degree and their acceptance came to depend more on how well I did my job."

"It doesn't take a Philadelphia lawyer to work in a sawmill, but you pick up some skills. There was this feeling that we were all in it together, 'nobody gets out of here alive' type of thing. We tried to stick together. It made work a lot more fun."

"There was a lot of dope in the mill. It was boring and repetitious, so a lot of guys used drugs just to pass the time. I'd say fifty percent of the guys there smoked dope just to get by."

"It scares me when he goes to work. He's gotten hurt really bad before. I wish he had a job that's a little more safe. Of course, I would never tell him to quit his job because it's dangerous, but I wish he had another job. I wouldn't want him to take a job he didn't like, but I really worry sometimes. I try not to think about it too much--there's no use worrying--but whenever he's late I wonder if something might have happened." (millworker's wife.)

"Most guys in the mill hated their jobs--millwork is just what they're used to." (another millworker's wife.)

## Economic Culture in a Timber Dependent Community

The Natural Environment. Staples economies involve a complex way of thinking about the natural environment. Based on the idea that staples are an economic resource, people think of the trees and the other natural features of the region in terms of their affect on where and how timber can be cut, milled, and moved to market.

"It doesn't make me feel bad to make my living off timber. Some people think we're a bunch of dumb hicks who just like to butcher trees. But what are their houses made of? Where does the paper they write on come from? The yuppies say they want us to stop cutting down trees while they're sitting in their wood chairs. They can't get through a day without using wood somehow. Why should I be ashamed to get paid to provide something that everybody needs?"

"I'm real worried about a country's thinking when an owl is more important than a family. I'm real upset about the publicity that's been given around the country about what's happening to our "great Forests" when they aren't out here seeing the whole picture. Yes, there're some bad things that've happened, but there's good and bad in every industry."

At the same time, people are deeply aware of more subjective factors that affect how they live in and respond to the environment.

"What I like best about living here is just sitting on my back porch watching the river go by. People come up here from the cities to go fishing or just spend the afternoon by the river; I get to live by it. Sometimes I forget how lucky I am."

"I just spent two-and-a-half weeks at my daughter's place in Kansas. When I got back, I was so happy to be back in green. And the smell of the air. You can't replace that. The air doesn't smell the same ...anyplace else."

Community. In a staples-based economy the local production plant--in this case the mill--is the focal point around which the community is organized.

"When I was a senior in high school I had several friends who said they were going to try to get on at the mill when they graduated. I heard about it--the work and the pay--and at that time it sounded like an ideal situation. Back then it just seemed like the next thing to do."

"When I was a kid I went straight from the streets of L.A. to the woods of Oregon. As soon as I got here I knew it was home. It was someplace I'd read about, someplace I dreamed about, and suddenly I was there. It was almost like it was meant to be. So I found a job here at the mill, we got a home up here on seven acres and we had three boys. It was like a dream come true."

The mill serves as the financial and social foundation of the community. Ultimately the negative qualities of millwork--its isolation, instability, danger, and lack of challenge--come to be accepted as just another part of the cultural terrain that defines the place. In the same way that those who live in and love Los Angeles do not think of their city apart from smog and congestion, the undesirable characteristics of millwork fade into the background.

"This is just a nice place to live. It's as rural as you can get without dusty roads. I've spent a lot of time living in big cities. The pace is 180 degrees from what it is here."

"The thing I like about living here is that I can't go out without seeing someone I know. I like living in the same town as the people I went to school with. It makes things more like a family situation. There are dozens of small towns, but what makes this one special to me is having my friends here."

"The community is pretty tight. There's always someone there when you need them. We rely on each other. When times get tough, we pull together."

## Economic Culture in a Timber Dependent Community

### Economic Culture and Identity

None of these factors is especially unique by itself, but in combination they add up to constitute the specific culture of Pacific Northwest mill towns and their residents. In important part, it is a culture in which economic instability is a way of life and communities have little ability to influence the local economy. The best jobs are physically demanding and dangerous, provide good but irregular compensation, and require deference and compliance from workers. It is also a culture that has developed a sophisticated interpretation of the relation between the local economy and the resource upon which it depends, as well as a deep appreciation of the communities' natural and human assets.

Pacific Northwest mill town residents take pride in the hardiness that their culture necessitates.

"You have to be strong to live here."

"What would we do if things got worse? We would do what we've always done--survive."

They believe they have a distinctive character that is a result of the culture of their region.

"We love these mountains...these mountains are our mountains. The people and the land go hand-in-hand. The mountains made the people here what they are."

"I grew up here. I know the area like the back of my hand. I can look at a certain tree and think of something my dad and I did together. There's a lake that reminds me of the first time I took my son fishing. I'll bet I could draw the mountains around here with just my memory of them."

And there is a widespread feeling of pride in the important historical role that mill towns played in the development of the region: "There is a sense of, 'Hey, we helped build this country'."

Peoples' ability to use the culture to shape fulfilling lives for themselves is a source of great personal and community satisfaction and has produced a strong self-identity for mill



towns and their residents. They view the changes they and their communities face with feelings of despair for the loss of their individual and community identity.

"I've always worked in the mill. I've never thought of doing anything else."

"Nobody's going to know what it's like to be in (mill towns) anymore.... (They're) either being engulfed by the cities or, like (my hometown), they're dying out. It's going to be sad. What would be lost? A sense of permanency, a sense of roots, a sense of heritage."

The cruel choice could not be any more plainly expressed.

## ECONOMIC CULTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The primary objective of local economic development policies and programs is economically healthy communities. It is a difficult objective to quarrel with; communities need healthy economies. But if the objective is pursued without taking into account the local economic culture, it carries great risk of creating serious social dislocations. New industries generating new jobs may be cultivated in a community, jobs that match the skills and experience of the local workforce, but if they are incompatible with local people's self-identity they will not be filled by the local workforce. Millworkers would have trouble seeing themselves as ski lodge desk clerks, for example, even if the pay were the same. The transformation of a mill town into a ski resort can bring new jobs to a community, but they will be largely filled by people who didn't live there before, while the old residents struggle with the question of whether to adapt or move away.

If local economic development activities are to be effective, they must take into account the economic culture and the cruel choice it implies. The economic culture of each community presents its own unique problems and opportunities. The challenge to community development is to identify the specific issues facing a specific locale because of its economic culture, and create focused responses.

In the case of Pacific Northwest timber towns, the primary issue that emerges from the economic culture is the frailty of community problem-solving capabilities. To review, these are places whose residents have not had much opportunity to learn how to take an active role in the community. Because of their staples base, the towns have simply been sites for the local operations of the timber industry; local people have had little voice in the key decisions about their economic base. As a result, they have had little experience in

## Economic Culture in a Timber Dependent Community

shaping the local economy. At the same time, people are committed to their way of life and reluctant to change.

Such circumstances call for policies and programs that combine the usual local economic development aims of job and wealth creation with the training of local citizens for leadership and community problem solving. By engaging local residents in this fashion, community development activities are more likely to be undertaken that are consistent with their own view of what the community is and should become.

Not just Pacific Northwest mill towns, but all staples based communities derive their identities from the local economic base. Thinking about economic culture more generally, to acknowledge that each local situation is unique is to imply that it is essential to investigate how and why the cultural characteristics of a particular place are associated with a particular economic base. For an individual, a household, or a community to think of becoming something else is to take a significant step outside their cultural bounds. And so it is unsurprising that when local economic development approaches fail to account for the local economic culture, they meet opposition.

The most effective response to such opposition is not to deny or ignore it and run the risk of making people strangers in their own hometown; it is to understand its source and learn to work with it.

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## **PACIFIC NORTHWESTERN LOGGERS AND THE SPOTTED OWL CONTROVERSY**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Fighting over the control and disposition of land and land-based natural resources in the American West is a tradition at least as old as European settlement of the region. The outcomes of such conflicts have had important consequences, not only for the land and natural resources in question, but also for the stakeholders in the battles. One need only contrast the wealth accumulated by some early development interests with the fate suffered by most American Indian tribes in the nineteenth century to be reminded of the consequences of winning or losing the struggle for access to the land upon which one's prosperity and/or way of life depends.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the consequences which are unfolding as a result of one such struggle. The conflict to be examined is the Spotted Owl controversy which is currently underway in the Pacific Northwest. The specific consequences to be outlined are those for residents of affected logging communities in the region with a particular focus on one stakeholder group, those employed in logging itself.

Attention will be directed to five main tasks: First, an attempt will be made to briefly describe the general historical context of the controversy. Next, focus will be shifted to the specific social consequences of the dispute and some evidence will be presented in support of the contention that Northwestern loggers constitute what sociologists term an occupational community. Particular attention will be devoted to how membership in this occupational community sets loggers apart from others in society, including other residents of forest-based towns in the region. Thirdly, the effects of the Spotted Owl controversy on the loggers' occupational community in comparison to other stakeholder groups in logging communities will be discussed with particular reference to its' members ability to adapt to rapid social and economic change. Fourth, it will be argued that economic diversification in forest based communities is likely to affect various community stakeholder groups differently, with loggers being among those least likely to derive benefit. Finally, some directions will be suggested for the way public land management decision making might be changed if the currently observed problem of political and personal disenfranchisement of certain groups such as loggers is to be overcome.

## SOME BRIEF HISTORY

With the exception of water, few western natural resources have been the subject of more protracted, highly emotional disagreement, conflict, and political action than the region's forests. The nineteenth century "cut out and get out" era of migratory forest harvesting spawned a political reaction culminating in the turn-of-the-century conservation reform movement led by Gifford Pinchot with the strong backing of his fellow Progressive, Theodore Roosevelt. This movement resulted in the creation of federally held forest reserves (soon to be renamed national forests).

One of the oft-touted benefits the Progressive visionaries planned to achieve by creating the reserves was the stabilization of logging communities. This was in reaction to the pattern observed throughout much of the nineteenth century, in which communities sprang up near harvesting operations and usually declined as the logging moved "over the next hill" (Holbrook,1938; Clary,1986). On another level, the designation of the forest reserves was part of the Progressives' larger scheme of creating a more orderly society through the positive use of scientific principles applied by government experts (Hays,1959; Lacy,1979). In a book written for popular consumption, Pinchot articulated a future vision of the U.S. as a "nation of homes" the materials for which would be provided by the wise, scientifically guided management and use of the country's forest resources (Pinchot,1910).

Pinchot was also instrumental in the development, (largely from a mixture of European influences), of forestry as the first American natural resource management profession. This served the immediate purpose of staffing and administering the reserves with scientifically trained managers.(Pinchot,1947; Hays,1959). A longer term result was the strong influence in national forest management of what might be termed the traditional European forestry paradigm. This approach assumed the primacy of wood production over other forest uses and held as an intermediate objective, the large-scale conversion of naturally occurring, ecologically complex woodlands to relatively simple "normal forests", engineered with the idea of sustaining maximum long-term fiber production (Clary,1986, Behan,1991).

In the post-World War II era, this approach became increasingly a physical reality on the ground, as the nation's economy boomed, growing stock was drawn down on industrial lands and the "custodial era" of national forest management gave way to harvesting in earnest on the federal forests. It is interesting to note that as recently as 1973 (ironically the same year as the passage of the Endangered Species Act ) a special advisory panel suggested to President Nixon that liquidation of old growth timber on federal land in the

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Northwest be accelerated to achieve greater efficiency of production (Dana and Fairfax, 1980).

During the post-war period, another development which held significance for the future of federal forest management was unfolding. This was the emergence of the movement favoring forest preservation into the mainstream of American politics. Although this movement dated back at least as far as John Muir and the battle over flooding the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park (a dispute which began in the first decade of the century), it had largely confined itself to advocating the creation and expansion of a national park system and a few relatively small wilderness areas (Nash 1967; Wellman, 1987). Now the movement's growing membership was responding to increased harvesting and other development activities on public lands by lobbying in favor of wilderness designation for significant acreage of national forest, BLM and other federal holdings. Success was eventually achieved in securing the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Passage of the 1964 Act however was really only the beginning of the serious battles over federal wilderness designation. During the next 25 years, the advocates for forest preservation (who served as a core group in the evolution of the broader environmental movement) devoted an enormous amount of time and energy to administrative and legislative fights concerning specific wilderness set-asides (Stankey, 1989). By the late 1980s the majority of these battles had reached conclusion (with the notable exception of that concerning federal lands in Idaho and Utah) resulting in the existence of a national wilderness preservation system comprised largely of lands in high elevation sites and with holdings on a scale far beyond that originally imagined by Aldo Leopold, Robert Marshall and other early wilderness advocates (Wellman, 1987).

It would be inaccurate to state that environmentalists concerned with federal land management devoted all of their energies to maximizing the acreage to be included in areas not open to timber and other multiple use management. They were, for example, instrumental in the battles over the practice of clearcutting on commercial forest lands in national forests, most notably the Bitterroot in Montana and the Monongahela in West Virginia. The latter battle led to the passage of the National Forest Management Act of 1976 which has come to have a major influence on national forest management. Even in the latter case, however, one of the environmental community's clear objectives in attempting to influence the legislative language was to limit the management discretion of

the agency decision makers (most of whom, at that time, were professional foresters in the utilitarian tradition of Pinchot) with whom the environmentalists disagreed philosophically and whom they mistrusted profoundly (LeMaster,1984).

It has remained the case that the environmental movement's major efforts, relative to federal forest lands, have concerned protecting land from what its' members view as exploitative management overly focused on timber production and unduly influenced by industry. The ideal of the normal forest is anything but ideal or normal to environmentalists who are more concerned with aspects of forests such as biological diversity and endangered species than with efficient wood production. Viewed in this light, the Spotted Owl controversy can be seen as the most recent chapter in a long-standing philosophical battle over the management of the federal forests. With the current generation of wilderness battles more or less behind them and the vast majority of protected wilderness acres in high elevation sites, it was a logical progression for environmental groups to turn attention to the remaining lowland stands of "old growth" or ancient" forest.

It should be noted in passing that one ironic turn in the rhetoric of the battle over the federal forests has been the political use of arguments concerning the welfare of forest based human communities. The Progressive reformers argued that the fate of the communities should not be left to the whims of the industry and the free market, but rather that government land ownership and regulation of timber would serve the long term interests of such communities. In more recent times, advocates for the industry have argued that it is excessive harvest restrictions on federal lands, influenced by the environmental movement that pose the most significant threat to community stability. Recently some environmental groups have been arguing that they favor "sustainable communities" rather than ones based on what they characterize as short term exploitation of forests.

## THE SPOTTED OWL CONTROVERSY

The northern spotted owl (*Strix'occidentalis caurina*) is a creature of the coastal Douglas fir forests of Washington, Oregon and Northern California. Although little was known about this bird prior to 1970, research by a wildlife biologist, Eric Forsman beginning at about that time suggested that this secretive bird requires a habitat consisting of stands of Douglas fir trees with particular characteristics. These characteristics include multi-storied canopies, large stem diameter and high canopy closure. It was also surmised that the presence of cavities for nesting, rotting trees and downed woody debris for prey habitat are important for the owl's viability. Thus wildlife biologists came to the following finding:

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"The conclusion is that northern spotted owls are dependent upon old-growth conifer forests of the Pacific Northwest" (Gutierrez, 1985:39).

Concern on the part of a small group of owl biologists about the effects on owl population viability of continued harvest of much old growth in the region coincided with the turning of attention on the part of the environmental community to what they came to term the "ancient forests". Given the fact that there is no legislative protection for particular types or conditions of ecosystems, the strategy the groups settled on was to use the Endangered Species Act and the spotted owl's circumstances to thwart plans already in place to "convert" the remaining unharvested fir forests to second growth stands.

In order to accomplish this objective, it would be necessary for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to "list" the owl as "threatened" or "endangered". In 1987 environmental groups filed two petitions with the agency asking it to "list" the owl in Washington, Oregon and northern California. In December of that year the agency announced its decision not to list the owl. A suit in federal court was filed the next year to force the agency to review its decision. The court found in favor of the plaintiffs and the agency formed a new review team. In April, 1989 the agency issued a "proposal to list" the owl as "threatened" throughout its range in the three states. The listing was finalized in June of 1990.

The myriad of events which unfolded during and in the wake of this decision are too complex and involved to detail fully here. They included "yellow ribbon" demonstrations by loggers and their sympathizers in the spring and summer of 1989, a failed attempt at a "summit" meeting of principles in the dispute orchestrated by federal legislators from the region in June of 1989, and the passage of the so-called Hatfield-Adams Amendment in October of that year designed to maintain federal timber harvest at previous levels in the "owl region" for another year. In May of 1990 the Report of the Interagency Committee to Address the Conservation of the Spotted Owl (the Thomas Report) was released detailing a proposed conservation strategy for the spotted owl which called for the creation of large, habitat conservation areas (HCAs) to ensure the owl's viability. In February of 1991 the Secretary of The Interior named a Spotted Owl Recovery Team to draft a detailed plan for owl recovery. Later that month a federal judge castigated the Fish and Wildlife Service for its "failure" to designate critical habitat for the owl. In May of 1991 another federal judge halted nearly 200 planned federal timber sales in the owl forests and ordered the Forest Service to develop a plan to protect the spotted owl by March 5, 1992. On June 17, 1991



the Fish And Wildlife Service announced that it was proposing to list as "threatened" another old growth dependent bird species, the marbled murrelet.

The final outcome of the ancient forest issue remains to be seen. As of this writing, additional Congressional intervention in the issue appears to be an increasingly likely possibility.

### The Studies

The remaining discussion in this paper is based largely on the results of two research efforts. The first was a study conducted by the current author in a research site encompassing portions of northern California and southern Oregon. The study, which extended from 1981 through 1984, focused specifically on loggers. The research questions revolved around testing the proposition that Northwestern loggers constitute an occupational community and (assuming the proposition held up) examining the consequences of the existence of such for the logger's ability to adjust to changes imposed by economic, political and social forces exogenous to their day to day world.

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved participant observation in which the investigator moved to a logging community and found employment "in the woods". The data collected consisted of notes recorded on a daily basis in a research diary. The second phase of the field work involved nearly a year of formal interviewing and associated observations of loggers in the study area. The details of the theory, methods and findings of the study are found in Carroll (1984), Carroll (1989), and Carroll and Lee (1990).

The second study, a collaboration by three researchers, was conducted in 1990. The purpose of this work was to begin to assess the potential impacts on forest based communities of sudden timber harvest reductions likely to result from measures taken to protect Spotted Owl habitat. Three communities, Forks, Darrington, and Raymond, all in the Douglas fir region of western Washington, were selected for study. A variety of stakeholder groups in the communities including loggers, sawmill workers, shake and shingle workers, community business owners and spouses and families of workers were identified and individuals from each were selected on the basis of chain referral sampling for interviews. A specific purpose of this work was to attempt to identify both similarities and differences of potential impacts of harvest reductions for the various groups. The study results are reported in Lee, Carroll and Warren (1991) and more detailed scholarly analysis will be forthcoming in the form of articles submitted to professional journals.

The Loggers' Occupational Community

The notion of occupational community as it has been used in the sociological literature implies the existence of a shared life and sense of identification among its members that is not typical for the majority of occupations in western society. In his early, but still very useful synthesis of the literature on this subject, Graeme Salaman stated:

Members of occupational communities will not only see themselves in terms of their occupational role, they will also value this self image. This process is unlikely to occur among people who are in occupations that do not have occupational communities, and it is extremely unlikely among those workers who have an instrumental orientation toward their work and who wish to escape totally from their work once they leave the workplace.

When people see themselves in terms of their occupational roles they see themselves as certain sorts of people with particular qualities and capacities, for whom some [behavior] is appropriate while some is not. In fact, it means that the people concerned [internalize] a value system.(1974:22-23).

Later in the text, the same author states:

Members of occupational communities do not attempt to separate their work and their non-work lives; their work influences their non-work activities and interests. Members of such communities manifest a strong convergence of work and non-work life generally, and the most important feature of this is that they prefer to be friends with people who do the same work. For members of occupational communities, colleague relationships permeate out-of-work life. A colleague is someone who is a member of the same occupation, certainly, but more than this he is someone who inhabits the same normative and associational world. Collegueship involves... sharing the same work-based stock of knowledge and meanings,symbols and...language (p 25-26).

The loggers interviewed and observed in the course of the studies very clearly fit the criteria for occupational community membership. There were found to be very clear social boundaries around the occupational group. Workers involved in any element of the process of severing or moving logs from the stump to the mill are clearly identified as members of the occupation. Loggers interviewed for the more recent study very clearly matched the description written about those from the earlier research:

For those studied, logging is clearly more than simply a means of earning wages; it represents a way of life complete with a set of highly developed traditions and shared values that have been cultivated and passed down through multiple generations. The boundary between loggers and non loggers is very clear to members and they attribute considerable significance to group membership. A strong sense of shared mission and an almost militant esprit de corps [were] observed (Carroll and Lee, 1990:145).

The most striking and consistent pattern specifically concerning loggers which emerged from these studies is the existence of a highly developed occupational identity. The identity was observed to revolve around four interrelated themes: independence, pride in facing physical danger, pride in skill, and a sense of being in a unique occupation for which there are no truly acceptable alternatives. This identity is often expressed in stories of accomplishment by an individual or a crew or a fete of daring which the subject extricated himself or others out of "a bad spot". For example, a story was told by a coworker concerning an equipment operator who rescued his boss's "cat" from a dangerous place on a steep slope. The acknowledgement of this was a comment on the way home in the crew bus that evening: "What would we ever do if Clarence got scared on steep ground?"

The occupational identity can be observed to have two interrelated consequences for the occupational community member. One is to create a very intense commitment to the occupation. The other is to give the individual worker a sense of empowerment and purpose. "Getting the logs to town" is as much a moral imperative for the logger as it is an economic activity. This identity which is group based but individually expressed is much more than bravado. It is deeply felt and lived and mutually reinforced on a day to day basis. Often it is passed down from one generation to the next. There is little that is more disturbing to the loggers interviewed for these studies than actions or events which threaten to devalue or destroy this identity.

The Northwestern loggers' occupational community has evolved over a period of more than 50 years (Holbrook,1938; Haynor,1945; Carroll,1989). During this time the

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timber economy in the region has been characterized by nearly constant fluctuation. The circumstances under which they operated might be termed "bounded uncertainty". No one knew for sure when the next boom would begin, but the common experience was that after every bust, an upturn would eventually follow. Strategies thus focused on "getting through" the lull periods. Loggers and their families adjusted to the cyclic nature of the industry by such measures as taking temporary logging employment in faraway places (i.e. Alaska), working at odd jobs and growing gardens. They also typically developed patterns of mutual aid and remarkably efficient informal job seeking networks.

None of these adaptive strategies however, prepared loggers and their families for a time when the cycle was to be fundamentally altered. The period of the early 1980s represented the most prolonged depression in the industry since the 1930s. This traumatic period of timber sale "buy backs", massive forest products unemployment, industrial restructuring and company and individual bankruptcies was followed, at long last, by an upturn in mid-decade. For those working in the Douglas fir region, the boom turned out to be short lived. In this instance, however, the reasons for hard times were different, and from the loggers' standpoint, far more threatening. This subject will be taken up again below, following a review of some events and circumstances to provide some additional context for this discussion.

### The Spotted Owl Controversy and Logging Communities

During the summer of 1990 a billboard with the message: "OWLS vs JOBS" was observed on a Metro bus in Seattle. The sign went on (in much smaller print) to advertise a television news program. "...reports at 6 and 11:00". Nearly anyone involved in the Spotted Owl controversy can find something objectionable in that all-too-often repeated characterization of the dispute. It ignores, for example, the more general habitat and ancient forest dimensions as well as the temporal and philosophical underpinnings of the issue. The "Owls vs Jobs" characterization also greatly oversimplifies the social impacts resulting from the controversy itself and from the increased uncertainty of and abrupt changes in allocations of public timber which are currently emerging.

During the same summer, the Spotted Owl controversy became the subject of considerable attention in the national media and at high levels in the federal government.

One report, (in a syndicated radio newscast) quoted a subcabinet official in the executive branch as stating that the potential job losses resulting from increased timber harvest restrictions were not particularly significant because "...[a]nyone can find another job; people do it all the time". That view represents perhaps the most misleading oversimplification commonly associated with the social consequences of the dispute. Statements such as that are usually a reflection of a labor market conception of human behavior. Another common expression of this view is the argument that Northwestern forest products workers are simply part of the regional economy of the Northwest, and that they will adjust "one way or the other."

The labor market metaphor may well be a valid characterization of the relationships of workers to jobs inside the Beltway, or the Silicon Valley. It is somewhat useful for understanding behavior within particular occupational niches in the forest products industry in the Northwest. It does not consider however, important dimensions of the circumstances of forest products workers suddenly displaced and facing the prospect of no future employment in their occupation or perhaps in a rural setting at all. There can be no question that people do adjust to exogenous economic and political forces over which they have little or no control. However, the significant issues of concern in the current case revolve around the nature of the adaptation and the social costs incurred. In short, the labor market model ignores culture, identity, the social meaning attached to particular kinds of work and the mediating effects that these forces exert on adaptive behavior in times of change and stress.

Perhaps the most important general observation which emerged from the community impact work described above is the fact that the Spotted Owl controversy is widely perceived in the communities studied as fundamentally a clash of urban and traditional rural cultures in which the latter is being overwhelmed and devalued by the former. The Owl is seen as a stalking horse furthering the interests of environmental groups at the expense of people whose lives and livelihoods depend on harvesting and processing trees. This has led, for many, to a profound sense of anger and betrayal. One logger interviewed stated:

"We feel attacked and betrayed. For us the American dream is being betrayed."

Another told the interviewer:

"If this thing happens [the listing], I might just move out of this country...Just because I feel so disgusted...and betrayed by the government"

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Those sentiments were shared in varying degrees of intensity by most community groups we encountered in the impact studies. With some exceptions (which will be discussed below), community residents generally expressed the view that their lives and livelihoods were hanging in the balance of decisions being influenced and ultimately made by urban-based interests and decision makers who have little knowledge or interest in how those decisions would effect the local way of life. The "urban versus rural" values and perceptions theme emerged in interview after interview.

The studies reported here have been conducted in communities consisting mostly of what might be termed traditional rural populations. In the case of the first study, there were some non-traditional groups living in the area, but the focus of the work was on individuals and families whose livelihoods were tied directly to the extraction of forest products. Other investigators however, have conducted research in settings in which substantial numbers of former urbanites also reside.

Although the result of "exurb" migration to rural areas in the region has often been relatively peaceful coexistence of the two groups in very separate social circles (Lee,1991). Events such as the Spotted Owl controversy (and the recent "Big Green" initiatives in California) have resulted in cultural conflict at the local level as well (Fortmann and Kusel,1990; Brown,1991). The latter author states:

As the environmental organizations became more successful in their efforts to preserve the ecological integrity of the Douglas Fir forests, they became more conspicuous in the public eye. Their methods of protest became dependent on lawyers, lobbyists, and professionalized integration into the administrative processes of federal agencies such as the BLM and Forest Service. The social justice content of their goals, that is to say, how policies could be arranged to benefit the poor and working populations of the Rogue Valley, was zero. They started with trees, not people. In the minds of many environmental activists, the trees were being saved from the ignorant "rednecks"--read: local working-class people--who, it as assumed, were dupes of the transnational forest companies and captives of an outmoded frontier mentality (Brown,1991:10).

In a later section of the same paper, Brown continues:

Several of my interview subjects complained about the comments popular among the newcomers... Casual jokes about how backward and reactionary the locals are can be heard in any crowd of non-locals. I heard a typical one just the other day when a friend said she just didn't want to go to a meeting where she had to "hear the yokels yammering away about jobs" (1991:13).

None of this, of course, has been lost on long-time residents in timber communities.

Whatever "labor market" adaptations eventually takes place in response to the decrease in timber related employment, they will occur, for many, within the context of a sense of anger and alienation from increasingly complex and uncertain political and administrative decision making processes that are viewed as being controlled by people who neither understand nor particularly care about their circumstances.

### Community Stakeholder Groups

Before turning to the subject of the choices faced in the case of logging communities and their likely consequences, it will be useful to briefly describe the circumstances of stakeholder groups other than loggers in the communities we studied.

*Community Business People.* People in this category are, for the most part, proprietors or employees of small independent businesses such as grocery, drug and hardware stores, restaurants, service stations and the like. They tend to be very committed to small town life and often work very hard to promote the image and well being of the "town" as the center of the local lifestyle. Local business people tend to comprise the political leadership of communities and are usually at the core of any locally-based economic diversification efforts. Such people have often invested their life savings in one or more local enterprises and their fortunes have tended (in the past, at least) to rise and fall with those of the timber industry in the immediate area.

It should be noted, however, that the interests of local business people are seen as somewhat different than those of timber workers. Business "types" tend to value an environment of economic stability for their enterprises and thus are often in some tension with forest products people over the issue of economic diversification. Said one:

As a community member, and especially as a business person, I am under a tremendous amount of pressure to "take sides,"[in the Spotted Owl controversy] to commiserate for people here constantly about the situation. Don't get me wrong, I am concerned for them and for the community, but I think I am

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personally going to make it. My future is bright here in town regardless of downturns in the timber industry.”

*Sawmill Workers.* Unlike logging, the nature of the work carried out by most employees in sawmills tends to be repetitive and very routinized. The ability to complete a specified task consistently and efficiently is valued over independence and creativity. The work environment tends to be closely controlled. Due, in part, to these circumstances, there has been, in recent generations, a much stronger tradition of unionization in the sawmills and more worker-management conflict than is found in other sectors of the forest products industry in the region.

The interviews we conducted suggest that sawmill workers' occupational identities and the importance placed on occupation as a life interest tend to be quite different than is the case for loggers. To be sure, there are parallels in terms of pride in skill in the case of more highly skilled mill jobs such as sawyer or millwright, but the sense of identification with one's particular work which is the hallmark of membership in the loggers' occupational community was not generally found among sawmill workers interviewed. Sawmill workers were observed to be as likely to identify with organized labor as with sawmill occupations per se. Many did however express concern and resentment at the possibility of being forced from their occupation with few viable options. Many however, said that they would be happy enough to take equivalent employment if such were available in their community. Most did express serious reservations about the disruptive consequences for themselves and their families of being forced to relocate to an urban area. Most expressed a strong attachment to small town life, citing its advantages for raising children and its personalized atmosphere.

*Shake and Shingle Workers.* Another stakeholder group of relevance to this discussion is that comprised of people in the shake and shingle industry. These workers are typically employed in independent, often family run mills. Those interviewed for the impact study tended to express less commitment to their occupation than is the case for loggers, but very strong attachment to their homes and family/friendship networks. Many stated that moving would be the "last thing" they would do if they lost their jobs because at a stressful time such as that, their support network would be more important than ever.



Shake and shingle workers who find themselves unemployed are in somewhat different circumstances than other timber workers. On the one hand, a higher proportion of shake and shingle workers tend to be self employed than is the case for others in the industry and are thus not eligible for the usual unemployment benefits. On the other hand, shake and shingle mill employees can be eligible for Trade Adjustment Assistance in light of their industry's status relative to competition with foreign trade. This program has a lengthy certification procedure but it offers an extended period of cash benefits as well as job search and (ironically perhaps) relocation assistance.

*Women.* As one might expect, the interviews revealed that women play a complex variety of roles in the communities in which the studies were conducted. These vary from head sawyer in a sawmill, shingle worker, and small business owner to logger's spouse. No women were identified who were employed as loggers. Most of the women interviewed had jobs outside the home and primary responsibility for housekeeping, household financial management and child care. Most cited financial need as the primary reason for working outside the home.

The complexity with respect to women which was revealed in the interviews in the three study communities inspired additional data collection and analysis which is currently underway (Warren, Lee and Carroll, 1991). One very clear pattern identified is a perception on the part of a variety of women that they absorb a lion's share of the stress resulting from proposed harvest reductions. Expressed concerns centered around possible job losses and the resulting strain on families both emotional and economic. Specific reasons for this range from tension resulting from changes in long routinized activities and anticipation of having to move away from extended families, to fears concerning their husband's ability to adapt to other kinds of work. Women also expressed concerns related to their own ability to hold up under stresses including family financial crises, and demands for emotional support from husbands and children and the possible break down of family coping mechanisms. This particular dimension of the crisis will be explored separately in future publications.

### The Future of Logging Communities and Their Residents

What implications can be drawn from the above discussion with respect to the future prospects for logging communities and their various stakeholder groups in the Northwest? It is clear, as most commentators on the subject have stated, change is clearly inevitable. No community can ultimately be insulated from what the sociologist, Roland Warren (1987) terms the "vertical linkages" which extend from the larger society to local communities. It is argued here however, that the particular form such change takes is neither inevitable, nor

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is it driven exclusively by the "invisible hand" of predestined economic (or, for that matter, ecological) forces. The future of these communities hinges, in large part (as it always has) on political choices from a range of possibilities which are bounded by ecology, larger macroeconomic forces and policies and human culture. Some of these choices are to be made at the local level and some are regional national, and even international in scope.

One such choice which seems at this juncture to be a *fait accompli* is a significant reduction in available public timber supply. While the specific magnitude of this reduction will likely be determined by Congress, the federal timber harvest levels planned in the pre-Spotted Owl era for the Douglas fir region now appear to be very unlikely. It should be noted that if the decision to preserve the stands in question had been anticipated a decade or two ago, incremental harvest level adjustments could have been made to avert the present circumstances. Public and private sector planners assumed that the federal old growth would be available for harvest. Federal land agencies included it in the base upon which they calculated timber availability.

While all of this is now water under the bridge, it is important to recall that the present crisis in the communities is not caused by a *physical* shortage of wood fiber or the ability to sustain its production. Rather it is largely a product of political decision making concerning the allocation (and notably, reallocation) of forest lands to produce or sustain values other than timber. The factors driving these decisions are clearly complex. They are linked, in part, to a more thorough appreciation on the part of scientists and others of the complex ecological relationships and functions characteristic of old growth Douglas fir ecosystems. Many such relationships are, from a practical planning standpoint, not reproducible. The replacement stand is a different forest from an ecological standpoint.

On the other hand, the efforts to secure the preservation of these specific forests at this particular moment in history is in large part, a function of the happenstance of political agenda setting. If the environmental community had chosen to focus on another issue, or if the national "political mood" was not receptive to environmental issues at this particular time, there would likely be no "spotted owl crisis." Instead the "crisis" might concern desert or riparian ecosystems or some issue not related to the environment at all.

It should also be noted that the focus of the dispute has been on the material dimensions and consequences which will result from the decision outcomes (i.e. the viability

of owls and their habitat, biological diversity, forest products jobs, the economic well being of communities etc.), whereas the ideational underpinnings of the battle have received less attention (Lee,1991). Yet if one adopts a longer view of the present controversy, a compelling case can be made that it was ideational reasons (or as President Bush would say,"the vision thing") relative to the future of ancient forests was what led the environmental community to press the listing of the owl. As the ninth district federal judge who has presided over a number of judicial proceedings concerning this controversy stated in a recent decision:

*"The fate of the Spotted Owl has become a battleground largely because the species is a symbol of the remaining old growth forest"(Dwyer,1991 p.10).*

Another significant aspect of the controversy is the fact that it is not the protection of old growth per se which is creating a crisis in timber communities. Rather it is the timing and manner of decision making which are having the most significant negative impacts. The timing issue relative to harvests is discussed above. What is specifically meant by the manner of decision making in this instance is both the uncertain nature of the process resulting from political and legal brinkmanship and the frequently demeaning manner in which workers have been depicted in the media, (particularly in editorial cartoons) in the more heated periods of the controversy. Such cartoons, which have frequently characterized loggers as insensitive and exploitative, have also often implied that the workers are responsible for decisions,concerning where and what trees to harvest thus setting up a "blaming the victim" scenario. This, of course, simply does not match with the reality of who actually makes such decisions (Lee,1991).

It is also important to note that while the details of particular public land planning efforts have been subject to some local influence, the larger order decisions (such as how to structure public land planning processes, whether to "depart" from nondeclining even flow in regulating national forest timber harvest, or whether or not to list the Owl) have been far more influenced by formal, professionalized interest groups representing industry, environmentalists and other national level players. A circumstance which is frequently pointed out by local groups is that they often feel the most immediate day to day impacts of such decisions. Timber community activism related to the Owl crisis has recently altered this pattern to some extent, but the method of community influence remains largely outside "normal" channels, taking instead the form of media exposure, social protest and direct appeals to Congress.

Another set of political choices concerns the often discussed topic of economic diversification in forest based communities. While it would be clearly inappropriate to

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argue that communities should not attempt to diversify, it is important to note that diversification is not the panacea that some make it out to be. In addition to the myriad of practical economic considerations (i.e. what kind of enterprises to attract or create? What kinds of resources and skills would be needed? Can this be done in time to help people who are already or soon to be out of work? Will the jobs pay enough to support a family?) looms the question of which community residents such efforts and enterprises would actually help. The evidence gathered suggests that diversification efforts could exacerbate the cultural conflicts already underway over the Owl question. In one of the study sites a sign was seen in a front yard with the inscription:

"Retrain??.If I'd wanted a CPA, I would have married one!!"

One worker interviewed expressed concisely a sentiment held by many:

"Personally, I'd rather starve to death here and live off elk meat rather than participate in any degrading plans to move me around and change my culture and life.

This reaction is especially common among loggers who feel particularly under attack as a result of the controversy anyway. From their perspective, it adds insult to injury to create economic opportunities that are more suited for others, while their livelihoods are disappearing as a result of decisions that they do not perceive as legitimate.

Questions of retraining face the same difficulties. As a group, loggers seem to be among the least likely community residents to be readily amenable to participating in retraining efforts, particularly for occupations that, from their perspective, restrict personal freedom. Any efforts which smack of "social engineering" are likely to be met with resentment by members of this group. This is not to say that some loggers will not opt for retraining, but serious questions remain about the long term effects of retraining on this particular group given their traditions and collective identity. This is a topic worthy of a time series study. Other stakeholder groups appear likely to be easier to reach with retraining programs, but the problem remains of how to help people in distress while not engaging in cultural elitism to which they are likely to react unfavorably.

None of the above should be interpreted as an argument against attempting to design ways to help people in distress. Quite to the contrary, it has been suggested here that the acute distress currently occurring in logging communities is, in fact, largely a product of the nature and timing of political decision making. To adopt a *Laissez Faire* approach to human suffering that is a more or less direct product of specific political decisions, appears to be inconsistent to say the least. The suggestion here is that the problems faced are not simple and that cultural issues should be carefully considered. Solutions which are perceived as being imposed on rural people or threatening certain groups' cultural heritage are more likely to exacerbate rather than solve problems.

Finally, it is appropriate to return to the topic of public land decision making, and in particular, its linkage to resource based communities and stakeholder groups. It is very important in discussing this topic to clearly distinguish the interests of workers and community residents from those of the industries upon which they depend. There are times when such interests clearly overlap, and times when they do not. This distinction is often confused in the political rhetoric over natural resource issues. It is inconsistent, for example, for a forest products company to claim that it is arguing in favor of public timber availability to sustain communities when, (as occurred in the author's initial study site) that company then closes its mill and woods operation with virtually no notice to its workers and transfers its assets to another region of the country leaving unemployed workers behind. On the other hand, it is also inconsistent for an environmental group to say that it is in favor of sustainable communities and then to argue in favor of immediate restrictions on areas previously slated for timber harvest thus leaving resident/workers without short term employment alternatives

In the post-NEPA era of public land management planning, the art of influencing decision making has become increasingly sophisticated. The ability to be eloquent in front of a microphone, to write an appeal or a legal brief and to understand complex NEPA procedures have become the currency needed to be effective in influencing political decisions. The process emphasis of such decision making has many disadvantages which are beyond the scope of the present discussion. Two disadvantages which are relevant here are that they tend to reward conflictual rather than conciliatory actions by participants and they tend to leave less procedurally sophisticated actors behind (Daniels,1991). Both of these are particularly disadvantageous to many people in forest dependent communities and loggers in particular. From a logger's perspective, for example, it seems that someone (probably in an urban area) can file an appeal to a forest plan over his or her lunch hour and eliminate the logger's paycheck a few months hence.

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The example above is clearly an oversimplification of the way most group influence actually occurs. The point however, is that the decision making procedure often leaves the logger feeling disenfranchised as do formal public involvement meetings where loggers and their families often sit in the back of the room (if they attend at all) while their more formally educated "exurb" contemporaries are more likely to articulate their positions in front of the microphone. This situation is clearly not a recipe for productive citizenship or adaptive problem solving.

It is not the purpose here to lay out the details of an attempt to reform land management decision making. The point is rather to suggest that the current system, as it has evolved over the last two decades, has left at least some groups feeling disenfranchised. This seems clearly to be contributing to the more general problem of political fractionation over land management decision making. In a recent book, Julia Wondolleck (1988) has suggested that national forest decision making be reconceptualized dispute resolution rather than expert decision making. She suggests further that procedures be designed to bring competing interests together with built in mechanisms such as joint fact finding to arrive at commonly acceptable decisions. Margaret Shannon has more recently (1991) suggested the need to build "Civic Friendship" and "Civic Conversation" in developing public land policy. She goes on to point out that many rural cultures are oral "-around the kitchen table..." and she calls for the development of approaches to decision making which incorporate such traditions. There is a great deal of work and experimentation to be done if progress is to be made in getting beyond the current "guerilla warfare" approach to public land decision making. Clearly, far more is at stake in this than the well being of forest based communities. However it does appear that stakeholders in such communities would stand to benefit substantially in having their sense of citizenship restored by the implementation of more culturally relevant land management decision making processes. Groups rarely get all they want from pluralistic decision making. However, serious problems occur when particular stakeholders come to believe that their voices are not being heard at all. Changing this dynamic relative to rural working people would appear to be an important step in reversing the growing political "gap" between rural and urban America.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

To develop a broader understanding, it is helpful to view the Spotted Owl issue in its larger historical context. It has been suggested here that the current controversy is simply the latest chapter in a nearly century-old philosophical battle over the public lands. The fact that the situation has evolved to a crisis at all suggests that our current public land decision making processes are exaggerating rather than helping to resolve the problem. The time has arrived for a significant rethinking of such processes (Wondolleck, 1988).

In the meantime, however, a numerically small but socially and culturally distinct segment of the population of the region is feeling serious consequences from the current decision processes. Although the full impacts are difficult to predict with great precision (particularly without knowing the ultimate magnitude and specific timing of the harvest reductions) the evidence indicates that there are likely to be long-term consequences for the lives and culture of particular groups in the communities. One of the biggest problems faced by community stakeholder groups is the extended uncertainty and accompanying sense of powerlessness that the controversy has generated.

Among the groups likely to be the most severely effected are loggers and their families. One of the reasons for the severity of the impact on this particular group is the nature of the logger's occupational identity. While this identity has historically been a great source of pride and personal and group empowerment, loggers perceive it along with their traditions to be under attack in the Owl controversy. If the spotted owl is a symbol of a threatened old growth ecosystem, loggers and their families can be seen as symbolic of a way of life and culture threatened by abrupt political change.

The circumstances faced by loggers and other stakeholder groups in the communities affected by this controversy, (although admittedly something of an extreme case) appear indicative of a more general phenomenon which has emerged as part of recent struggles over natural resources and the environment. This is a growing perception on the part of what might be labeled "traditional" rural residents that their heritage and lifeways are under attack as part of the movement for greater environmental protection. This can be observed across a variety of issues currently in contention in the West (and the nation) including the movement to remove cattle from public rangelands, the anti-hunting movement, the more general animal rights movement and the designation of wild and scenic rivers near rural communities. The increased polarization seems to stem, in large part, from a lack of mutual understanding, trust (in many instances, even basic respect) between environmentalists and those who are involved in managing, extracting and/or directly using natural resources. The result has been a tendency toward a top down, process oriented, regulatory approach to

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decision making and environmental protection that seems profoundly antidemocratic to some groups.

As Beverly Brown (1991) points out, members of the rural working class have as big a stake as anyone in the long term sustainability of the ecosystems upon which they have traditionally depended to make a living. Finding approaches to decision making and environmental protection which emphasize both consensus building (over both philosophical and practical matters) and cultural sensitivity would appear to be in the interests of both environmental protection and the well being of working people and others in rural communities.

Rural communities face many serious economic challenges related to such developments as changing world markets and the arrival of the information age. Such challenges cannot be met in a cultural vacuum or in isolation from each other. More effective land management decision making approaches appear to be an important part of finding solutions. New decision making approaches would be a major change from business as usual, and a challenge to develop and carry through. The Spotted Owl controversy however, is an object lesson in the consequences of falling back on the politics of brinkmanship in setting the course for the future of public land management.



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**MOURNING AND ARTIFACTS:  
ALTERATIONS AND EFFECTS ON A SMALL RURAL VILLAGE**

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As we move into the 21st century our quest for "modernization" and the continuing pattern of urban dominance that travels with it has wrought destruction on traditional rural communities.

Tightly knit communities with centuries of culture and tradition behind them try to form a coherence of the results the unintended consequences urbanism introduces into their way of life. Consequences which often transform their most "sacred" traditions.

Nothing is exempt from the relentless "modernization". Even death is not immune as the laws from the dominating urban society infiltrate into the ceremonies which surround the death rituals.

This article addresses the transformation of the bereavement process and the subsequent impact on artifacts as the people in a small rural community in northern New Mexico fight to maintain their culture and traditions in the face of urban dominance.

The people of this community consist of twenty Hispanic families who trace their roots to the original settlement population. The people are typical of the population living in small rural villages throughout northern New Mexico. The adult members of this community were interviewed and gave detailed information on their beliefs and traditions; as a member of the community, I was in the position to be both a participant and an observer.

While interviewing los viejitos (ancient ones) of this community, I was able to discover the community's roots. Historically, it began as a watering station for travelers after the 1680 Pueblo Indian revolt, and was maintained by a Franciscan priest and a band of Cicuye Christian Indians.

People from the valley area began to migrate to the mountain where the Homestead Act of 1916 provided settlers with 160 - 320 acres of land for the cost of the filing fee and a finca (establishment of residence).

By 1879, the dry land farming and ranching community was thriving. Working the land took extensive manual labor provided by the large families typical of the times. The family home consisted of an L-shaped building; parti-local residence patterns were observed. When a newly formed family needed a place to live, a separate room was added to a common wall along with an outside entrance; thus many generations were able to live together.

Building the rooms was a community project; everyone helped to make the adobe bricks and to enjarrar (mud plaster) the outside. Harvesting was also a community undertaking; after the harvest, they elected trusted members to transport the wheat to the molino (mill) in Mora for grinding. Transporting was a enormous undertaking involving a trip of more than a week in a carro-de-bestias (horse drawn wagon). Cash money was also entrusted for provisions such as sugar, coffee, salt, baking powder, cloth, etc., which the community did not raise or could not barter. For cash money, the men had to work outside the community as sheep herders earning \$18 a month. Neighbors helped the women tend the crops and animals at this time.

Religion played a big part in maintaining the viability of this Catholic community. Before 1927, there was no official building to hold Mass; therefore, Mass was held in private homes. The priest was picked up at the parroquia (parish district) eleven miles away; worshipers often walked many miles to attend services. After Mass the people enjoyed a lunch prepared by the hostess, and caught up on the latest news creating an essential communication center.

Later decades saw many changes; the patrilocal mode of residence was still in effect until the early 1950's. At this time the large ranches and farms had become too small to maintain the younger population and an out-migration to nearby urban cities developed.

Many urban traits began to infiltrate back into the community. For example, electricity was installed in 1959, and a community well was offered to the people in 1975 bringing with it indoor bathrooms. In 1980 the first telephone lines were extended into the area.

Being thirty-five miles from the nearest urban city the community was extremely isolated for most of this century; the isolation of this rural community contributed to its self sufficiency. To arrive at the summit of the mountain where it is located, a creek has to be forded, and a treacherous, forty-degree grade, one lane dirt road has to be traversed for five miles to reach the apex which culminates in a plateau rising a thousand feet above the surrounding terrain.

## Mourning and Artifacts

The closing of one room schoolhouses in 1969, and the consolidation following precipitated the upgrading of the roads. A bridge was erected over the creek; a gravel/oil pavement was extended from the State road to the location of the new school a mile up the mountain.

Not until 1987, after parents boycotted the unsafe conditions their children were exposed to on this uphill stretch were temporary guard rails erected.

Guard rails were also installed at the top of the precipice in 1990 after the county lost a suit arising from the death of a teenager whose vehicle plunged down the cliff. Later that year gravel was also laid down for an additional three miles. The last three miles are still dirt roads tending to bog down when heavy rain or snow falls making it difficult to get in our out of this rural community.

## FINDINGS

The remoteness of this community has allowed it to maintain its traditions and customs; however, many outside influences have now infiltrated this small rural community. This article will focus on the alteration of death rituals and how the resultant grief, mourning, and bereavement are now perceived.

The personal significance of who you are is culturally defined. Sociologists point out that reality is socially defined and humans grieve over losses that are thus defined. For instance, the further the person is from the nuclear family, the less the grief is supposed to be.

Durkheim in The Elementary forms of Religious Life, stated that emotions are a product of the social reality in which the person exists.

... mourning is not a natural movement of private feelings wounded by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group (p. 443)

The mourning is a social experience of grief which permits us to experience external validation for feelings.

The funeral ceremony provides a place to share feelings and expression held by members of this community. It serves as a means of directing the grief experience into the prevailing acceptable social behavior.

In contemporary society a change can be seen in the rural community researched. The people of this community communicated freely about the changes which have taken place in the bereavement process; more importantly the subtle changes in the rites of the funeral were discussed. This traditionally Hispanic, Catholic community is attempting to cling to their rituals and customs in the face of the outside urban dominance which intrudes into their lives.

The changes in the rituals are best presented by the people themselves, an eighty-year-old male remembered:

I was very young when my grandmother died. I remember that she was sick for a little while, then the family (extended) was all around her. She had the priest give communion and then we went up to her bed for her blessing. She gave us all something to remember her by. I got a nice Santo (saint). They sent us out of the room and the priest gave her extreme unction. Not long after that we heard the women crying. After that the women dressed her and we went in to give her a good-bye kiss. We (the children) started playing outside, one of my aunts came for us so she could wash us and put on our good clothes. People started coming in the carro-de-bestias (wagons pulled by horses), and after awhile all my cousins, aunts, and uncles were there. They prayed a rosary for her. Then they sang and prayed all night. the next day we went to church and the priest gave her Mass. Then they buried her, after that we went home to eat and I played with my little cousins.

Phillippe's, (1978), version of "tamed death" relates to the story above. "Tamed death" was a ceremony by which the dying persons separated themselves from the material world and made themselves ready for the spiritual world; the dying person was the main character at the death scene.

Being the main character, the dying person was able to gather the extended family for the last farewell. In doing so, the kinship ties were strengthened and reaffirmed, thus maintaining the solidarity of the community. It also provided for the transition of the dying person in a clearly defined manner; usually there was a solemn funeral service with the mourning ritual clearly defined.

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The primary affiliation, the ties of kinship are a community trait; also evident are the characteristics pointing to a simple society which is collectively dominated by tradition and custom. These traditions and customs are expressed in the next narrative by a sixty-five-year-old woman's memories about the funeral rites of her grandmother fifty years before:

It had been snowing the day my grandmother died, all the neighbors came to the house and said good-bye to her and for her final blessings. The priest was not able to come because of the snow so she did not get the last sacrament, but she was so good I'm sure she went straight to heaven. My mother washed her and put on her good dress that she had wanted to be buried in. Then the people came back in to say good-bye again. The neighbors gave her a velorio (wake) all night. Since the snow didn't let us get to the coffin maker's house eleven miles away, my grandfather made her one with the extra boards he had lying around. My mother and a few of the other ladies put some cloth in it to make it pretty. The children came in and out of the room where my grandmother was laid out. There was no fear of her since we knew that angels were in the room with us to take care of her soul. After they put her in the coffin, we had to keep her in that room for a couple of days because the ground was frozen and they couldn't dig a grave. The men made a big fire at the place where they wanted to bury her to get the ground soft enough to dig, and after a few days the grave was dug and we buried her.

The above narrative depicts another trait where the community is self sufficient. The familiarity of the deceased causes no fear in the people since death at home was considered a normal experience in days when family members often died at home. the death was experienced, labeled and taken care of by the individual and by family members. By availing themselves of custom and tradition, the members of this community were affirming commitment, loyalty and allegiance to enforce family solidarity. Since the community was isolated, the laws pertaining to embalming were not enforced and had not yet been incorporated into the funeral rites.

And yet, changes had to be incorporated as this community's isolation came to an end. In the next vignette, a fifty-year-old tells about her mother's funeral:



When my mother got sick we took her to the hospital, the priest met us there and gave her the last sacrament, they wheeled her away to a room and told us to go into the waiting room. We never saw her alive again. The doctor came out and told us that he had done all he could to save her but that it had been too late.

We took her body home with us in the truck, covering her with a blanket. My brother got in the back with her. When we got home, my aunt bathed her and put my mother's wedding gown on her. She arranged her on the bed so people who were waiting outside could come in and see her. She told me to take care of the kids so they wouldn't bother the big people during the velorio which they held all night.

That night, the people prayed, sang and cried. They would take breaks for coffee and food then go back to praying and singing. More people came the next day and they always brought more food and drinks. The men had wine and whiskey, but they hid it outside and used to go out to the bon fire they had there. My aunt wouldn't let them drink in the house.

The next day, the men had already dug the grave and made the coffin, my aunt had the men put the body in the coffin carefully, then we took it to the church where the priest said the Mass. After that we opened the coffin one last time to see my mother and we all had to give her a good-bye kiss. Then we took her to the campo santo (holy camp) outside the church, and the priest said more prayers. The men put the coffin in the grave and we took a handful of dirt to throw in. The shovels were handed around and the men covered the hole. After that we went back to my house and served the people lunch.

Again the community traits are visible in this rural village, the extended kin group follows folkways; the rituals observed during the funeral strengthen group values. The attendance was a sign of solidarity, and by attending the funeral the people were also establishing reciprocity for when their time came. They were also reorienting themselves to life and bearing witness to the existence of death.

The rituals of praying and singing are also a way of directing anger inspired energy into a nonthreatening behavior. The taking of the mother to the hospital is a contemporary urban trait which is creeping into the established rituals of this community. The transition from the rural community to "modernized" urban traits become evident in the next interview as a forty-six-year-old woman remembers:

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Mother refused to go to the hospital so we had to pick her up and make her go. She said she didn't want to die away from the family. We took turns being with her in the hospital room, but the nurses didn't look too happy about it. My mother didn't die until we weren't with her. I think the hospital could have let us stay with her and bring the kids to see her.

Afterwards they told us we couldn't bring her home, they said that only the funeral home could take her. We went to one and made a deal with them. We picked out a coffin and had her embalmed so that the family members who lived far away could make it in time for the funeral.

The first rosary was said in the funeral home "slumber room". Then the funeral home brought her to the church in their hearse. We had the velorio for my mother the next two nights. The neighbors brought food and took care of the guests in our house until the funeral Mass and burial took place.

The rural community is clearly going through a transition, it utilizes parts of the traditional rituals, and also incorporates parts of the contemporary urban traits in its funeral rites.

The death is now taking place away from the home (rural) as the hospital (urban) takes over the role of caretaker. The separation of the relatives from the patient, the enforcement of visiting hours and the rule of no children allowed makes the hospital staff's work easier.

The bereavement process has no clear definition of when to begin. The body now becomes a health threat instead of the remains of a loved one. This brings about the failure for the family to make sense of death or to allay the fears which are awakened when the death of loved one is experienced.

However, the attempt to maintain some of the rituals and customs provides the community with a place to share their feelings and express the values they hold dear. The transition can be clearly seen in the life history of a thirty-one-year-old man when his sister died of a heart attack.

My cousin came running and told me there was something wrong with my sister. I ran to her house and found her on the floor. I gave her C.P.R. (cardio-pulmonary-resuscitation) for awhile and nothing happened. I went next door to call the ambulance to meet us on the way to the hospital. While I was there, the neighbor offered me his car so we could all fit and continue the C.P.R. They also offered to take care of the kids.

The ambulance met us ten miles from town and took her to the emergency room. When we got there, the first thing they asked us was if she was Catholic, at that point I think I already knew she was dead. However, they kept us waiting in the lobby for hours before they came out and told us she had died. It's different when a young person dies, you expect old people to die, but when it happens to a young person you get scared it might happen to you.

They informed us that the body would have to be sent to Albuquerque for an autopsy and let us in to see her. I telephoned the family to let them know, and we went home. When we got there, the people were already at my sister's house waiting for us to see what they could do to help.

The next day we went to the welfare office to see if they could help us pay for the funeral. They gave us \$200 and told us the funeral had to be done for less than \$600. We took the check to the funeral home but before we had a chance to explain to the lady helping us, she had shown us what the arrangements were going to cost. We just looked at each other when she said that since the body had been autopsied, the charge would be \$300 to restore it and that for making the arrangements it would cost \$250. With other items the cheapest funeral would be about \$1800. Finally we told her that the welfare was helping us pay for the funeral. She went out and spoke to the director, and got back to us with a price of \$598 for the entire service. She showed us a picture of the casket that would be used since only the expensive caskets were available for viewing. Since the funeral was so cheap, the remaining money had to later. We could also pay on the side for extras like the over casket and cards so the price wouldn't be affected.

The service did not provide for delivery so my cousin offered his truck and camper to transport the body home. When we went to pick her up, the casket we had been shown in the picture had been changed to a plainer one. When we saw her laid out in the casket, she looked all scrunched up like she didn't fit. I got really mad and told my wife that it wasn't the one we had seen in the

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picture. She went into the office and I could hear her yelling at the director. After the scene in the office, the director came out and told us to come back in an hour and the casket would be changed.

The urban characteristic based on (monetary) exchange and rational calculation is evident in what transpired at the funeral home. In contrast, the community's willingness to help, the monetary donations collected after the tragedy occurred, which paid off the entire cost of the funeral, underlines the traits of fellowship, kinship, and neighborliness. The community characteristic of kinship was illustrated by the willingness of the community to absorb this woman's three orphaned children back into the community instead of placing them into the foster care or adoption programs.

The rituals which help in the acceptance of death are missing as the urban laws of autopsies, embalming, and the monetary cost of the funeral come into view.

The people have no way to demarcate the death. Without the body itself to view, the death does not become real. There is no rite-of-passage to provide the new status for the bereaved. The bereaved react with anger because the mourning ritual has not been clearly defined.

The rage takes on another dimension; traditionally, rural people are raised to believe that the family is self sufficient. The expense of the funeral (urban) is often beyond the monetary range of most families in rural areas, yet the responsibility to the deceased is not severed by the death. People feel reluctant to receive aid from outside agencies. If they have never dealt with a funeral home, the results are often traumatic and add to their feelings of rage and helplessness.

Concord is important in the observance of rituals giving comfort and succor in times of need; the functions of reaffirmation of ties emerging when the community rallied around this family are manifold. The people resent the altering of these functions. The next interview illustrates this.

Thirty years ago, we would have called a priest instead of an ambulance so he could administer the last rites; it gave us (family) and the dying person comfort since we believe there is life after death.

Someone from the family washed the body and made it ready so the people could come in and say good-bye; it is always better to hold the body before it gets cold, it seems like they haven't gone that far away. We also believe the soul stays in the body for awhile and it's like they can hear what we tell them. We would hold a velorio over night and rosaries and prayers were said over the body. People brought food and other things to help the family out, everyone stayed at the house that was having the velorio. Women took turn helping out in the kitchen and taking care of the little ones.

Today the rosary that lasted hours has been cut down to thirty minutes, the people get restless and begin visiting with the people they haven't seen in a long time. I've seen the family get mad because they think these people aren't giving any respect to the dead. The velorios are no longer held except by a few people. The body is left alone overnight at the church. the Mass is no longer what it used to be, in church, the men don't care if we stand or not. Before the women got to sit on the few pews we have and they stood in the back, now-a-days the men are usually outside drinking and the kids are in their cars with the radios on. They have all lost respect for the dead.

It is a community trait that these people know each other intimately and are well connected by bonds of friendship. They have a sense of common purpose, and a death brings them together to reaffirm their bonds and ties.

While the women traditionally congregate inside the house at this time, the men see to other things. One of the men gave the information about the grave digging.

We used to open the grave-site with shovels, during the opening most of us drank beer and wine. A party-like atmosphere usually developed and one of us would get drunk and have to be looked after so he would not fall into the hole. Today the back-hoe has taken that job away from us, it was something we liked to do and we miss it.

The reaffirmation of bonds are observed here along with the latent function of laughing at death since joking or poking fun at something is a way of relieving tension.

After we dug the grave, we made the wooden pine box for the body so we could carry it to the Church where Mass would be given. The family picked the pall bearers, they were usually someone the dead person was close to. We buried the coffin at the campo santo in front of the church after everyone had thrown

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in a little bit of dirt. I remember when one of my cousins from Denver came to a funeral here. She became hysterical when we started to fill the grave with dirt. She had never been to a funeral where they did that. In town they always leave before this part. After the job is finished we go to eat with the family.

The people were following certain ancient ritual procedures established for death in Judeo-Christian societies.

- pronouncement of death
- cleansing of the body and viewing
- shrouding
- transporting and accompaniment
- readying for burial.

The changes are evident in today's treatment of the established procedures for death. Instead of the priest pronouncing death, a medical examiner is needed. The prolonging of life instead of provision for eternal life is what the people in this community say they miss the most.

The body must be taken to a hospital to determine the cause of death. Funeral homes have taken over the cleansing of the body, and the viewing is held at the chapel provided by the mortuary. The shrouding is a vestige procedure provided by draping the coffin in a linen sheet which also is a symbol of the baptism gown worn by the deceased, while the Mass of the dead is given. Transporting is done by the mortuary in a hearse to a cemetery where the grave has already been dug by a back-hoe, and is covered with pretty artificial grass so the raw hole can not be seen. A short ceremony is performed and the people leave without seeing the coffin lowered or covered with dirt.

The community under study is in transition. It utilizes burial procedures from both urban and rural methods. The body is taken to the hospital, the mortuary handles the cleansing, the viewing and the coffin; however, the deceased is taken to the Church where rosaries are said and velorios are held for two or three days. This is essential since the extended family has dispersed to great distances. Monetary donations are given by the members of the community to help cover the funeral costs as is the food for the mourners.

For the members of this community, the social cohesiveness can be seen in the collective which is dominated by tradition and custom, and in the shared values, sentiments and activities which the community attempts to maintain.

Customs are habits arising out of repetition which satisfy recurrent needs in the interhuman struggle for survival. The community's desire to reaffirm their social relationships and to strengthen the extensive personal ties maintained the function of continuing as the primary group for most of the members. It brings the members back to their roots.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, by demanding that the people help observe the rites, the community has developed a strategy for survival as urban dominance pushes its way into their life.

By participating in the death of a loved one, the people are accepting death as natural. They are occupying themselves by caring for the person and channeling their anger into nonaggressive behavior as they become involved in funeral arrangements. The rituals provide a social safety valve which directs anger inspired energy into non-threatening behavior. As a Rite of Passage it provides a new status for the bereaved.

Funeral Rites provide essential functions for the community. The community members' values are strengthened, solidarity is shown by the attendance, reciprocity is established, and they reorient themselves to life as they bear witness to the existence of death.

The voluntary engagement in the manual acts (i.e., pall-bearing, opening the grave, filling the grave, etc.) indicates an acceptance of death. The act of participating in the laying to rest of the deceased is a way to drain some of the emotion by expressing grief and participating in the difficult complex ceremonies.

Most of the ceremonies are part of the Roman Catholic procedure in the rites of death. The last rites are an affirmation of the continuity of the spirit along with the fatalism attributed by the saying La Muerte no hespera a nadie, (Death waits for no one). The funeral rites also provide for an extensive expression of feelings, it validates the assembling of the loved ones so that emotions can be publicly and freely expressed thus providing for the social support system of the extended family to be fully operative.

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However, the increasing urbanization of this century has changed funeral ceremonies, urban people were unable to perform many tasks that had previously been a part of rural family functioning. Personal service areas took over home centered activities, there was an increase in wealth which lead to elaborate funerals; subsequently, funerals serve as a statement of status. Smaller living spaces left no room for wakes, the embalming became a law and the funeral industry came into being. The funeral went from the hands of the family members into the control of funeral directors and the commercial activity it generated.

Funeral homes are an intrinsic part of the bureaucratization of the death system, they assume the responsibility for the body at the time of release from the hospital until final burial.

Urbanism is a mandate of bureaucracy, the first thing that must be destroyed is the family and their attachment to the land. By making the funeral a part of bureaucracy, ceremonies become suspect as they are regarded as a religious activity having little value to contemporary humanity. Today's society is future oriented and no longer focuses on historically valid symbols, symbolic ceremonial behavior is not relevant.

With the bureaucratization of society, every activity must have an extrinsic end. Ceremonies are a gesture, a representation of collective images, they are performed for their own sake, are sentimental, and appeal to nonrational senses, thus ceremonies are disappearing in the face of bureaucratic efficiency. Subsequently, when bureaucratization moves too fast there is a backlash effect, people turn back to the past, to the ceremonies and rituals they are comfortable with. This is what has happened in this community.

How can the government with its dominating bureaucracy help with the backlash against its growing demands? As life becomes more bureaucratized and emotions more private, the funeral ceremony becomes less popular and there is no need for community response since the increasing anonymity of man means society is less and less affected by the death of the individual.

However, the government can make things easier for the integration of rural communities. There is a vast need for the acceptance of death, by bureaucratizing death the mourning has been delayed. Programs should be instituted that will help people take



care of their loved ones as death nears. There are some programs (i.e., visiting nurses) now in effect, but they are contingent on monetary eligibility of the family. Most of the people in this community are part of the "working poor". They make just enough money not to be eligible for most programs, but they do not have any extra resource to hire outside help.

Outside help is also necessary in helping to establish the steps when a person dies at home, there should be a central office where the information is available. Currently the only information available is from the funeral homes, and by making that one call the funeral home usually takes over the arrangements.

The funeral arrangements are one of the hardest things a grieving person has to deal with. There should be an agency where a call and the amount the bereaved are able to pay would take care of everything connected to the funeral. In their state of grief, people often go into debt during this period in their lives which they can ill afford. Better financial aid for the "working poor" who have no way of coming up with even the most inexpensive funeral costs is needed. Most of the funeral homes demand cash before releasing the body.

After the funeral the bereaved persons need services on how to cope with their loss. They need better publicity for services now available, and the publicity should make the services more visible and educate the people in order to take away the stigma associated with them. Most important of all the people need trained professionals that understand the culture from which the people come.

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## **RURAL CULTURE AND VALUES**

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When the Western Governors' Association commissioned this paper, the mandate was to address rural economic development in ways that respect the culture and values of local rural life. For 22 years Community Design Center of Minnesota has provided community and economic development assistance to rural town and urban neighborhoods in Minnesota and several other states. Recognizing and building on the values and culture of local communities has been a key ingredient of our approach to community development. This paper reflects our own experience and perhaps that of other small nonprofit development assistance groups.

We are aware that commendable efforts have been made in recent years to stabilize and reinvigorate the economic life of rural communities. State Departments of Agriculture and Commerce, as well as local governments, universities, and nonprofit citizens groups, to name a few, have labored for years to reverse rural economic decline, population loss, and a severe crisis of self-confidence. Towns have hired consultants to help them develop "Year 2,000" plans. Strategies have ranged from trying to import a Saturn factory to planting flowers and trees on Main Street. Some efforts have been successful, some have not. The efforts of these years have provided a base of experience from which our assessment of rural policies is made.

### **I. THREE ISSUES FOR PUBLIC POLICY MAKERS**

Starting from a perspective of values and culture, those who formulate public policy o\for rural areas should address three basic issues:

1. Public policy tends to overlook rural values and culture as economic assets. People in small towns and rural areas measure themselves by the land. A sense of land and place is still a foundation of what they believe to be their value system. This connection to the land is a characteristic that should set them apart and give them a particular perspective and strength to bring to the nation's discussion of values.

In our highly mobile society, the loss of a sense of place is no small part of the nation's current panic over the perceived loss of common values. We think these rural

values correspond to a deep-seated need among many Americans today for a more centered and manageable life.

Public policy all too often imposes urban values and culture on rural development. No one "deal" or "big fix" can create economic sustainability. Economic sustainability involves looking at economic development from many angles. An integrated view of local sustainable economic development requires the nurturing of all types of businesses, from the large to the tiny. Often in the rush to create business the tiny ones are overlooked. Yet tiny or micro business development is necessary for rural economic diversity.

Rural economic revitalization policies need to support relatively small, focused, diverse, local ways that help rural communities respond to change. They need to be able to manage and participate in change instead of being overwhelmed by it. On the other hand, small solutions can only be effective if they are based in a sound understanding of the interconnection of problems. We need to have some idea of where a small local program fits with the whole so we can ensure that it will be sustained.

Public policy makers often impose their own urban values on rural physical development. We are living in a world that says towns have to buy into the latest design and market fad. Witness the malls that have killed many Main Streets and neighborhoods in both small and large towns. Witness the plastic sameness of facades covering many towns' architectural heritage.

2. Public policy often rewards fragmented and isolated economic development strategies in rural areas rather than cooperation. Government programs are often standardized to meet political considerations that have little to do with the situation of particular communities. State government is not always in a position to meet innovation. Towns respond with equally standardized decisions. There is a great temptation for towns in economic stress to grab the first franchise that is waved in their face before their neighboring town can get it.

Sometimes rural citizens are ahead of the government. For example, inter-city cooperation across jurisdictions for rural economic development is an innovative and promising local response to rural problems. But in Minnesota, towns are not encouraged to apply cooperatively for small city grants. It can be done through much maneuvering and creative use of fiscal agent status, but it is not encouraged up front. Practically speaking, state government is still operating in terms of individual towns.

Here we have policy that has the effect of unintentionally supporting wasteful competition between struggling towns.

Small rural towns need encouragement to join together in long-term and multi-issue efforts. They need assistance that helps them understand the national and international context of their local predicament. At the same time, they need to think through their own history, values, styles, and assets, so they can make decisions locally in light of the larger picture.

3. Government technical assistance today is often unstable, short-term, and subject to political whims. Depending on who is in office, state programs come and go, with no sustained approach to rural issues.

Government employees who work in rural development are required to answer to a number of bureaucracies. Often this loyalty takes precedence over the rural communities whom they are helping.

Government technical assistance often is not in a position to play the primary development and coordinating roles. No one single approach, no outside timetable, no foundation or legislative allocation schedule--in short, no one agenda should determine the rhythm or the content of rural economic revitalization and community development. One set of imbalances should not be used to correct other imbalances.

Finally, it is critical that there be a community context for doing any kind of development. There must be a process that builds community self-confidence while protecting the integrity of community values and identity. These values offer a shared context for adapting to a changing time, a quality regrettably more association with individuals acting alone, as in the survival of the fittest. Too often today, development efforts are handled as isolated "deals," with no regard for the history or culture of a community.

## II. A PROPOSAL FOR SHAPING FUTURE RURAL PUBLIC POLICY

This proposal focuses on small rural communities with the following characteristics: 1) populations of about 3,000 or fewer\*, 2) proximity to each other, which gives them a history of relating, 3) local economies which have been affected by a shift from a small farm agriculture base to large farms with fewer crops and fewer farmers, and 4) a loss of population, especially of their young.

We submit that there are three major challenges for small rural communities and any economic development that is based on local values and culture. We believe that public policy should consistently encourage:

- 1) Recognition of rural values and culture as economic assets.
- 2) Cooperation among small rural towns to address economic sustainability.
- 3) A technical assistance which aims at building infra-structures of attitudes ideas, and beliefs. These expressed beliefs support cooperations and enable communities to have confidence in their own culture and values.

### 1) Recognition that Rural Values and Culture are Economic Assets

Rural communities have assets to bring to negotiations. First among these assets are their culture and their values. Rural values are a marketable commodity that is worth something. Let us describe the commodity.

These values combine America's best traditions of both communitarianism and individualism. In a phrase adapted from Wendell Berry, they represent the very humble but absolutely necessary capacity to think locally and to act locally, in contrast to urban values where the thrust is to think globally and act locally.

Society is almost frenzied by the sudden recognition of loss of coherent values. Perhaps the loss is caused by the "global" character, in which local problems seem trivial in comparison to the cosmic issues of global warming, loss of rain forests, dependence on non-renewable energy sources, and international migration, to name a few. Rural communities are sitting on a treasure. Using rural values as the basis for sustainability is not an exercise in nostalgia. They are a resource that, handled properly, can be put at the service of our entire society.

The United States faces the task of comprehending and accepting its new diversity. As diverse cultures and values begin to crowd for a place on our nation's agenda, rural values and traditions should be there with them.

### **Culture and Values**

Community Design Center often invites discourse on values by arranging for rural people to tell their stories to each other. It may seem strange, but people in small towns often know little about those in nearby towns. They may know of them, but they rarely talk about values with each other. Yet we have found that when we bring them together, they agree that, indeed, they have things in common, things that are worth saying and worth saving.

They recognize each other's stories, whether the tellers are townspeople or farmers. The main themes of their stories are connection to the land, the centrality of family, the importance of a place to which they have contributed. And today there is a growing awareness of the need for safeguarding the local natural environment. At the core of rural stories is the land as a source of values. Rural thinking is influenced by the cycles of nature. It is not uncommon to hear that the land is our ultimate destination as well as our source for living.

### **The Land is Valued**

There are those who believe that part of our country's crisis of values results from more and more urban people being further and further removed from the land. There is concern that we are losing the leaven provided by having people in our midst who have a sense of the land. As the number of families working the land diminishes, the rural source for society's connection to the land and to the cycles of nature is drying up.

The memories and symbols derived from nature are beginning to disappear from our national urbanized culture. Increasing numbers of people, and especially children, have only a theoretical understanding of where food comes from. There are many people more familiar with processed potting soil than with the earth.

Appreciating rural values begins with acknowledging decline. There should be no blaming for rural loss. Farm people participated as much as anyone else in our



society's love affair with the big machine and the preset moment. The last 40 or 50 years of reducing the variety of crops, of mechanization, of insisting that fewer people carry out better agriculture have taken a toll. Cash crop farm families on food stamps tell us a lot about the lack of sustainable economics in the countryside.

Since humankind discovered agriculture, settled down by rivers, and started building cities, there has been tension between city and rural life. Cities have always been seen as beacons of opportunity and freedom to restless rural young.

But on the other hand, the reassertion of rural values and culture today could have significance for our self-understanding as a democratic country. Democracy is local. Rural life is one of the few local places still left, where people think and act locally, where not everything yet (although it's getting there) looks like everywhere else, and share homogenization of culture has not sapped a place of its individuality (i.e., Country Kitchens, McDonald's, etc.).

#### **Rural Values Can Be a Marketable Commodity**

One way of building rural economic revitalization is to count the nation's loss as rural communities' gain. In other words, the existence of rural values can be a marketable commodity in a society hungry for values. An integrated approach to rural development would include helping communities deliberately plan to market their values and to regard their life experience as a resource.

According to a 1985 Gallup Poll, "Given the opportunity, almost half of American adults would move to towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants or to rural areas. The vast majority now lives in or near cities with much larger populations." In order to take advantage of this apparent opportunity, rural communities need to think in new ways about their economics, their values, and their future.

In one southeastern Minnesota region, four towns, joined by a highway that runs along a ribbon of virgin prairie, are also aware of the surrounding sea of farmland they share. They have banded together into a regional authority to seek economic development. The four towns see opportunity for sustainable small business development related to environmental education and tourism. They ascribe economic potential to environmental education because of their own experience in learning about the significance of the prairie. More information on these towns of "Prairie Visions" is presented in Section Two on cooperation among rural towns. But the critical element in their organizing together is that they are examining new ways to harness their rural character to a market economy.

**Integrating the Rural Experience of Loss into Economic Potential**

When the members of several Minnesota communities met recently to plan cooperative action, they decided to have a gathering for their neighbors in surrounding townships. They chose this title: "Our Heritage and Our Future: Can Rural Communities and Farmers Survive, or Will We Vanish Like the Prairie?" They used it because they knew that it would trigger something in the heart of their neighbors in the townships. People know the experience of loss in America's rural heartland.

In rural towns and townships, where the economic base in farming has shifted from small family farms to fewer but bigger ones, three things often occur. First, a period of denial that can prevent recognition of the implications of the shift can set in. Then, there can be a panic which increases the competition with nearby communities. Finally, a loss of confidence hangs over the community. It is the rural face of loss, in which people at first deny the problem, then are angry over it, then dejected, then in a mood to barter things away. The goal of public policy is to help towns accept their changed status and get on with adapting to changed circumstances while preserving their values.

A further complicating factor is that these changing communities are also just beginning to awaken to the need to protect the local environment and food supply. This new awareness requires changes that can be threatening. Acknowledging environmental problems on top of the stress in rural economics is one thing. Agreeing on solutions is another.

One farmer who stopped spraying some of his acreage has not told his farmer neighbors when they meet for breakfast at the truck stop. "It might not work, and I'd look foolish." He knows about bigness, mechanization, chemicals, and the dangers in depending on one or two crops, but he's not so sure about solutions. "I think that big ideas got us into this mess. Big solutions aren't going to get us out of it. We have to look hard at why we fell for the big solutions to begin with. We went for the brass ring by putting profit and the bottom line ahead of other things. Why did we do that? We should have know better."

The rural experience of loss can power economic conversion when those who have experienced loss feel as comfortable telling their farmer neighbors about organic as

they do telling interviewers. The situation today among rural people is somewhat akin to a called-off marriage in which the partners are more at ease talking about their marriage with a therapist than with each other. We have found in our "rural discourses" that when people come together to share their stories, they do very well in sharing what's changed, what's lost, what is renewable.

### **Conflict and Rural Civic Life**

The civic life of small, rural towns reflects the positives and the negatives of rural culture and values. This is particularly true in the way civic conflict is handled. What does conflict in small towns often look like?

"We like to say that the old tradition of community barn-raising is still operating with us and shows that we have a strong value of cooperation. But lately, something else is happening. Sometimes when a farmer neighbor is in trouble, our first, and often guilty thought, is: "I wonder if he's going under; and I wonder if I can get his land for a good price." This remark by a Minnesota farmer exposes the negative side of rural values.

Rural values include an independence that attempts to stand alone against the forces of both nature and market. Without this stand-alone independence, we would have had neither frontier nor nation. But the shadow side of independence is competition. In rural communities, competition can take a personal turn and result in one person's success being interpreted as another person's failure. Competition can slip into envy. Envy is the nemesis of cooperation. And it is where conflict starts in rural America.

People see each other frequently and in different roles. Individual and family histories are well known. Social and political life is "face to face." Public expression of conflict tends to be avoided. Elected officials often serve as volunteers or work for a small stipend. In many places, there are no contests for public office. Frequently, there is a history of competitiveness with nearby towns based on high school sports. This competitiveness tends to carry over into a general attitude toward each other. Sometimes, whole towns have acquired local reputations, and individuals' reputations are to some degree bound to their town's reputation.

The boundaries between personal, public, and economic life are hazy. Private acts have much greater potential for becoming public acts. The inevitability of gossip influences personal choices and is often the main way conflict is expressed. If outsiders don't know this, they can't know what is going on. Conflict is usually

handled covertly rather than overtly. People do not object or disagree in public. They object and disagree in private, one-on-one, and in ways that can be personally critical.

If there is public disagreement, the reasons given publicly can mask the real story. For instance, in southern Minnesota historic tensions between Lutherans and Catholics carry over into the business and banking communities. Competitiveness in high school sports between towns can make it difficult to envision the towns' cooperating on other issues. Tension between old time residents and newcomers is common enough to be a staple plot in literature. When small towns are struggling with survival and population loss, contention between older and younger officials over the changing of the guard is destructive. Every willing citizen is needed. Conflict can interfere with efforts to diversify an economy and take advantage of a region's assets.

On the other hand, such face-to-face political environments where the personal can become the public at any moment are exactly the environment in which American democracy was born and from which earlier generations of our public leaders came. The New England town meetings, the Committees of Correspondence, and later immigrant associations all had similar characteristics to these small towns. People knew just about everything about everybody.

These communities provide a particular kind of American civic reality. The citizens' familiarity with one another and the manageable scale of their political and economic life can be their greatest ally. They have the potential to be an example of responsible self-governance in the midst of a larger society that seems to be increasingly unmanageable.

It is more effective to address conflict through prevention than to try to handle individual conflicts as they occur. Conflict that doesn't emerge publicly can paralyze a community's ability to progress. Leaders who recognize the dynamics behind rural small town conflicts can use conflict prevention in planning for long-range cooperation.

## 2. Cooperation Among Small Rural Towns to Address Economic Sustainability

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**Community Design Center has developed a conflict prevention model aimed at:**

1. Helping both elected officials and potential elected officials recognize the nature of their civic conflicts, how conflict influences their public life, and how it can inhibit their capacity to improve their economy.
2. Involving local people in design of conflict prevention programs which are appropriate for their situation and which they can implement in their region.
3. Incorporating conflict prevention programs into the ongoing work of cooperation between towns.
4. Developing of an orientation format for elected officials around conflict issues that can be used in small towns throughout the region. Such an orientation can help prepare citizens to serve as local officials and can enhance their capacity for leadership.

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Cooperative efforts toward local and regional economic sustainability grow out of willing attitudes, mutual understanding, and common resource sharing. Towns and townships need to rethink the way they relate to each other, to the larger cities near them, and to their region.

When Community Design Center begins working in rural areas, early meetings between elected officials and citizens are designed to make it possible for them to ask questions of themselves. When mayors and elected officials of rural towns spend time asking the questions, "Why do we need each other?", and "What are the challenges facing us?", the answers becomes apparent to them, such as:

- "By working together we can advertise the distinctive assets of the area and each town."
- "There is power in numbers."
- "If we have more people working together, as we are now, we aren't fighting."

- "Egos too big."
- "We need to carefully identify what sets this area apart from others and do what it takes to make it happen."
- "We need to think of ourselves as residents of an area that is interdependent, and that can become a strong economic area."
- "We need to aim for more cooperation, i.e., school districts, athletic activities, etc."
- "Expand our own awareness of the assets in this area."

**A Joint Powers Agreement that is multifaceted and long-term**

Basing local economic development on respect for rural values and culture means that communities need to build a reservoir of willing attitudes, mutual understanding, and shared experiences. All these can help rural communities begin acting in new ways in beginning long-term and multi-faceted official cooperation. The familiar joint powers agreement is an ideal vehicle. It can be used to address a series of mutual concerns in holistic and integrated ways.

Ordinarily, joint powers agreements are used for limited ad-hoc collaboration between jurisdictions to share services like fire or police or to deal with specific interjurisdictional concerns like water districts. But we are not talking about an ordinary use of joint powers. We are talking about using the joint powers agreement in a multidimensional way. Activities ranging from negotiating with industry to with state governments, to coordinating town festivals, to developing area wide economic strategies can provide a framework of experience through which local officials and citizens can work together across jurisdictions and for a long period of time.

Using joint powers in this way is a more creative way of using a legal structure. Its leadership is the elected officials and their designated surrogates. This is top-down organizing. But in very small towns, elected officials and ordinary citizens have close connections because of their face-to-face daily life. This approach is especially suitable for small rural towns. It seeds long-term collaborative economic revitalization.

The task is not to develop a new organization. The task is to help communities develop new ways of assessing and appreciating rural life, mutual cooperation, and local economic sustainability. Fostering such collaborative community action is aimed at developing attitudes and expectations of cooperation among towns as well as earning recognition at the federal, state, and regional bargaining tables. These things are necessary to support their goal of long-term coherent economic sustainability.

New regional patterns can develop out of such collaboration. Small towns who are cooperating can initiate discussions with people from larger cities in the region. Such dialogue can lay a foundation for elected officials thinking in new ways about the interdependence of the smaller towns and the larger towns, and possible mutual benefits of cooperation. For instance, cooperative ventures could be developed to insure the region's supply of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables, or to prepare plans for the best regional use of housing for families and seniors, water supply, transportation, etc.

In 1989-90, Community Design Center began helping four towns organize a collaboration called Prairie Visions. It is a joint-powers collaboration between the towns: Le Roy, Taopi, Rose Creek, and Adams, all located in Southeastern Minnesota's Mower County. Their populations range from 92 to 930. They are located along trunk Highway 56 near the Iowa border on some of the richest farmland on earth. The main population center (25,000) in Mower County is the city of Austin, a half-hour's drive from the furthest town of the four.

As with many United States rural towns, their economy has traditionally been based on farming and its auxiliary services. Also like other rural areas, in the lifetime of working local farmers, the number of farms along a 10 mile stretch of County Road 5 in Mower county have gone from 21 in 1950 to three in 1991.

Prairie Visions towns are in the section of the country where the great prairies began and remnants still survive. They regard this prairie remnant as one of their assets for economic development. Local people have only lately come to appreciate the prairie's significance. As the mayor of one town said, "I thought all these years I was walking in weeds." Now their prairie remnant is becoming something of a symbol for their history and their present situation.

Aware of the current that drains away their young people, the Prairie Visions towns are involving their youth in shaping the vision. Along with schools in other parts of southeastern Minnesota, the local school district has initiated a program in which high school students research the economics and assets of an area and present their suggestions for improvements to people of the community. It is a variation on the "Foxfire" initiative that

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came out of the south, where young people interview older community members to learn disappearing skills.

These four towns in Southeastern Minnesota have initiated a "Prairie Days" festival. This festival is promoted as "rural encounter" for Twin Cities metropolitan residents through the Science Museum of Minnesota, located in St. Paul. Families come as guests of the four towns, camp in a local park and go from town to town for special events. Rural families show urban families their particular style of hospitality, and urban families, particularly urban children, learn something about rural life.

Town leaders see this event as a building block to a deeper urban and regional connection for the area, resulting in statewide education, tourism, and attractiveness as a place to live. It is also the harbinger of an attitude that sees rural sustainability linked with urban sustainability--metropolitan areas linked to the surrounding countryside in commerce, energy policy, recreation, and environmental safeguarding.

Mayors and city councils from the four Prairie Visions towns have made a commitment to cooperate on such issues as education, recreation and tourism, social service, and economic development. At a recent meeting with the director of the State of Minnesota's community unit that oversees the state small city grant program, the director was describing how individual towns can apply for grant money. Prairie Visions representatives said they were not interested in competing as individual towns for these grants. This indicated a major change in thinking and attitude by key elected officials. The other citizens at the meeting supported them. In small towns where elected officials are part and parcel of the community, the use of this kind of multidimensional joint powers can have a great impact on the general civic life of the community.

Prairie Visions is participatory democracy at its most innovative. Perhaps 20-30 people--elected officials and other--take responsibility for the business of their collaboration. Much larger numbers of people participate in other activities, like storytelling afternoon that brought 45 people together from towns in several neighboring counties. Cooperative activities among towns have a strong representation of local elected officials who are integral to the work and to the planning. Except on rare occasions, officials seldom give speeches. The joint powers leadership core is extraordinary in proportion to the population



base. In contrast, urban neighborhood organizations with population bases of 10,000-30,000 and more, regularly operate with 20-30 core people or fewer.

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**Such a joint powers agreement has several distinguishing characteristics:**

- 1) It is an agreement between several jurisdictions for a broad range of activities rather than an ad hoc collaboration for specific service delivery. It is thus multidimensional and can include social service, program design and delivery, as well as economic development.
- 2) It is long-term and can be used for strategic long-term planning.
- 3) It requires that the participating towns contribute to an operational budget to support the activities of collaboration.
- 4) It enables a group of small towns to bargain as an entity in county, state and federal arenas.
- 5) It enables a region to have more power to define itself and to enforce standards for development.

- 3) **A technical assistance approach that builds an infrastructure of attitudes, beliefs, and understandings that can support cooperation and enable communities to have confidence in their own culture and values.**

The technical assistance offered rural communities should express a philosophy that is holistic, that integrates economic and community development, and that respects and builds on local strengths. Government policy should ensure priority for this kind of technical assistance.

Often government policy makers dismiss as "soft" or unquantifiable such activities as paying attention to values, cooperation, and attitude building. Technical assistance more often aims at revitalization in terms of "doing deals" that can be seen and measured. Job creation, business, industrial, retail, and housing development do require "deals," and measurement is their test. But their consequences, sometimes unintended, always affect the community. We need public policy that recognizes that building community self-confidence and creating a cooperative environment is as important to economic development as doing deals. In order to allow time for attitudes to change, technical assistance needs to be long-term.

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The first step is to help build the infrastructure of attitudes for cooperation, and this takes time. It requires a model that sets the tone for a collaborative and creative and entrepreneurial environment. The manner in which information and help is given is as important as what is said and done. Assistance needs to be given in a collaborative way and not with a top-down approach where the technical assistance provider "has the answers" or is viewed by the community as having the answers.

An important facet of the technical assistance job is coordination of other sources to ensure efficiency and appropriate timing. Food technical assistance needs to include a strong adult education component, community organizing and political analysis capacity, and flexibility. Standardized programs that include canned conferences, lectures, and strategy sessions are limited in their usefulness because no matter how similar problems may be, every town and group of towns has its own story and situation.

It can be an advantage if the technical assistance provider is an outsider. Evaluation interviews with people in Minnesota towns where an outside technical assistance person was working indicated that the technical assistance outsider had a definite advantage because such a person(s) was able to:

- 1) connect local people to outside resources
- 2) facilitate discussion and action that made things happen
- 3) avoid non-constructive local relationships
- 4) create an atmosphere that drew out the talents of local people
- 5) be effective because there wasn't a personal history or an outside agenda.

Outsiders, however, must work together and not at cross-purposes. State and county governments; university departments; private consultant, both profit and nonprofit; civic and advocacy groups devoted to the development of special aspects of rural life--all have a toll to play. But it's a team role.

Without an understanding of its history and values, a community can easily find itself overwhelmed by outsiders who treat the community as a non-renewable resource and then move on, leaving the community to disintegrate socially, economically, and politically.

Furthermore, the purpose of any technical assistance should be to help rural people benefit from, rather than be driven out by, the forces of change. More than just "benefit." The values and style of rural communities should influence any change. The task is not to stop change; it is to help communities do more acting than reacting. It is not to convince people that they have to live by the "market." They can use economics for their own advantage, building on their own culture and values, rather than be used by economic forces for some other larger and non-local entity's gain.

### **III. LOCALECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY: THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT**

No one deal can create a sustainable economic base. Local economic sustainability requires diversity, with economic development coming from many angles. An integrated approach to sustainable economic development requires nurturing all types of businesses, from the large to the tiny.

But often in the effort to develop business enterprise, the smallest enterprises are overlooked. Yet tiny, or "micro-" businesses have been the beginning of many huge corporations. Microbusinesses often have the appropriate scale for efficiency. They also possess the flexible, resilient scale necessary for introducing a new product or service to the marketplace.

In rural and urban areas, successful microbusinesses can inspire an entrepreneurial atmosphere that works as the leaven of self-confidence in a community. It is in the small and micro business, often serving as a supplemental income, that regional values and culture are best expressed.

In Latin America, the *microempresa* (tiny business) is regarded as indispensable to sustainable local community development. In this country, state and federal government, university, and community development generally have begun supporting "small business" development in rural areas. However, when "small business" is defined as companies having 100 - 500 employees with under \$3 million in sales, the "microbusiness" and its potential can be overlooked. More support is needed for creation for "kitchen table" variety businesses.

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Small local businesses in towns and on farms can provide supplemental income. Furniture and cabinet making can provide seasonal income without making a farmer leave home and the community to get a job. Farm and small town food processing are good examples of adding value near the point of raw material production, such as, fruits, grains, and vegetables. And there is available resident labor using underemployed small town and rural residents.

A community may need new vision to maximize its resources. For example, identifying buildings on the farm that are not being utilized, to use for a business that complements the existing farm business. A barn can be a good cabinet or machine shop. The use of existing land, buildings, tools, and other capital assets for a higher purpose is efficient. Returning the human resources, along with developing work skills and management acumen, is the basis for further economic development. Supplemental businesses often do not require great investment and risk, and may therefore grow and prosper without producing displacement and loss.

Some people are finding market niches like kosher and organic chickens, or specialty food processing, using local farm products. There is a growing market for organic foods. Communities can encourage farmers to grow and market organic produce for larger towns nearby.

This last point deserves underlining. A goal of this new economic order is to produce and sell locally what is now purchased from far away. If all the added value accrued from raw material to finished product can be retained or maximized in the community, a net economic gain takes place. In contrast, when a franchise quick-stop with gas, bread, and soda pop for sale opens in a highway location, in a new building, on the outskirts of a small town, key benefits are missed locally. Local buyers spend local money for gas produced elsewhere. The profits from the sale pay a franchise fee and interest on borrowed money.

Fostering these smaller business ventures in the planning of a local economy can have a strong cumulative economic effect in an area. The important characteristic of all such development is the reuse of existing resources and wealth, people, capital improvements, infrastructure and buildings, locally produced raw or waste or materials, in ways that can be marketed to buyers from outside economic bases.

The engine for such change might be a community foundation, shared among towns, which allows local people to combine providing for their security and still contribute. Their saved wealth goes to the future welfare of their community rather than some other community far away. All too often an estate and/or farm is broken up and sold and the assets left to a distant relative living in another part of the country. Nothing is left in the community where the wealth was created.

Creating an entrepreneurial atmosphere in a community requires a willingness to define resources in new ways. It means having lots of people in on the discussions. It means that civic discourse on local values, history, and assets includes enough residents to come to know each other's stories and to fully understand local history and present diversity. Communities can encourage systematic development of farm and rural vacations on a regional basis. They can develop education programs for church leaders, who sorely lack an understanding of rural issues, and for urban teachers to live for a period of time in a rural community as part of their curriculum in understanding diversity. Just as these groups went into the inner city to meet minorities, they ought to be going into rural communities.

With good information and technical assistance, rural communities can better decide what is important to them and what is a better plan for an economic life that respects their own unique history, resources, and people. Most business development assistance is directed toward the individual entrepreneur who is presumed to have ideas, nerve, stamina, and capital. Successful entrepreneurs tend to be practical people. Farmers, as entrepreneurs, can be like that too. So can housewives and old people and socially ignored people. Successful entrepreneurs come in all descriptions.

The task of holistic technical assistance and of joint powers leaders is to bring and keep different sorts of local people together. It is important to keep them talking. One conversation and one activity builds on another.

Creating a "can do" entrepreneurial atmosphere in a community does not require that everyone run a business. But it does require creating an environment in which diverse businesses can flourish and ideas are valued, nurtured, and supported, however small. Some will always be small, and appropriately so, providing supplemental income. Some may have potential to expand over time and should be encouraged to stay.

A "can do" entrepreneurial atmosphere emphasizes the message that there are indeed opportunities and good ideas that can be fostered and developed right in the community. For when a small business is seen as a success in a community, that success is a spur to

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confidence for others. It creates local pride and a belief that it is possible "to make it here." And that's what economic sustainability is all about!

Ultimately, economic sustainability for rural areas of the Midwest and western United States hinges on cooperation between urban and rural sectors. It is in the Midwest and West that cities still have an organic connection to the surrounding countryside. It is the role of leadership in these states to commit the forces of government to work together with local communities, urban and rural, and to educate their people. No city, no town, no farm, is an island. Leadership's vision must enable citizens to one again come together, sit down, and listen to each other.



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