



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud

Reluctant rural regionalists

Peter V Hall*, Pamela Stern

Centre for Sustainable Community Development, West Mall Complex 2622, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada V5A 1S6

A B S T R A C T

Keywords:
Regionalism
Regionalization
Rural administration
Heritage tourism
Canada

Recently, scholars have begun to explore questions of regionalism and regionalization in rural contexts. Regionalism is often understood and presented as a pragmatic solution to intractable problems of fragmentation, inefficiency, accountability, spillover and neglect in the face of economic restructuring and other external threats. These arguments have long been deployed in the top-down restructuring of rural public administration; for example, the amalgamation of service districts to keep schools, hospitals and other facilities open in the face of declining population. At the same time, regionalization may be understood as a ‘means’ or process of becoming through the formation of new and shared regional identities, “structures of expectation” and institutions. Between 1996 and 2004 the number of municipalities in the Canadian Province of Ontario was reduced by more than 40 percent from 815 to 445. Evidence suggests that many of these amalgamations were undertaken reluctantly. In this paper we examine the issue of regionalism from the perspective of one rural municipality—the former silver mining centre of Cobalt, Ontario—that has resisted amalgamation. We argue that its resistance to amalgamation is a consequence of the conflictual social relationships that have been inscribed into the landscape over the past century. Using documentary and archival materials, supplemented by contemporary survey and ethnographic data, we trace how successive generations of miners, mine-owners, government officials, politicians and residents have constructed Cobalt as a distinct place. We show that this oppositional identity belies the extent to which the town and its citizens are embedded in regional housing, labour and consumer markets.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Somewhat belatedly, scholars have begun to explore questions of regionalism and regionalization in rural contexts (Goodwin, 1998; Hamin and Marcucci, 2008; Hamin, 2007). Planners often approach regionalism in instrumental and outcome-oriented terms, viewing new regional governance structures and organizations as an end goal. Especially in its current North American metropolitan manifestation, regional governance has been seen as a solution to intractable problems of fragmentation, inefficiency, unaccountability, negative spillovers and neglect (Orfield, 1997; Rusk, 1999; Wheeler, 2002; Brenner, 2002). These same approaches also have been deployed in guiding the (re)organization of rural public administration in the face of economic restructuring; for example, in the amalgamation of service districts to keep schools, hospitals and other facilities open in the face of economic and population decline (Slack et al., 2003; Rainnie and Grobbelaar, 2005). Likewise, in growing rural areas, regional solutions are sought to problems of externalities, such as where recreational and cottage developments in unincorporated areas may create untaxed fiscal obligations for adjacent municipalities (Goodwin, 1998; Law,

2001). There have also long been calls for regional management in rural areas to address a range of ecological concerns; for instance, watershed management, habitat conservation, and farmland protection (Beatley and Manning, 1997). In some sense, thus, rural regionalism shares with its metropolitan sibling, an underlying assumption that new, or at least reformed, regional governance arrangements can assist in addressing contemporary challenges in the arenas of local government finance, economic development, and environmental protection.

At the same time, regionalization may be understood as a means or *process of becoming* through the formation of new and shared regional identities, “structures of expectation” and institutions (Paasi, 1991: p. 249; see also Larsen, 2003; Paasi, 2003; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Jonas and Pincetl, 2006). Here the focus is less on regional governance as an end or outcome, but rather on the processes, dialogue, communication and sharing that are a means of creating common understandings, expectations, identities and actions. Drawing on the work of Paasi (1991), Hamin and Marcucci (2008) argue that “for rural regionalist efforts, successful structures of expectation will centre on landscape-related questions.” Hence for them, one indication of rural regionalist success is coalition-building across traditional lines of division over the landscape between farmer, forester, rancher and environmentalist (Hamin,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 778 782 6691; fax: +1 778 782 5297.
E-mail addresses: pvhall@sfu.ca (P.V. Hall), pamela_stern@sfu.ca (P. Stern).

2007). These authors are drawn to Paasi's work in regional geography because his writings emphasise agency, or the role of particular actors in initiating, shaping, and enacting new regional structures and identities (see also Bryant, 1995; Gilbert, 1988).

Power is exercised in both the governance arrangements of formal regionalism and in the process of regionalization, albeit in very different ways. In this regard, Paasi (2003) draws a useful distinction between the identity of a region and regional identity:

The former points to those features of nature, culture and people that are used in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, governance and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one region from others. These classifications are always acts of power performed in order to delimit, name and symbolize space and groups of people. Regional consciousness points to the multi-scalar identification of people with those institutional practices, discourses and symbolisms that are expressive of the 'structures of expectations' that become institutionalized as parts of the process that we call a 'region' (478 *italics in original*).

Thus, the identity of a region and regional identity both emerge through political processes. We find Cox's (1998) theorization of 'spaces of dependence' and 'spaces of engagement' useful in understanding the political dimensions of the regionalization process. Spaces of dependence are the sites of lived experience which provide actors with "place-specific conditions for [their] material well being and [their] sense of significance" (2), while spaces of engagement are the spaces "in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds" (2). Cox argues that these 'spaces of engagement' are constructed by actors (people, firms, local governments, etc) through networks that may reach both outside or within existing localities. While both the spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement may be regional, this is not necessarily the case. Instead, the actual working out of the regionalization process is contingent and political. There is thus every reason to expect that mismatches, tensions and conflict will exist between the emergent regional identity (or space of dependence), and the formal political identification (a space of engagement) of the region sought by particular interests.

In this paper we ask whether, and under what conditions, the regionalist project is likely to be more or less successful in rural, or rather non-metropolitan, areas. What are the prospects for regional governance arrangements, and what are the prospects for formation of regional identities and spaces of engagement in rural areas? How is power exercised in the pursuit of regional governance and identity in rural areas, and in whose interests? We explore these questions through a single case study, and conclude that there are considerable obstacles to the rural regionalist project. We argue that these obstacles have their roots in the contradictions inherent in the regionalization process in rural areas.

Our case study is Cobalt (pop. 1200), a former silver mining town in the Timiskaming District (pop. 33,300) of northeastern Ontario. In the last decade, in a context where the Ontario provincial government was actively pursuing the regional consolidation of municipal governments, each of Cobalt's neighbouring municipalities in the southern end of the district concluded a formal annexation or amalgamation. In 1997 Coleman Township, which surrounds Cobalt, annexed a previously unincorporated area known as Bass Lake containing lake-side cottages, some owned by Cobalters. To the north, the City of Temiskaming Shores (pop. 10,700) formed in 2001 with the amalgamation of Dymond Township, Haileybury, and New Liskeard. And Latchford, to the south, annexed Gillies Limit, an unincorporated portion of the district traversed by a natural gas pipeline. Cobalt, though engaged in both formal and informal discussions about amalgamating with each of these neighbours, could not resolve longstanding political differences.

Consequently, its boundaries and formal governance arrangements remain unchanged. This is not to say that Cobalt is not tightly integrated into the wider settlement region; it is part of a single regional housing, labour, and consumption market, and both the town and individual citizens participate in a variety of regional forums, organizations, and activities. But, we argue that the regionalist project in contemporary rural areas is likely to be confounded or frustrated by the differentiating nature of the very regionalization processes that create the demands for regionalism in the first place.

Marsden (1998) has drawn attention to the importance of differentiation within the countryside in the United Kingdom, and Persson and Westholm (1994) note a similar dynamic in Sweden. Marsden argues that the contemporary 'post-productionist' rural spaces are less likely to be shaped by agriculture (or resource extraction in the northern Ontario context), and instead are increasingly shaped by a variety of local and non-local networks, supply chains and regulatory systems which combine in particular places in highly variable ways. Hence, "we have to conceive rural spaces as ensembles of local and non-local connections, of combinations of local actions and actions 'at a distance', situated in regional economies and different institutional contexts. In this sense, different rural spaces have different combinations of networks to which they are connected" (Marsden, 1998:109). Certainly, our observations in the Cobalt region support the contention that contemporary processes of change in rural areas are highly uneven; and echoing Cox (1998), we also observe that Cobalt is engaged in both regional and extra-regional networks.

Our more general argument is that regionalization processes in non-metropolitan areas share two characteristics. First, they build upon existing strong local identities, and second, they share with other processes of capitalist development, the characteristics of being differentiating. The result is that the lived experience of regionalization is simultaneously including and excluding. In other words, the various region-scale processes in market, governmental and civil society arenas that implicate rural localities into regional formations (and for that matter, national and global formations) also undermine prospects for the successful creation of shared, regional structures of expectation. Reluctant rural regionalists, individuals and communities who planners often assume would benefit from regionalism but who frequently resist more integrated regional governance, are created through this process. As we demonstrate below, the unevenness that results from consolidations of services is perceived as disadvantaging some parts of the new regional entity. The regional project in rural areas will be resisted, and is likely to fail, if this dynamic is not addressed. From the perspective of the most marginal communities in a region, this may not be the worst outcome.

This paper draws on evidence collected during repeated research visits to Cobalt since 2004 as part of a larger study of citizen engagement in community and economic development. Data collection activities have included over 40 in-depth ethnographic interviews¹ with current and former mayors and councillors, business owners, residents and government officials, a questionnaire survey conducted during the summer of 2006 and to which over half the adult residents of the town responded, and review of archival sources. We ensured that our formal interview respondents reflected a diversity of opinions by, for example, recruiting all but one of the living former mayors, as well as former councillors known to have disagreed with each other. We also sought interviews with residents less likely to have held elected

¹ Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. As part of the research protocol, a signed consent to record the interview was obtained from each participant. All individuals quoted by name gave additional written consent to be identified.

positions, including older women and young adults. We lived in town while conducting the research, and so our formal data gathering efforts are supplemented by numerous informal interviews, conversations, and direct observation of daily community life. Our approach is ethnographic; we seek general understandings through an exploration of the rich complexities of a single case.

1. Cobalt's region

In the preface to their 1968 report to the now defunct Tri Town² and Area Planning Board, the consulting engineering and planning firm of Marshall, Macklin and Monaghan wrote of their disappointment at what they saw as a failed effort to engage in regional planning. The Tri Town and Area Planning Board, which had been constituted by the Ontario Department of Municipal Affairs in 1966, was charged with developing a coherent region-wide approach to municipal planning. Marshall, Macklin and Monaghan, however, were stymied in their effort to treat the district as a single region. They wrote that

The Official Plan started out with a regional approach, taking the problem of future development on an area-wide basis with the major emphasis on a [sic] urban corridor in the north-east section of the Tri Town and Area. This development rationale was found to be unacceptable to a number of the member municipalities of the Tri Town and Area Planning Board. A new approach was required which would put greater emphasis on the individual roles that the local municipalities would play. There have been many meetings with the member municipalities to resolve this aspect of separate but interacting aspirations for the future of the Tri Town and Area. The result is an area-wide approach to the future but with full cognisance of the particular role each municipality will fulfill in both economic and social terms (Marshall Macklin Monaghan, Ltd, 1968a: preface).

In their contemporaneous Urban Renewal Study for the Tri Town and Area, Marshall, Macklin and Monaghan again appealed to their clients to see the region as a coherent unit,

The economic activities carried on in the towns of the Area are complementary to one another. A rise or fall in economic activity in any part of the Tri Town Area will affect the whole area and will not be limited to the town in which it occurred...For example, the establishment of a new basic industry in New Liskeard would benefit the whole area rather than New Liskeard alone because labour would be drawn from all towns, and wages would be spent in all towns. Similarly, the establishment of a shopping centre, in say Haileybury, would reduce the sales of stores in Cobalt, New Liskeard and Latchford, because the towns would be close enough for it to draw shoppers from the whole area. Again, the demolition of housing in Cobalt would increase rents and the cost of living in Haileybury and New Liskeard because people displaced would increase pressure on accommodation in those towns.... From a policy point of view, therefore, the Tri Town Area is a self-contained economic entity, in the sense that any policy measure taken within the Area would have spread effects over the whole Tri Town Area, but the spill-over into neighbouring areas would be very limited (Marshall Macklin Monaghan, Ltd, 1968b: Appendix 2, p.13).

Their reasoning is undoubtedly correct. Yet, both the Urban Renewal Study and the Official Plan are structured in a way that

presents each municipality as a distinct entity, describing the housing, employment, industry, commercial activity, and infrastructure separately for each municipality. The planners also accepted the local view that Cobalt's mining legacy presented unique planning issues, and thus it required a separate urban renewal study.³

The municipalities of the Tri Town Area were all incorporated during the first decade of the 20th century, and though they developed in concert and are part of a single economic region and administrative district, they established distinct and separate identities and socio-economic niches. The Township of Dymond in the Little Clay Belt, a remnant glacial lake bed, remained agricultural until the 1960s when, following the construction of the Highway 11 bypass, it transformed into something resembling an edge city, with a shopping mall, big box retail, motels, service stations, and tract housing. New Liskeard, originally created from Dymond Township, developed as an agriculture service and retail centre and it remains so today. Retail sales data (cited in Marshall Macklin Monaghan, Ltd, 1968b: p. 18) indicate that New Liskeard was well established as the regional trade centre prior to the construction of the highway bypass. The amalgamation of New Liskeard and Dymond (with Haileybury) allowed New Liskeard to recapture the property taxes, retail and commercial activity lost from its downtown since the 1970s.

Haileybury, in contrast, developed as a bedroom community to the Cobalt and Coleman mining camps, with a number of mine-owners and managers building large homes in an area along Lake Temiskaming still known as 'millionaires row'. At the same time, Haileybury enacted a by-law against carrying lunch pails in order to discourage actual miners from living there. In 1912, it became the judicial seat for the District of Timiskaming,⁴ and still retains the district courthouse and land registry office as well as the Haileybury School of Mines. A catastrophic fire in 1922 destroyed both commercial and residential sections of the town from which Haileybury's commercial sector never fully recovered.

The Town of Cobalt was incorporated in 1906 following discovery of silver three years earlier by workers extending the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railroad to the farming towns to the north. Cobalt, which is an administrative island carved out of Coleman Township, was from the start an urban centre with shops, restaurants, banks, a stock exchange, a YMCA, churches, dance halls, theatres, hotels, and an electric streetcar. And from the outset, this small town existed in tension with the surrounding rural township (Baldwin and Duke, 2005). Coleman Township contained many more mining properties than Cobalt, and the mining companies successfully fought efforts to include Coleman in any service provision that might create tax obligations for the mines. The conflict between the two municipalities was then much as it is at present: Cobalt regards itself as an urban centre, albeit a tiny one, with urban amenities—library, arena, parks, sidewalks, street-lamps, public water and sewer, garbage collection, etc—and some Cobalt residents resent that Coleman constrains its physical growth. Coleman residents make use of many of these amenities, and while the Township contributes financially as it chooses, it and its citizens vigorously resist any attempt to incorporate it formally in the town of Cobalt or even to acknowledge that its financial contributions to the operation of the arena or the library are any more than voluntary.

² The name Tri Town is a reference to the towns of Cobalt, New Liskeard, and Haileybury. The name, though now largely obsolete, survives in the names of a few regional institutions such as the Tri-Town & District Chamber of Commerce.

³ The Department of Municipal Affairs acceded to a Cobalt-specific urban renewal study to examine the possibility of developing mining heritage tourism. The study was not carried out because the federal government, under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau ended all federal support for urban renewal programs in 1969.

⁴ We follow local official naming conventions with regards to the District of Timiskaming, Lake Temiskaming and the City of Temiskaming Shores.

Long-time Cobalters often speak of the two municipalities as one, as in “to me Cobalt means Cobalt-Coleman” (Helene Culhane in interview with PS, June 2006), but this view is not shared by most Coleman residents. Compare the perspectives of a former mayor of Cobalt and the current mayor of Coleman.

Former Cobalt mayor: They [Coleman residents] use all of our facilities, which again nobody in Cobalt has ever said anything about it, you know. They use our library, they use our, our arena, they use our post office. And nobody really cares. They're the ones that seem to bring all these things up all the time... [E]verything was joint basically. And the way we look at it, well, the arena is there so you know, the more the merrier. The library is there, the more the merrier. Like you know, if you've got some money to spare, you wouldn't mind throwin' a little bit our way. Well, we'll appreciate it no doubt, but... I'm sure that you can talk to most people in Coleman Township. Their address is Cobalt, you know. And that they still believe themselves to be Cobalt, but it's just the newcomers that want this distinct society type of thing ... “We want our own identity” (interview with PS, May 2006).

Coleman mayor: [I]t's like marriage almost, like you know, if you are not going to work together, you know, you may as well separate. You know, you've got to do it whatever it is, if it's boundaries or what. You know you work together and be a little bit more understanding....

Later in the same interview, the Coleman Mayor commented: I just wish we could just all work together and get somewhere together, Cobalt, Coleman, Latchford, you know. But don't ask me to get married (interview with PS and PH, June 2007).

There is nothing new about the tensions between Cobalt and Coleman. Throughout its history Cobalt, under fiscal pressure, has made periodic efforts to amalgamate with or annex portions of Coleman Township, and less frequently, to abandon its municipal charter and become part of the township (Baldwin, 2005; Marshall Macklin Monaghan, Ltd, 1968b: p. 6). After declining to join with New Liskeard, Dymond and Haileybury in the formation of the City of Temiskaming Shores in 2001, Cobalt initiated amalgamation talks with Coleman and Latchford; these talks began in 2005 but soon collapsed when Latchford successfully annexed Gillies Limit with its taxable natural gas pipeline. A 2006 proposal from Cobalt to annex a portion of Coleman Township met stiff resistance. Arguably, any one of the proposed amalgamations could have been handled differently with potentially different results. Although limited in scope, in Ontario, amalgamation proposals trigger strategic planning reviews of the financial costs and benefits of the proposal. However, Cobalters' objections to merging with Temiskaming Shores and Coleman's objections to merging with Cobalt were not based on either the planning process or the business case, but instead had more to do with concerns about the loss of local decision-making about the provision of public services.

Yet, despite these recent examples of how Cobalt has both resisted amalgamation, and has itself been rejected, the Town is implicated in a variety of regional governance arrangements that all fall short of formal regional integration. In this respect, Cobalt is no different from other rural municipalities in Ontario (see Douglas, 2005). We distinguish three types of regional cooperation: (1) formal governmental structures all of which are created by top-down regionalism from the Province of Ontario (and to a limited extent, the Federal government); (2) voluntary inter-governmental cooperation typically around shared service delivery; and (3) regional non-governmental organizations.

First, there is top-down regional reorganization of municipal government enacted by the Province of Ontario, most notably through the creation in northern Ontario of eleven District Social

Services Administration Boards⁵ in 1998 under the Provincial Government's Local Services Realignment policy. The District of Temiskaming Social Services Administration Board (DTSSAB) was formed in 1999 and has since assumed responsibility for employment assistance for people receiving social assistance (Ontario Works), day care, land ambulance, and social housing. Other examples of top-down regionalism in the province include district school and health boards. There are also various provincial and federal agencies that have devolved control to regionally appointed boards, including the South Temiskaming Community Futures Development Corporation which provides support for small business development in Temiskaming Shores, Cobalt, Latchford and surrounding communities.

Second, Cobalt selectively collaborates with its neighbours in the provision of public services. With Temiskaming Shores, Cobalt provides a subsidized bus and paratransit service, and landfill and recycling services. Cooperation with the smaller neighbours is more commonly in the form of joint applications to higher levels of government for funding. With Coleman and Latchford, Cobalt successfully applied to the provincial government for two community sponsored doctors. And Coleman recently stood with Cobalt to oppose efforts to close the local public school. Although it recognizes that its citizens make use of the recycling facilities in Cobalt, Coleman has declined to contribute financial support for this service. It does, however, redirect its per capita provincial allocation for library services to the Cobalt Public Library. Cobalt also participates in the James Bay Tourism Association, a regional tourism marketing association encompassing all of northeastern Ontario.

At the same time, there are several examples of where voluntary regional cooperation has broken down. The ability of municipalities to enter and exit these voluntary arrangements with relative ease may be to the detriment of the most marginal residents of the region. For example, for as long as anyone can remember, Coleman and Cobalt operated a joint volunteer fire department that was both a public safety and fraternal service organization. Coleman's 1997 annexation of the cottage properties at Bass Lake, however, precipitated a bitter conflict over the proper allocation of costs for providing fire protection to the rural cottages. Rather than increase its contribution to the combined fire department, Coleman opted to establish a separate fire department close to the new properties at the southern end of the township. Not only does each town now maintain individual fire departments at considerable cost, each department operates with a smaller complement of fire fighters and engages in fewer fraternal service activities. In addition, the less well-heeled year-round residents in the northern portion of Coleman Township are disadvantaged by having less certain fire protection. The ending of a joint summer camp at Bass Lake constitutes another failed collaborative effort between Coleman and Cobalt. Some collaborative efforts between Cobalt and Temiskaming Shores have also collapsed, most notably a regional Strategic Economic Development Unit (SEDU). In the lead-up to its formation in 2002, the SEDU engaged municipal officials from the region in a strategic planning effort SEDU still exists but without the participation of Cobalt.

Third, there are a variety of non-governmental organizations active across the region. In the 1970s, the separate Cobalt, Haileybury and New Liskeard Chambers of Commerce merged to form the

⁵ Following the decision by the Provincial government to exclude Muskoka from Northern Ontario for development funding purposes, the Muskoka District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) was dissolved and its functions taken over by the District Municipality of Muskoka. Note that in the Temiskaming case, as in all other parts of Northern Ontario, DSSABs have not transformed into Area Service Boards (ASB) as contemplated in the *Northern Services Boards Act* (MNDM, 2000). This legislation contemplates ASBs as nascent regional governments that take on a wide array of functions, including land use and economic development.

Tri-Town Chamber of Commerce; subsequently this Chamber expanded to include other towns in the District (such as Earlton, 30 km north of New Liskeard). Other examples include Temfund which supports local manufacturing enterprises using a loan fund established after the closure of mines in 1988, the charitable Tri-Town Foundation, sporting clubs and leagues (e.g. minor hockey, the Cobalt-Haileybury Curling Club), a Coleman and Cobalt Lions Club, and a food bank based in Cobalt serving clients from Latchford, Coleman, and Cobalt. Cobalt is the site of several cultural institutions that draw people from across the region; the Northern Ontario Art Association has operated an artists' colony annually since 1958, the Deepwater Theatre School runs a summer theatre program for older children and teens, and the Classic Theatre, now a private non-profit organization, provides a venue for professional and amateur music, theatre, and art.

Having reviewed the range of regional planning efforts, and the actual regional cooperation that does exist, we find ourselves pulled in two directions. On the one hand, these efforts would appear to reflect the kind of ad hoc, voluntary, and complexly overlapping regionalism depicted in much of the recent planning literature (Innes and Gruber, 2005; Hamlin and Marcucci, 2008). One might argue that Cobalt's brand of 'regionalism light' is alive and well. On the other hand, given all this regional engagement, we ask why, when presented with opportunities to move towards a more formal integration, did Cobalt and its neighbours balk at the prospect? This is especially puzzling in the Ontario context, where successive provincial governments have sought regional consolidation of the municipalities that fall under their control (Sancton, 2001). While many of the instances of regional cooperation are positive, it is significant that these regional efforts, some of which have included strategic planning processes, have not produced a more thoroughly regional governance model.

2. Cobalt's reluctant rural regionalists

From a rationalist planning perspective, the arguments for greater regional cooperation, and eventual formal integration appear compelling. In what follows, we review the evidence of regionalization, highlighting the contradictory nature of this process and the persistence of arguments for localism. In the process we identify a series of institutional and cultural factors which militate against greater regional integration.

One institutional factor that works against regional cooperation is the structure of funding for local development activities. Over the past decade changes in provincial-municipal funding arrangements have shifted considerable service delivery and decision-making to local government (Siegel, 2004; Douglas, 2005), but have required these same local governments to become 'entrepreneurial' in order to fund those services. This pressure on local governments often contributes to conflicts between adjacent jurisdictions over service delivery. Cobalt has thus far met the fiscal challenges by pursuing development grants to support mining heritage tourism. These grants include money for public infrastructure like 'vintage' street lamps, a new roof for the historic building which houses the town office, and walking trails as well as for tourism marketing studies

and business plans. Cobalt's success in attracting these tourism development funds has depended, in part, upon it asserting its unique mining heritage. Parks Canada was persuaded to declare the town a national historic district in 2001, and Cobalt's withdrawal from the amalgamation talks with Temiskaming Shores is widely (if mistakenly) explained outside the town as necessary to preserve its heritage designation.

The reorganization of municipal funding relationships has made the regionalism project more difficult; however, we are not persuaded that funding arrangements alone are sufficient to explain Cobalt's reluctant rural regionalism. While these funding arrangements do imply—to again use Cox's (1998) terminology - an extra-regional 'space of engagement', this exists in tension with Cobalt's local and regional 'space of dependence'. This mismatch contributes to Cobalters' continued politics of distinctiveness. Hence we also look specifically to the way in which Cobalt residents have come to understand their place in the world, especially in relation to the surrounding communities and jurisdictions. We do not regard these cultural or subjective elements as simply standing in opposition to rationalists' arguments for regional government that reference markets, municipal finances or the environment. In other words, we reject the notion that local identity is a fetter which needs to be removed in order to promote or pursue the regionalism agenda. Instead, we argue that local identities are closely connected to the regionalization processes themselves—they flow from them and are shaped by them.

2.1. Markets

While residents of Cobalt are enmeshed in regional housing, labour and consumption markets, they assert a separate class identity in relation to these markets and to the other communities implicated in these regional markets. We review the contradictory regionalization created by each of these markets in turn.

Cobalt is incorporated into regional housing markets as evidenced by the migration histories and intentions of residents, yet Cobalt is incorporated as a low-income neighbourhood in the region. This status is visible across a range of standard socio-economic indicators (see Table 1). Residential histories reveal significant circulation within the Timiskaming District. In a questionnaire survey of Cobalt residents ($n=407$), we asked adults where they were born, and also to name the three places (besides Cobalt) that they had lived the longest. 30.1% of Cobalt adults were born in the town, but only 9.6% had never lived outside town. Of the over 90% of residents who had lived outside the town, fully one-third named somewhere else in the Timiskaming District as the other place they had lived the longest. Future residential intentions also reveal likely continued circulation within the District with 28.9% of Cobalt adults indicating that they intend to move out of Cobalt within the next 5 years. We asked respondents to indicate up to three places they intended to move, although very few indicated more than one intended future residence. 34.3% of the places named by those intending to leave Cobalt within the next five years were within Timiskaming District.

Table 1
Socio-economic indicators, population census 2006

	Population	Median annual family income (\$)	% Of personal income from govt. transfers (%)	Median annual earnings of full-time workers (\$)	Unemployment rate (%)	Participation rate (%)
Town of Cobalt	1,229	36,611	30	34,750	11	48
City of Temiskaming Shores	10,732	59,505	15	40,361	7	62
District of Timiskaming	33,283	55,555	18	39,485	8	59
Province of Ontario	12,160,282	69,156	10	44,748	6	67

Source: Statistics Canada.

House prices are lower in Cobalt than elsewhere in the Tri Town. Low house prices in Cobalt result in a higher owner-occupation rate (76.2%) there than in the District (74.1%) or the province (67.8%). While Cobalt does not have significant private rental housing, it does have significant social housing. According to housing administrators in the district, this social housing is highly desirable, and the region-wide social housing allocation mechanisms further implicate Cobalt in the regional housing market. The Cochrane–Temiskaming Native Housing Corporation manages 213 housing units across the Districts of Hearst, Cochrane and Temiskaming, of which 30 units are in Cobalt. Manager Mike Chamandy stated that Cobalt is a desirable location because it has services within town and it is centrally located with respect to employment centres in New Liskeard, Kirkland Lake and Temagami. Anna McGonigal of the DTSSAB echoed many of these sentiments: the DTSSAB is responsible for two two-storey one-bedroom apartment buildings and a few privately owned Rental Supplement Units in Cobalt. McGonigal argued that Cobalt is taking its fair share of the social housing units, although she noted that the Rental Supplement Units were located in Haileybury and Cobalt and not in New Liskeard where the private rental market was stronger. So it is possible that social housing allocation processes further concentrate poor households in Cobalt.

Residents of Cobalt well understand the relationship between the regional housing market and the socio-economic character of their community. For example, in an interview a retired Cobalt businessman asserted,

Cobalt has digressed, I guess, for lack of a better word, to basically being a bedroom community. And it's a bedroom community that has a low economic base on top of that. Like the income of a majority of the Cobalt people is very low. There are very few professional people live in town. The real estate values are next to nothing. Because, like I tried to explain to some people one time ... that I can get you a good 24 x 40 or 44 bungalow home in the Town of Cobalt, fully serviced, say 10, 15 years old, and you'd be able to buy that home for \$50,000. ... You get that same house and put it in Haileybury, and it's going to cost you close to \$100,000.

Q: It's that big a difference?

A: Oh yes. And then you go to New Liskeard and add another 25 or 30,000 to that. So I said well when you go, which they now call Temiskaming Shores, but they're still Haileybury and New Liskeard and so on. When you have \$10,000 in your pocket, you want to buy a *home* and you're close enough to everything in Cobalt 'cause you're only 10 miles at the furthest. If you buy in Cobalt you'd have a \$40,000 mortgage... You go to Haileybury and you're going to have, say, a \$90,000 mortgage. You go to Liskeard and you're going to have a \$125,000 mortgage. I said, "Which is the best mortgage to have?" There's no—it's a no-brainer, as they say.

Q: So, did that convince people to...?

A: No. Doesn't matter. Nope, don't want to live in Cobalt (interview with PS, May 2006).

Cobalt residents have daily activity systems that bring them into regular contact with the residents of other towns in the region: this is especially the case in consumption markets. However, inclusion in these consumption markets serves to remind residents of Cobalt of the lack of retail services in their own town. In our survey we asked respondents to indicate which places they usually engaged in a variety of activities. We include here only those activities where residents have choices about where to engage in the activity; for example, since there is no grocery store in Cobalt, we do not include grocery shopping in this analysis. Using these data we have been able to identify whether Cobalt, Temiskaming Shores or 'somewhere outside the District' is their dominant location for social,

services and shopping activities. We found that Cobalters travel widely for social interaction, tend to stay in Cobalt for services, and overwhelmingly go to Temiskaming Shores for shopping activities (Table 2). The lack of commercial services and work in town strongly influences this pattern of regional behaviour. A former mayor described an unsuccessful effort to establish a co-op grocery store in Cobalt thus:

We can go to Haileybury and New Liskeard to do our shopping. We've got corner stores, you know... And I don't think a co-op grocery store would have worked here because we still have to go to New Liskeard to buy a pair of socks for example... We've had grocery stores that shut down. ... I don't think the people of the town would have supported it enough - not that they didn't want to. But like I said, if you have to go to New Liskeard to buy a pair of socks, I might as well stop and get my groceries, too. And most people work out of town now (George Othmer, interview with PS, May 2006).

Yet, we were consistently reminded by respondents that Cobalt used to be a commercial hub in the region. The town's new Visitor's Welcome Centre repeats this message in displays and in an introductory video that speaks about the dance halls, department stores, hotels and banks that were in town in earlier times. Indeed, Cobalters participate in a discourse that recalls a much more vibrant commercial life than ever was the case in their lifetimes. Consumption activities, and the discourses around consumption, thus serve to remind Cobalters of their inferior insertion into the region. According to the current mayor of Cobalt,

Cobalt was the business centre at one time. So there's still a lot of resentment from a lot of the older people especially that industry took from us. But it's location, location, location. They're [Dymond] at the intersection. Was a highway and mall was built. Like there was opportunity apparently for Coleman to have that mall and they turned it down years ago... But and you know there's only so much population, so I mean you're going to go where you can get everything that you want. And people shop in Liskeard, but there is resentment from the older people in Cobalt, so. ... We did have everything here, but it will never be that way again. There's no way. It's all, you know, it's enough to keep things going and to keep the town going. But the way it is now, it's not. (Andre Belanger, interview with PS, May 2006).

The regional labour market connects Cobalt residents to regional housing and consumption markets; however, evidence suggests that the decline of retail services occurred before the decline in employment in the town. Respondents to a 1972 community survey also complained about the loss of local retail and the need to travel to New Liskeard to buy socks (L.I.P., 1972). In the labour market, too, Cobalt residents find themselves incorporated in a marginal way. Three-quarters of working adults are employed outside of the town, with three-fifths (60.6%) working in Temiskaming Shores alone (Table 3). However, Cobalt residents, even those employed full-time, earn less on average than residents of the other parts of the Tri Town area, or indeed the Temiskaming District

Table 2
Dominant location for activities of Cobalt residents, Cobalt Survey 2006

	Social (relatives, friends, church)	Services (library, doctor)	Shopping (buy gas, use ATM, eat out)
None identified or other	38.3	30.7	22.1
Cobalt	36.4	40.3	10.1
Temiskaming Shores	14.5	27.8	67.6
Outside district	10.8	1.2	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Cobalt Community Survey, authors.

Table 3
Place of work, Cobalt Survey 2006

Cobalt	25.5
Other Timiskaming District (including City of Temiskaming Shores)	69.7
Other Northern Ontario	3.0
Elsewhere	1.8
Total	100.0

Source: Cobalt Community Survey, authors.

(Table 1). Cobalt's unemployment rate is higher, its participation rate is lower, and as a result, Cobalt residents rely on government transfers for a greater share of their income.

As with their inclusion in other regional markets, daily interactions in the labour market (and other places such as the high school) serve to remind Cobalters of their inferior inclusion in the region and serve to internalize a negative perception of the town.

A lot of people will still say, "I'd never live in Cobalt." But that's your loss, not mine because I've got a house in Cobalt that's probably, if it was in New Liskeard, this house is probably worth two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, you know? ... I don't care where you live. You can live in New Liskeard if you want, and walk to Giant Tiger, but that's your business. It doesn't bother me any, you know? There has been, yeah there has been a lot of negative stuff like that coming from schools. ... And we hear a lot of that at the office. And we've actually had an agent that made a comment like that. And of course, I went up and down her so quickly that she sort of, she'll never say that again, I'm sure of it, but, you know? She said something like, "I would never live in Cobalt!" And I said, "Good, I don't want you to live in Cobalt! That's perfect. That suits me well too. Stay where you are. Because, you know, I am happy where you are and..." You know? (interview with PS, May 2006).

2.2. Mining identity

Cobalters maintain a place-based identity as a mining town and a class-based identity as miners that sets them apart from others in the region. This is something that residents of Coleman, which was every bit as much a place of mining, do not share. And, this is despite the fact that although Cobalt began as a mining town, mining no longer occurs there and very few active miners reside there. According to the 2006 census, the proportion of residents engaged in primary resource extraction is similar in the Town of Cobalt and the City of Temiskaming Shores, and much lower than it is in the District of Timiskaming as a whole (Table 4). Our own survey in 2006 found that some 7% of currently working adults were employed in primary resource extraction, but Cobalt's current work-force is not dominated by mining. Significant mining has not taken place in Cobalt since the 1960s, and significant numbers of miners have not lived in the town since 1988 when the Sherman (Temagami) and Adams (Kirkland Lake) Mines closed.

Mining has, however, left its mark on the natural and built environment and on the subjectivities of residents. This is immediately visible in the original and recreated mine head-frames that

Table 4
Sector of work, population census 2006

	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Tertiary (%)
Town of Cobalt	4	25	70
City of Temiskaming Shores	5	16	79
District of Timiskaming	13	15	72
Province of Ontario	3	20	77
Canada	5	18	76

Source: Statistics Canada.

litter the landscape, in the denuded hill-sides and mounds of mine tailings, and in the fact that over one quarter of Cobalt adults (26.2%) and half (51.1%) of all adult men in the town worked in mining at some time in their lives. The notion that Cobalt is a mining town is also reinforced in multiple arenas and forums, most especially, the current funding regime for small towns that pushes Cobalters to emphasise the town's mining heritage and tourism potential when competing for development grants.

Cobalter's sense of their town as the 'cradle of Canadian mining' is part of what identifies them as coming from a place that is distinct and important in its own right, and that distinguishes them from other parts of the Tri Town area. Asserting a separate identity is not simply a place-branding strategy. In an interview addressing the lack of regional cooperation around tourism development, one long-time resident found a way to bring the interview back to Cobalt's (once) distinct and important place in the world.

Gladys: ...Anyway, but I enjoyed the out-of-town meetings, because we met with a different group of people, and enlarged your circle and gave you the feeling of what other communities were doing.

PS: How do you think what Cobalt is doing with the historical [project] compares with what's going on in other communities?

Gladys: I think actually we're working very hard, but I think in one sense, that we - we're having a hard job. Cobalt has started pushing against the waves to try to get there. It's my feeling of the general opinion. And everyone says, "Oh it's wonderful. And it's got all this history and everything." But they don't seem to want to help too much.

PS: Oh?

Gladys: Of course there's always been animosity between the three towns of Haileybury, [New Liskeard] and Cobalt. And being Temiskaming Shores just makes them a bigger item. We used to be very friendly with Coleman and got along pretty good. As a matter of fact, one of my best friends is the mayor of Coleman. We go out for dinner. [Laughs] And yet we're at loggerheads, as far as the political end of it goes. [Laughs] ... So what else have I done? I—I have travelled a lot, and I always advertise the fact that I am from Cobalt. And I meet people that know of Cobalt in all parts of the world. It's surprising that you can run into, I remember running into some people in a swimming pool in a mountainous area of Greece a few years ago. They knew right away what we [the Town of Cobalt] were (Gladys Wilcox, interview with PS, June 2006).

2.3. Public services

Like small towns just about everywhere, the fiscal pressures on delivery of public services in Cobalt are considerable. The provision of public or collective services is often a central argument made by those in favour of regional integration (see Cox and Jonas, 1993); in this particular case, it is the desire to preserve collective services within the town that informs the anti-regionalist sentiments of many Cobalters. Cobalt residents place a great value on being a place with a high level of public services; at some level this is about being "as good as" Temiskaming Shores. Yet, our ethnographic research, with support from our survey and archival research, revealed the widely held perception amongst Cobalt residents that when service consolidations have occurred in the past, they have been the losers.

Cobalt residents have a strong preference for urban services, expressed to us repeatedly in interviews both formal and informal—for example, much is made of the fact that the town crew will plough the driveways of elderly residents. Our review of services provided by Cobalt, Latchford, Coleman and Temiskaming Shores reveals that Cobalt strives to provide the same level of services as

the City of Temiskaming Shores—and certainly provides more services than Coleman and a few more than Latchford. In the words of the current mayor of Cobalt, “If you don’t have an arena and you don’t have a library you’re not a town anymore, really, you know (Andre Belanger, interview with PS, May 2006).

Precisely because public services are so important to Cobalters, regional differences in the approach to their level and delivery often act as a flash-point that further reduces the chances of regional cooperation. A former mayor observed that

[I]t’s like the Township of Coleman has always lived off the town of Cobalt. ...And this happens in a lot of other communities down south where the center pays for everything, but the rurals are able to use the services without paying for them. And that’s why people go to these rural areas, because their taxes are next to nothing, and yet they have the services of the arena and this and that and shopping and whatever (interview with PS, May 2006).

The experiences of Cobalt residents with regional governance have also taught them to be wary, and that more often than not regionalism results in a loss to them of public services. The consolidation of services out of Cobalt goes back many years, and predates the current push for regionalism. In the early 1970s, for example, both the telephone exchange and railroad freight services were moved to New Liskeard. The provincial geologist’s office was closed in the 1990s. Cobalters repeatedly explained to us that Haileybury has suffered as a consequence of its integration with New Liskeard. Establishment of a district school board is blamed for the closure of the Cobalt High School in the late 1970s, and the subsequent closure of the Haileybury High School. A current accommodation review of the Cobalt Public School (primary) is adding to the conviction that as “the ugly little sister” (in words of a former Mayor) Cobalt loses from regionalism. Likewise, a small hospital in Cobalt closed in the 1930s, and Cobalters made use of the hospital in Haileybury, until this was replaced by a new hospital in New Liskeard. The northward drift of these services first to Haileybury (8km to the north), and then to New Liskeard (16km to the north) is presented by residents of Cobalt as evidence in a discourse that posits New Liskeard as the undeserving beneficiary of all regional interventions. According to Cobalt town councillor Gino Chitaroni, Cobalt pulled out of the regional Strategic Economic Development Unit because all of the development planning was directed at New Liskeard.

When we started economic development offices I was actually appointed by the town here to sit on in creating the first one. It’s always had to be the Tri Town Area, Cobalt, Haileybury, New Liskeard, and region all the time!...[W]e wanted to get something set up separately for Cobalt. And we were turned down. We were turned down! That’s when they formed the Strategic Economic Development Unit, which is based out of New Liskeard. Now if anyone follows economic development... everything’s there [in New Liskeard], and they don’t give a shit about what happens down here. And we contribute! So our strategic plan for the area, everything was set up for the regional thing when we were the ones that asked for this in Cobalt! And we got turned down by the Feds because they wanted a bigger area (interview with PH and PS, August 2005).

In contrast with its experience regionally, Cobalt has been extremely successful in making direct petitions to higher levels of government. Both the archival record and our interviews show that Cobalt has long cultivated and exploited relationships with senior bureaucrats and provincial (and to a lesser extent federal) politicians. The result has been direct aid for numerous heritage and infrastructure projects.

Another way in which Cobalters have come to understand that they do not benefit from regionalism is related to the town’s negative perception in the region. A 1976 study on the tourism potential of the Tri Town area noted rivalry among the three towns,

When people in New Liskeard and Haileybury were invited to attend groups to discuss the ‘Cobalt area’ many declined interest. The response was to say, ‘why should I be interested in Cobalt?’ Because of this the study was renamed Cobalt-Timiskaming to include all communities of the Tri Town” (Proctor and Refern, 1976: p. 22).

Organizers of several current regional organizations and activities noted the same challenges in convincing participants to travel to Cobalt. According to Larry Aquino, the driving force behind the establishment of the Classic Theatre,

You know how often I used to hear... “Well, why didn’t they build it [the Classic Theatre] in New Liskeard?” Now, I couldn’t wait to tell them. You know, I’m from New Liskeard. “I mean, it’s too bad it’s in Cobalt.” “Yeah? It’s a good thing it’s in Cobalt because you wouldn’t have one if it wasn’t in Cobalt, thanks to them” (Larry Aquino interview with PS, May 2006).

And a teacher at the Temiskaming District Secondary School observed that

the people in New Liskeard have no idea what’s down past Radley Hill [between New Liskeard and Haileybury]. With the amalgamation of the hockey associations in the last few years, people from New Liskeard have had to go to Cobalt for hockey practice. They didn’t even know Cobalt had a rink, and they couldn’t find it. Holy cow, guys, where is your world!... I would hazard a guess is that they have never even taken a mining tour down there (Paul Gordon, interview with PH and PS, June 2007).

3. Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that the prospects for regional integration or even for increasingly regional ‘structures of expectation’ in the Cobalt case, and in rural areas more generally, are not very positive. While we found several examples of partial, voluntary and ad hoc regional cooperation, we found profound resistance to more formal regional governance. We argued that this is because processes of regionalization are themselves simultaneously including and excluding. We locate the source of this ambiguous process in both the strongly local identities present in such non-metropolitan areas, and also in the differentiating nature of precisely those social and economic processes that are presented as evidence of the need for regional-scale governmental institutions and arrangements. All this leads us to question the assumption that further regional integration would be a good thing for the residents of Cobalt.

In concluding, we want to connect our observations about the reluctant rural regionalists to ongoing debates about the limits of the regionalist project in other contexts, including in metropolitan areas. Indeed, Cobalt is ‘rural’ only in the sense of being a small town in a non-metropolitan context (see Persson and Westholm, 1994); we think that there are parallels between Cobalt’s experience and those of poor communities located within other regional spaces. The emerging critique of the brand of metropolitan regionalism promoted by authors such as Rusk (1999), Orfield (1997), and Wheeler (2002) centres upon three related questions; first, whether the voluntary and collaborative regional structures that characterize many new regionalist proposals have the power to overcome the challenges facing metropolitan regions (see Norris, 2001), second whether regionalism as practised is progressive in

distributive and empowerment terms (Imbroscio, 2006; also Brenner, 2002), and third, whether the latest proponents of regionalism pay sufficient attention to regionalization as a process (Jonas and Pincetl, 2006).

In collaboration with various co-authors, Margaret Weir has argued that the collaborative approaches of the new regionalists have particular shortcomings. Weir and Rongerude (2007) suggest one reason why little evidence has been found to support the claim that poor residents benefit from participation in regional collaboration and regional forums. Based on their case study of regional transportation planning efforts, they argue that there are “very few authoritative regional forums, and the more informal and collaborative the forum, the less likely it is that participation will yield tangible benefits for low-income people” (2). In a related study, Weir et al. (2007) argue that vertical (extra-regional) connections that provide multi-level political connections may be more important than horizontal (intra-regional) ones in delivering ‘real change’ because the horizontal connections do not provide access to centres of power. This certainly has been Cobalt’s experience, where the town’s historical and continuing direct connections to federal and provincial funders have proved beneficial. These arguments suggest important strategic reasons why a poorer community within a region, such as Cobalt, may resist regionalism (see also Weir et al., 2005 for further discussion on the political calculus that militates against the formation of redistributive coalitions within metropolitan areas).

In a related argument, Imbroscio (2006) has suggested that American urbanists—or what might more precisely be termed metropolitan regionalists—have come to adopt a ‘liberal expansionism’ that involves ‘shaming the inside game’. Imbroscio argues that community-based initiatives are undermined when solutions to the problems of central city areas are sought in connecting to external, especially suburban, resources.

Central cities are failing, according to this perspective, because they (and their poorer residents) are too isolated—governmentally, politically, socially, fiscally, and economically—especially from their wider metropolitan regions (i.e., from the suburbs that surround them) as well as from other extracity institutions such as higher-level governments and large charitable foundations. The antidote to this multifaceted isolation is expansion—that is, creating governmental, political, social, fiscal, and economic linkages between the central city (and its population) and institutions and resources existing beyond the central city’s boundaries (225).

Imbroscio is highly critical of this approach; and clearly his arguments would resonate with the residents of Cobalt who have come to understand that external regional linkages have the potential to take energy and resources away from development efforts in the town.

A third line of critique of the ‘new’ regionalist project revolves around the tensions between outcome and process. Jonas and Pincetl (2006) have argued that the potential always exists for tension between those interests which regard regional governance arrangements as a necessary outcome in the pursuit of some larger (economic) goal, and those for whom regionalization is a contingent process. They conclude their case study of a non-profit and foundation-backed effort to roll out New Regionalism in California by noting that “for all the attempts to wipe the governmental slate clean, fiscal and functional inefficiencies may well be built into new regional structures precisely because they are designed not to be functional for local interests, and instead respond to non-local economic and political imperatives” (484). This conclusion is entirely consistent with our own: regionalism following the logic of service and administrative rationalization is fundamentally at odds

with the actual processes of regionalization that we have observed in Cobalt.

While these three arguments have been advanced in the US context, they do resonate with previous work in the Canadian (and Ontario) context. One important difference between US and Canadian (new) regionalism is the role of Canadian provincial governments in shaping regional governments, with or without local consent (Sancton, 2001; Sancton, 2000; Douglas, 2005).⁶ The Province of Ontario has the power, through force, suasion and/or incentives, to reorganize local government. Assessing 50 years’ experience with regional consolidation in Toronto, Frisken (2001) argues that where higher-level governments play a strong role in shaping regional governments, the outcome is unlikely to favour stressed areas and populations within the region. She writes that “the Toronto case (also) contains discouraging lessons for those who argue the benefits of regional restructuring for central cities and other aging municipalities that occupy the cores of their regions....To the extent that a city’s influence with its parent government depends mainly on its contributions to the regional economy and on the strength of the political pressures its residents can bring to bear, its influence is likely to decline as a region expands” (538).

Cast in this light, the strategy of Cobalters to selectively engage in some regional collaborative initiatives, but to stand outside formal regional government arrangements and maintain their own direct lines of access to various provincial and federal government departments and funding agencies, makes sense. These funding sources are a vital non-regional ‘space of engagement’ in which Cobalters seek to preserve their local and regional ‘space of dependence’ (Cox, 1998). The result is that the actual processes of regionalization are in conflict with the goal of creating more formal regional governance.

Finally, we believe that the study of rural regionalism adds to metropolitan perspectives on regionalism, in part, because in smaller settlements we are able to conduct close ethnography of both the formal structures of government and citizen involvement in community and economic development. In Cobalt, the role of identity, culture, social networks and individual personalities that simultaneously support and deny regional integration, are not hidden within political parties, professions, bureaucracies and growth machines. In this context we have been able to closely observe not only the formal political activities and forums of government, but also the daily activities and discourses of ordinary citizens. In larger places both ethnographers and citizens often find themselves distanced from the everyday practices of government. Perhaps metropolitan regionalists would be more humble and less ambitious about their project if these dynamics were more visible to them.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant 410-2005-1048. We thank the Town Council and residents of Cobalt, Ontario, for their warm reception and generous willingness to participate in this research. An abbreviated version of the paper was presented at the 2007 conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. We also thank the participants in the research seminar of the Center for Sustainable Community Development at Simon Fraser

⁶ Sancton’s (2000) popular volume “Merger Mania”, written partly in response to the amalgamation of 27 Montreal suburbs with the core city to form the Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC), was approvingly cited to us by the mayor of Coleman Township. Formed in 2002, the MMC is now much smaller; following a 2004 referendum, 15 of the suburbs ‘demerged’ in 2006. In the process, the MMC lost approximately 230,000, predominantly English-speaking residents.

University, Len Evenden, Terri Evans and three anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. All the usual disclaimers apply.

References

- Baldwin, D.O., 2005. Cobalt: Mining Boom Town, unpublished report prepared for the Historic Cobalt Mining Camp Project, Cobalt, Ontario.
- Baldwin, D.O., Duke, D.F., 2005. "A grey wee town": an environmental history of early silver mining at Cobalt, Ontario. *Urban History Review* 34 (1), 71–87.
- Beatley, T., Manning, K., 1997. *The Ecology of Place: Planning for Environment, Economy and Community*. Island Press, Washington.
- Brenner, N., 2002. Decoding the newest "metropolitan regionalism" in the USA: a critical overview. *Cities* 19 (1), 3–21.
- Bryant, C.R., 1995. The role of local actors in transforming the urban fringe. *Journal of Rural Studies* 11 (3), 255–267.
- Cox, K.R., 1998. Spaces of dependence, spaces of engagement and the politics of scale, ore looking for local politics. *Political Geography* 17 (1), 1–23.
- Cox, K.R., Jonas, A.E.G., 1993. Urban development, collective consumption and the politics of metropolitan fragmentation. *Political Geography* 12 (1), 8–37.
- Douglas, D., 2005. The restructuring of local government in rural regions: a rural development perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies* 21, 231–246.
- Friskin, F., 2001. The Toronto Story: sober reflections on fifty years of experiments with regional governance. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23 (5), 513–541.
- Gibson-Graham, J.-K., 2006. *A Postcapitalist Politics*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Gilbert, A., 1988. The new regional geography in English and French-speaking countries. *Progress in Human Geography* 12, 208–228.
- Goodwin, M., 1998. The governance of rural areas: some emerging research issues and agendas. *Journal of Rural Studies* 14 (1), 5–12.
- Hamin, E.M., Marcucci, D.J., 2008. Ad hoc rural regionalism. *Journal of Rural Studies*.
- Hamin, E.M., 2007. Is Rural Regionalism Progressive? An Empirical Inquiry, unpublished working paper, Landscape Architecture Program, University of Massachusetts at Amherst.
- Imbroscio, D.L., 2006. Shaming the inside game: a critique of the liberal expansionist approach to addressing urban problems. *Urban Affairs Review* 42 (2), 224–248.
- Innes, J., Gruber, J., 2005. Planning styles in conflict: the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71 (2), 177–188.
- Jonas, A.E.G., Pincetl, S., 2006. Rescaling regions in the state: the New Regionalism in California. *Political Geography* 25, 482–505.
- Larsen, S.C., 2003. Promoting aboriginal territoriality through interethnic alliances: the case of the Cheslatta T'en in northern British Columbia. *Human Organization* 62 (1), 74–85.
- Law, A., 2001. Industry of last resort: Negotiating admissible identities in 'leisure-escape'. *Society and Leisure* 24 (1), 283–310.
- L.I.P., 1972. Cobalt Oral History and Community Survey, conducted as part of a Local Initiatives Project. Originals archived at the Cobalt Public Library.
- Marsden, T., 1998. New rural territories: regulating the differentiated rural spaces. *Journal of Rural Studies* 14 (1), 107–117.
- Marshall Macklin Monaghan, Ltd, 1968a. Tri Town and Area Official Plan, Vol. 1. Marshall Macklin Monaghan, Ltd., Don Mills, Ontario.
- Marshall Macklin Monaghan, Ltd, 1968b. Tri Town and Area Urban Renewal Study. Marshall Macklin Monaghan, Ltd., Don Mills, Ontario.
- MNDM, 2000. A Planning Guide for the Consolidation and Delivery of Local Services in Northern Ontario. Northern Services Implementation Project, Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, Government of Ontario. Available from: http://www.mndm.gov.on.ca/mndm/nordev/redev/Programs_services/PDF/ASB-Guide_e.pdf.
- Norris, D.F., 2001. Prospects for regional governance under the New Regionalism: economic imperatives versus political impediments. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23 (5), 557–571.
- Orfield, M., 1997. *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability*. Brookings Institution Press and The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Washington, DC/Cambridge, MA.
- Paasi, A., 1991. Deconstructing regions: notes on the scales of spatial life. *Environment and Planning A* 23, 239–256.
- Paasi, A., 2003. Region and place: regional identity in question. *Progress in Human Geography* 27 (4), 475–485.
- Persson, L.O., Westholm, E., 1994. Towards the new mosaic of rural regions. *European Review of Agricultural Economics* 21, 409–427.
- Proctor and Refern, 1976. Cobalt-Timiskaming: a Program to Realize the Tourism Potential (Part 2 The Background). Prepared by Proctor and Redfern Limited for the Ontario Ministry of Industry and Tourism, Toronto.
- Rainnie, A., Grobbelaar, M. (Eds.), 2005. *New Regionalism in Australia*. Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Rusk, D., 1999. *Inside Game/Outside Game: Winning Strategies for Saving Urban America*. Brookings Institution, Washington, DC.
- Sancton, A., 2000. *Merger Mania: the Assault on Local Government*. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal.
- Sancton, A., 2001. Canadian cities and the New Regionalism. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23 (5), 543–555.
- Siegel, D., 2004. Recent changes in provincial-municipal relations in Ontario: a new era or a missed opportunity? In: Young, R., Leuprecht, C. (Eds.), *Canada: the State of the Federation 2004, Municipal–Federal–Provincial Relations in Canada*. McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal.
- Slack, E., Bourne, L.S., Gertler, M.S., 2003. Small, Rural, and Remote Communities: the Anatomy Of Risk. A paper prepared for the Panel on the Role of Government, Province of Ontario, Canada, <http://www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/investing/reports/rp18.pdf>.
- Wheeler, S.M., 2002. The new regionalism: key characteristics of an emerging movement. *Journal of American Planning Association* 68 (3), 267–278.
- Weir, M., Wolman, H., Swanstrom, T., 2005. The calculus of coalitions: cities, suburbs, and the metropolitan agenda. *Urban Affairs Review* 40, 730–760.
- Weir, M., Rongerude, J., 2007. Multi-level Power and Progressive Regionalism. IURD, University of California at Berkeley. Working Paper WP-2007-15.
- Weir, M., Rongerude, J., Ansell, C., 2007. Collaboration is Not Enough. IURD, University of California at Berkeley. Working Paper WP-2007-14.