Pluralism by Default:
Community Power in a Paper Mill Town

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ABSTRACT. Forest-dependent communities are often isolated geographically and culturally but linked politically and economically to industrial core areas. Theories of underdevelopment and resource-dependence, and theories of community power are used to explain the implications of forest-dependence for the structure of local politics in one Maine paper mill town. Three models of power, as outlined by sociologists and political scientists, suggest three possible configurations of community power structures. Historical, documentary analysis and contemporary field research demonstrate the fluidity of the power structure for the community in question. As the needs and interests of the dominant local economic force have changed over time, the community has experienced elitist, hegemonic, and pluralist regimes of power. The contemporary power structure is a pluralism by default. The withdrawal from local politics of the major economic player has created a political vacuum and the historic dependency relationship between paper mill managers and the community has created an apathetic and nonparticipative citizenry. For. Sci. 42(1):35-45.

Additional Key Words: Forest-dependence, elites, hegemony, mill managers, history.

Resource sociologists have recently refocused attention on forest-dependency (see Lee et al. 1991, Bliss et al. 1992, Humphrey 1990, Drielsma 1984), continuing a long tradition of sociological studies in that field (Kaufman and Kaufman 1946). Current work has focused on a variety of levels of analysis ranging from the individual (Carroll 1989, Bliss and Flick 1994) to the regional level (Bliss et al. 1992, Marchak 1983). However, few studies have focused on "communities" as the unit of analysis. This case study examines the political consequences of forest sector dependence for a single community in Maine.

This work represents a traditional community study in that it treats a single, geographically bounded place that possesses a unique social structure and culture. The community in question is located in a state that is heavily dependent on forestry, and in a region that is also forest-dependent. The focus here will be on social relations at the most local level. The community under study is not only dependent upon a single sector, but as is the case in many pulp and paper mill towns, it is dependent upon a single production facility. The political, economic, and social relations between that facility's managers and the host community will constitute the bulk of this analysis.

Following a review of theoretical work on models of community power and underdevelopment, and empirical work on forest-dependence, the power structure of the community in question will be examined. The power structure analysis has two parts: an examination of the contemporary situation and a historical description of how power structures have changed over time.

Dependency and Underdevelopment

There exists a natural, but largely unexplored, intersection between work on community power structures and natural resource-dependence. Theoretical work on underdevelopment has focused primarily at the levels of the nation state (Baran 1957), region (Frank 1967, Amin 1976) or the world (Wallerstein 1974). Some attention has been given to underdeveloped regions within developed nations (Gaventa 1980, Hechter 1975, Brody 1982). In contrast to this, theories of community power address local, rather than national or international power structures. Underdevelopment theories discuss the relations between core, industrial, complexly organized, urban centers, regions, or nations, and peripheral, raw material producing, rural, areas, regions, or nations. Empirical and theoretical examinations of community power often demonstrate how market power is translated into political power at the local level. This analysis attempts to bridge these literatures by illustrating how nonlocal economic elites came to dominate politics in one peripheral, resource-producing community.

Lenin (1956) is responsible for the term internal colonialism, which describes unequal relations between peripheral, resource-rich areas and metropolitan, manufacturing areas within industrialized nations. Dependency theorists Frank
(1967), Amin (1976), and others demonstrate that underdevelopment is neither a temporary phenomenon, nor a “stage” in a growth model as some neoclassical economists suggest (North 1955, Perloff et al. 1960). Rather, underdevelopment is often chronic, with a distinct set of social relations that perpetuate the dependent status of certain individuals, groups, and regions. The periphery is not “un”—developed, so much as it is developed in a dependent mode to the industrial core. These areas serve as reservoirs of raw materials and cheap labor power. Positions of status and power are held by outsiders—agents of nonlocal government or industry. Many decisions that affect life in local communities, particularly decisions concerning the disposition of natural resources, are made by such outside interests (Hechter 1975).

Peluso et al. (1994) suggest that cultural divisions of labor, unequal exchange, and interference from federal bureaucracies are components of internal colonialism that lead toward the related phenomena of impoverishment and powerlessness. In addition, they cite typical processes of capitalist development including structural shifts to larger firms, substitution of capital for labor, and increasing absentee ownership as phenomena that put local people in resource-dependent areas at risk of poverty and exacerbate powerlessness at the local level.

Bailey et al. (1993) explicitly link dependency theory to forest-dependence at the community level. The relationships between local elites and nonlocal agents of private, resource-based industries are key factors in the configuration of local power structures. Local elites are actively recruited by outside industries to champion their agenda in the local political arena. Once these local elites become staunch advocates of resource development as the best option for local community development, other options are discounted, and the processes of extractive resource addiction are set in motion (Freudenburg 1992).

Bureaucratic power exerted by the state is also cited as a source of unequal access to natural resources and therefore a contributor to powerlessness in resource-dependent regions (Working Group on Natural Resources 1993, Freudenburg and Grambling 1994). While forestland in the study area in question is dominated by private ownership, that land is primarily owned by nonlocal corporations. Thus, absentee ownership is more of a factor in the region in question than bureaucratic domination, though some state-level regulation has limited the resource management options of both local and absentee private owners (see Beckley 1992).

**Community Power Structures**

Lukes (1974) outlines three models or three dimensions of power; the pluralist model (first dimension); the elitist model (second dimension); and the hegemonic model (third dimension). The pluralist model, sometimes referred to as the decision-making approach, was defined and articulated by political scientists in the 1950s and 1960s (Dahl 1960, Polsby 1963). This model assumes that everyone has equal access to the resources that confer power, whether they be material resources such as money or productive land, or less tangible resources, such as access to information or government officials. The pluralist model assumes that any individual with a grievance, regardless of their position in society, can organize to have that grievance considered by the courts, the legislature, or local governing boards. No significant barriers to participation in the political process are thought to exist. Low participation in politics is explained away with apathy, cynicism, and alienation (Gaventa 1980). Pluralists characterize political nonparticipants as content with the status quo, or at least not sufficiently aggrieved to take action.

The elitist model, developed primarily by sociologists, challenges pluralism by suggesting that many issues never reach the political arena. Elite theorists assume that certain groups have fairly consistent interests over time. They also assume that power can be accumulated. These two assumptions taken together suggest that power may be concentrated in the hands of a powerful minority. Most often, the minority that enjoys a disproportionate amount of political power is the same minority that benefits from society’s unequal distribution of wealth and status (Flora et al. 1992). These powerful elites, from whom the model takes its name, are able to diffuse challenges to their authority by keeping their opposition disorganized and de—legitimized. Elites also consolidate power by manipulating the political agenda. The fact that an issue never reaches the political arena does not mean that it is a nonissue.

Lukes’ (1974) third dimension of power, referred to here as the hegemonic2 model, builds upon, but ultimately transcends, the simple dichotomy of the pluralism/elitism debate. It describes a system of power, elitist at its base, though so subtle and pervasive that elites are not recognized as such and the dominated are unconcerned with gross inequity in the local distribution of power.

The hegemonic model treats power issues in contexts where overt conflict is not present. It assumes that an individual’s objective interests may be different from their subjective understanding of those interests. Situations thus arise in which persons or groups think that some phenomenon is in their best interest when in fact it is not. This allows the powerful to dominate with the active consent of the dominated. Under hegemonic regimes of power, the powerless defend the legitimating ideology of the powerful (Lukes 1974, Gaventa 1980). The mechanisms of power in the third model prevent latent conflict from reaching expression. The consciousness of the powerless is “split” by the use of myths, symbols, rumor, and language by the powerful. The cult of individualism, the ideology of equality, and emphasis on the family over other aggregations of individuals, are just a few examples of norms and values common in our society that inhibit the consciousness of objective class interests. Political learning, essential for success, is problematic for groups or individuals with low status and wealth (i.e., the powerless).

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1. Form (1959) describes how local elites condemn the confrontational, bombastic style of local labor leaders when they try to enter the political arena. They advocate a more “civil” political discourse in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of competition from organized labor.

2. In homage to Gramsci (1971), who articulated similar ideas in the early part of the century.
Many who do attempt to participate and fail (due to second dimension mechanisms) may become passive and self-doubting. They ultimately select themselves out of politics and blame the victim (themselves) for their powerlessness (Gaventa 1980).

The following analysis demonstrates that community power structures are fluid. The community in question experienced elitist, hegemonic and pluralist power structures over the course of the last century. It is not the case that some or all communities are archetypal pluralist democracies, nor are all or some communities elitist oligarchies. Nor are these conditions immutable or frozen in time. Rather, power structures are dynamic. The mechanisms for reproducing any of these systems of power are not perfect, and therefore historic changes in community power structures should be expected.

Forest Dependence

There exist several forms of forest-dependence. Communities may depend on forests for subsistence uses (Brody 1982), for tourism, recreation, and/or amenity values (Peluso et al. 1994), or for industrial uses. Communities that depend on forests for industrial uses are often referred to more specifically as timber-dependent communities. However, a further important distinction must be made. Some communities depend primarily on the extraction of timber, while others depend primarily on initial processing of wood products. Both are correctly characterized as timber-dependent. Most forest communities depend on their local forests for a variety of benefits. The emphasis here, and in the existing literature, is on social and economic aspects of timber-dependence.

Various authors have attempted to define forest-dependence in quantitative terms. The most comprehensive review of such efforts is provided by Fletcher et al. (1991). Most definitions of forest-dependence rely on employment and set some threshold of forest-related employment as the definition of forest-dependence.

Other aspects of forest-dependence have also been studied. The most comprehensive sociological study of forest-dependence to date is Marchak (1983). Marchak treats labor issues, social structure, and ideology for forest products workers throughout British Columbia. She also includes an analysis of state policy with respect to forest resources and case studies of two forest-dependent communities. A substantial amount of work has been devoted to “community stability” in forest-dependent communities (Fortmann et al. 1989, Wear et al. 1989, Machlis and Force 1988). Other specific topics related to forest-dependence have included the occupational identity among loggers (Carroll 1989), forest workers’ views of environmentalism (Dunk 1994), inequitable distribution of tax benefits in forest-dependent municipalities (Semple and Ironside 1992), and the influence of local historical events on social change in timber-dependent communities (Force et al. 1993). Much of the sociological and economic work in the area has examined a variety of indicators related to the quality of life (Drielsma 1984, Bliss et al. 1992) or the degree of dependence (Fletcher et al. 1991).

This research represents an explicit attempt to link the theoretical literatures on underdevelopment, and community power to the growing empirical literature on forest-dependence. To date, few linkages between these literatures have been made. Forest-dependent places often represent examples of underdeveloped extractive peripheries. Community power and underdevelopment are linked in that both deal with the distribution of power, though usually at different levels of analysis. Finally, and most importantly, this work directly treats the role of a multinational forest-products firm in the power structure of a forest-dependent community. No prior work has explicitly treated the issue of power and its exercise in forest-dependent communities, though similar work has been done in mining (Gaventa 1980) and agricultural (Goldschmidt 1978, Gray 1991), and other rural communities (Bailey and Faupel 1993).

Research Setting

“Community” is a difficult concept to define theoretically, and a difficult one to operationalize for empirical work. Wilkinson (1985) defines community as a geographically bounded place that has common and distinct social institutions and some degree of shared values and culture. Seiler and Summers (1974) make a case for coordinating researchers’ and lay persons’ conceptualizations of community. They outline an approach that allows research subjects to provide their own definition of community. Respondents are asked to name “local” leaders without researchers’ imposed boundaries or definitions as to what “local” or “community” mean. The spirit of this method was followed in this research. Residents of Rumford, Mexico, Dixfield, Peru, Bethel, and other towns in northern Oxford County, Maine, were interviewed at length about what they conceived their community to be.

After months of such interviews and participant observation, it became clear that residents of Rumford and Mexico have a distinct identity as a single industrial community. They view residents of the surrounding rural villages as distinct and separate from themselves. Similarly, residents of the surrounding rural townships view the life and culture of Rumford/Mexico as distinct and separate from their own experience, even if they work, shop, or conduct other affairs there. Many Rumford/Mexico residents refer to residents from the surrounding area as “farmers,” regardless of their true occupation. One interview respondent from the surrounding rural hinterland referred to Rumford/Mexico residents as “cave dwellers” as opposed to the “forest people” of neighboring rural towns.

There are several other practical justifications for treating these two towns as “the community” for the purpose of this analysis. The two towns share a school system, police and fire protection, a Chamber of Commerce and social service clubs such as Rotary, Lions, and Eagles. The towns also share their historic dependence on one forest products processing facility for their economic base. For some issues (taxes, and the much discussed potential merger of the two towns), it is necessary to deal with each town separately. The use of data...
aggregated at higher levels, such as labor market area data, are explicitly noted in the text. Whenever this type of data is used, caveats are made. Unless otherwise specified, "the community" will refer to the combined population base of Rumford and Mexico.

Rumford/Mexico is located in a mountainous region, between two tourism-dependent communities (20 and 30 miles distant) and slightly further from the second largest urban area in the state (40 miles distant). While the county, state, and region surrounding Rumford/Mexico may all be characterized as forest-dependent, the particular form of forest-dependence in the community is shaped by the presence of a large pulp and paper processing facility. Boise-Cascade currently owns the Rumford plant, which represents the only significant manufacturing industry in the area. It currently employs over 1500 people, and at one time employed over 3000. Seventy percent of the workers at the mill reside in the Rumford/Mexico labor market area. The remaining 30% commute from within a 50 mile radius (personal communication with personnel director 1992). The total labor force for Rumford/Mexico is 4500. Sixty-five percent of males and 48% of women over the age of 16 are active in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991).

In 1990, the combined population of the two towns that make up the community was 10,500. Over 7000 people reside in Rumford, the community in which the mill is located, and the remainder reside in Mexico. The population of the community peaked at 15,000 when employment levels at the mill were at their height (see Figure 1). Since that time the community has steadily lost population.

Methods

A combination of methods were used to obtain a multidimensional database with regard to forest-dependence and local power relations. Direct interviews, participant observation, secondary data analyses, and historical analyses were employed. The decision-making approach of pluralist scholars was replicated. Two contentious issues in local politics were compared to determine if leadership was consistent. Direct interviews, participant observation, and media analysis comprised the decision-making analysis. In addition, following the lead of elite theorists, community leaders were interviewed about their perceptions of the local power structure. Twenty-five interviews with community leaders were undertaken. An additional 25 interviews were granted by various key informants not identified as leaders, including union officials, local business persons, newspaper reporters and editors, service group representatives, and local public servants.

Participant observation, primarily in the form of attendance at town meetings, selectmen's meetings, school board meetings, community development meetings, and informal interaction with meeting participants also provided insight regarding the local power structure.

Historical materials and oral histories were essential for exploring changes in the local power structure over time (Gaventa 1980) and Gray (1991) emphasize the importance of historical work in revealing the third dimension of power. To understand the current context of social relations, their evolution and development must be understood. Current and historical employment and economic data, from both government (census) and private (Boise Cascade) sources were collected to demonstrate the degree of forest-dependence quantitatively. Testimony from face-to-face interviews, as well as media sources, and union and company documents illuminated qualitative dimensions of forest-dependence.

Results

Forest-dependence is a real phenomenon in Rumford/Mexico, as measured both by quantitative and qualitative means. Table 1 illustrates the larger context of forest-dependence at the state level. Paper and allied products are indisputably the leading manufacturing industry in Maine, accounting for over one-third of the value of manufactured product. Paper manufacture accounts for less than one-fifth of manufacturing employment, but accounts for over one-quarter of gross wages.

Capital expenditures in the paper industry alone account for two-thirds of all capital expenditures in manufacturing. When coupled with lumber and wood products data, the degree to which the state relies on its timber resources for its economic base is even more pronounced. Two-fifths of the value of manufactured product, over one-quarter of employ-

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3 The labor market area (LMA) is a Maine Department of Labor designation. The Rumford LMA is comprised of 34 townships, only 17 of which are inhabited. Half the residents of the labor market area reside in Rumford and Mexico. Rumford/Mexico is located on the southern edge of the LMA within easy commuting range of several rural communities outside the LMA.

4 The 50 face-to-face interviews were semi-structured interviews tailored to obtain specialized knowledge from each of the respondents. Interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to two hours.
Table 1  Paper and lumber and wood products contributions to Maine's manufacturing economy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paper and allied products</th>
<th>Lumber and wood products</th>
<th>Combined forest products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of manufactured product</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing employment</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross manufacturing wages</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital expenditures</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


ment, one-third of gross wages and nearly three-quarters of capital expenditures are accounted for by the forest products industry. Forest-related tourism (not calculated) increases the state's forest-dependence further.

At the local level, employment in the forest products sector is equally dominant. Table 2 shows that employment in the forest products industry has accounted for between 33 and 42% of jobs in the local labor market in the last decade. Forest-dependence is declining, due to a reduction in employment levels among wood-harvesting contractors. More efficient technology has led to a 44% reduction in logging employment. In contrast, mill employment has fluctuated but not declined.

Table 3 illustrates another quantitative dimension of forest-dependence. The town of Rumford has a significant proportion of its local tax base provided for by Boise-Cascade. The town of Mexico, in contrast, relies almost exclusively on homeowners for its tax base. Approximately, three-quarters of Rumford's ten million dollar budget comes from the taxes paid by the mill. Not surprisingly, the level of services provided by local government is considerably higher in Rumford than in Mexico. Major reinvestment in the mill in the last decade and a half has increased the tax contribution of Boise-Cascade. The uneven distribution of tax benefits within the community is a significant issue and is the main reason that Mexico has been interested in merging with Rumford for nearly a century.5

Forest-dependence is as equally a part of the consciousness of community residents as it is a statistical phenomenon.

Sons have followed fathers and grandfathers in the mill and in the woods. Rumford/Mexico has a distinct culture that is centered around the production of quality, coated paper. Despite its location on the lowest land in the community, the mill dominates the landscape of both towns and the surrounding area. A local journalist summarized the situation in the following manner.

We have been dependent upon a paper mill for the last seventy-five years or so... sure as hell they [the company] are the lifeblood of the community. We would blow away if it [the mill] wasn't here.

A local politician was equally convinced that the community's very existence depends on the presence of the paper mill.

The only thing that affects this community is Boise Cascade. Without it, there wouldn't be a... community.

The official literature of Boise Cascade also highlights the community's economic dependence on their presence.

Rumford is a paper-making town if there ever was one. Paper is its sole reason for being, specifically the paper that is made in the huge mill on the great bend in the Androscoggin River. The destiny of the town has always been guided by the economic success of the mill. The community was born because of the mill, has grown with it, and today is comprised of three generations of skilled paper makers and allied craftsmen (Anonymous 1976).

Community leaders and community developers speak repeatedly of attracting new business to the area, but the community's history clouds its leaders' visions of its future. The only businesses they court are suppliers of support services to the pulp and paper industry (two other mills are

Table 2. Forest-dependence index for the Rumford labor market area1, 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lumber and wood products employment</th>
<th>Other manufacturing employment</th>
<th>Mill salaried employment</th>
<th>Total manufacturing employment</th>
<th>Forest-dependence index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>1680</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>7630</td>
<td>0.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1040</td>
<td>1580</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>7110</td>
<td>0.415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>7080</td>
<td>0.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>7500</td>
<td>0.364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>1660</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>7550</td>
<td>0.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>1630</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>8100</td>
<td>0.334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>1660</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>8060</td>
<td>0.338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The LMA includes 34 minor civil divisions with a total population of 21,099, and an average labor force of 7537 from 1984–1990.

2 Sources: Census of Maine Manufacturers, 1991 (1993); personal communication with Boise Cascade Personnel Director (for salaried mill employment); personal communication with Boise Cascade Woodlands Division.
located within a 60 mile radius). Despite the proximity of successful, four-season recreational developments, Rumford and Mexico citizens identify their community as an industrial one. Until recent years the community was also an important regional service center, but the rapid growth of Lewiston/Auburn, some 40 miles away, has diminished that role. Few attempts to diversify the industrial economic base have been made. Manufacturing businesses that have moved in did not stay long, in part because the most highly skilled segment of the local labor force is employed at the mill. Local business leaders expressed that other manufacturing industries (primarily shoes and textiles) could not compete with the wage scale at the paper mill, and that the remaining work force left much to be desired (personal communication with community development official, 1992).

**The Contemporary Power Structure**

Pluralist and elite theorists challenged one another’s methods for over two decades and the debate ended in a stalemate. Pluralists argue that if one only interviews “community leaders” then one will almost certainly conclude that power is concentrated in a few hands. They also argue that the reputational method, as the name implies, only reveals those who are reputed to have power and does not reveal who actually exercises it. Elitists, on the other hand, argue that pluralists overlook the importance of the locus of decision-making. By focusing only on outcomes in the political arena, only a small subset of community issues are addressed. Elitists suggest that many of the important decisions are made in corporate board rooms, on golf courses, and at the private social functions of the elite. Both methods were used in this study to avoid either time-worn criticism.

The analysis of the contemporary power structure of Rumford/Mexico revealed a pluralist power structure. Interestingly, results from both decision-making and reputational analyses suggest that a pluralist power structure exists. Of the 23 interviews with “community leaders,” 23 were usable. Community leaders were defined as such by their position (selectmen, town manager, town moderator, etc.), or by referral. Each leader was asked to name three people (including themselves, if appropriate), who are influential in community affairs.

Rather than agreeing on 5, 10, or even 15 people who are consistently active in community affairs, there were 28 different responses from a total of 69 possible responses. Of the 69 responses, 26 nominations were for “nobody.” That is, over a third of the responses of community leaders themselves suggested that there were no identifiable, effective community leaders. The category “nobody” was three times more popular than the highest individual nominee. The town manager of Rumford received 8 nominations, and a prominent local business man received 6 nominations. The modal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of major wood processing firms</th>
<th>Total valuation of firm(s)</th>
<th>Total assessed value of town</th>
<th>% of valuation by wood processors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>282,970</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>702,000</td>
<td>1,660,830</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,319,195</td>
<td>3,495,419</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,964,180</td>
<td>5,538,630</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,477,590</td>
<td>6,013,045</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7,887,860</td>
<td>7,756,732</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38,179,340</td>
<td>59,284,040</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71,439,900</td>
<td>110,629,485</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>97,276,700</td>
<td>173,052,060</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>337,621,400</td>
<td>453,647,340</td>
<td>74.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Source: Rumford tax assessors office.

**Table 4. Leadership in Rumford/Mexico: Responses from community leaders and key informants.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community leaders (n = 23)</th>
<th>Other key informants (n = 21)</th>
<th>Total (n = 44)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of individuals nominated</td>
<td>Total number of nominations</td>
<td>Number of individuals nominated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Nobody&quot;</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political leaders</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business leaders</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School, religious, and social service leaders</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Source: Original community leader and key informant interviews.
Eleven leaders from the political sphere were named, 9 from the business sphere, and 7 from social service groups (including churches and schools). Furthermore, many respondents expressed that there is very little interchange between these spheres of leadership. Few individuals are viewed as holding power in more than one area.

Virtually every person interviewed provided a new name, and it was impossible to interview all the leaders on the list due to time and fiscal constraints. More striking than the diversity of the responses is that the most common response was to say that there are no leaders. It is not an issue of having too many good leaders to choose from, but rather that there are precious few effective, identifiable leaders that a majority of people recognize.

Only three individuals named themselves as leaders, despite the fact that they were told they had been singled out as leaders by others. A former executive from the mill lamented that local people in positions of power or with substantial influence in the community do not even recognize themselves as leaders.

They were leaders by anybody’s definition. They were looked up to by the community. We knew the town real well. And they didn’t recognize themselves as leaders. So we had to tell them basically, “You are a leader.” We actually had to bring them back out of the closet. We said, basically, “You have a role to play in the community.”

The above suggests that community leaders do not identify themselves as such, not out of modesty, but because they sincerely do not conceive of themselves as community leaders—despite the nominations of their peers or their positions in government or on key local committees.

Responses by key informants who were not community leaders support the pluralist findings of the reputational analysis. The largest category for nominations remained “nobody” among nonleaders, and the remaining 52 responses were distributed among 34 individuals. Again, these were well distributed among business, political, and social leaders. The decision-making approach also suggests that a pluralist power structure exists in Rumford/Mexico. Two issues were examined, one that directly involved mill politics and one that was more related to community politics. The first issue was a major strike during which a sizable share of the workforce was permanently replaced. It was a turbulent time in the community, and there was a great deal of pressure on people not directly involved to take sides. Opposing factions in the dispute—organized labor and mill management—tried hard to recruit local business leaders, politicians, and the clergy to support their cause. Neither had much success.

Two strikes actually occurred since Boise Cascade purchased the mill in 1976. The first occurred in 1980, when only 200 of the 1200 unioned workers showed up to ratify a contract. A member of the union executive at that time suggested that a “radical” minority forced the strike, but that once the vote was taken, there was no turning back. Past and present union leaders expressed frustration in trying to maintain an active, informed, and interested membership. They also unanimously expressed that, prior to 1986, the union’s agenda was limited to workplace issues only. There was no attempt on the part of the union to enter community politics.

A second strike occurred in 1986. This strike had a tremendous impact on the community, as well as on the company balance sheet. Individuals lost their life savings, families were divided across the picket lines, and a large influx of new, permanent replacement (scab) workers (most of whom were recruited from outside the community) contributed to the feelings of distrust, betrayal, and loss. Despite those effects, no community leaders were willing to intervene in an attempt to bring about a resolution. The clergy, local political leaders, and local business leaders all resisted the pressure to take sides. Several of these leaders said that they had everything to lose and nothing to gain by becoming involved. The prospect of serving as an honest broker was viewed by local leaders as politically risky. Ultimately the governor of the state intervened to help settle the dispute. The leaders in this conflict were union representatives and corporate managers. The strike began as a local conflict between one union local and one mill. It rapidly escalated into a larger conflict in which both sides brought in leadership and expertise from national and international headquarters, and the intervening government authority was at a correspondingly higher level as well.

The second issue chosen for examining the local leadership structure was the potential merger of the two towns into one political entity. Such discussions have resurfaced from time to time from as early as 1908. Mexico, the less well endowed community, feels that it bears more than its share of the costs associated with having the mill located in the community. Mexico is down river and downwind of the mill in what is called “cancer valley” by some. Many Mexico residents feel that they do not share equally in the benefits (tax revenue) of having the mill in their community. Mexico recently attempted to dramatically increase the assessment of a mill-owned sludge dump that is located in that town. Boise Cascade challenged that assessment in court and received a favorable ruling. Not surprisingly, Rumford residents are quite content with their high level of services and are not interested in invitations to share their relative wealth.

Leadership on this issue differed dramatically from the leaders of the strike. Mill managers express very little interest over the potential merger of the two towns. When pressed regarding the tax implications of such a merger (which could cost them additional millions of dollars) they insist that they would abide by what the Boards of Selectmen of each town decide. Union leaders are similarly disinterested. The merger issue is dominated by the same local political leaders and business leaders that maintained such a low profile during the strike.

Historical Power Structure Analysis

Most of the respondents interviewed who had any sense of the history of the community, or who had lived that history,
described an elite power structure when speaking of local politics in decades past. At the apex of that hierarchical structure were a few powerful individuals, most of whom had direct connections to the Oxford Paper Company. One individual, Hugh Chisholm, planned and built all the initial industrial facilities in the community. Companies under Chisholm’s ownership built and rented many of the residential properties in the then booming community. This same man owned all the downtown properties, a few of which were later sold, and the remainder leased. Chisholm did not settle in Rumford, but it was his dream to create an industrial utopia there. He spent a great deal of time there from his first visit in the 1880s until his death in 1912. As one would expect, Chisholm was extremely influential in local affairs. Few decisions were made in local government without his tacit or explicit approval. In 1905, Chisholm asked for, and received of town fathers, a 10 yr fixed tax rate for his largest mill. The rate was well below the assessed value of the mill and was justified on the basis of helping the Oxford Paper Company “get off the ground” (Leane 1958). In the two decades following the turn of the century, Rumford/Mexico had a patriarchal system of social relations that closely resembled a feudal system.

Initially there was some resentment. As in the classic model outlined by dependency theorists, Chisholm purchased all the land for the mills and for the development of the new downtown though local agents. “Ghost-buyers” (well-respected local elites, and holding companies set up by the same) purchased the river bottomland at agricultural prices. The former owners saw the value of that land increase exponentially once it was turned over to Chisholm and developed into mills, dams, and residential and business areas. A few shrewd farmers saw what was coming and held out for astronomical prices, but most felt as though they had been tricked (Leane 1938).

Organized labor also presented a challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the local and extra-local power elite that came to dominate this resource boom town. There was discussion in alternative newspapers and at union meetings about socialist organizing. However, language and cultural differences among the immigrant workforce divided wage laborers internally. Tension between long-term residents and immigrant “newcomers” prohibited the emergence of a unified, organized challenge to power of Chisholm and his associates.

As the Oxford Paper Company grew and the community matured, immigrants learned to speak English and intermarried. Distinctions between oldtimer and newcomer were still noted, but were less important. However, a coalition to challenge the power elite did not emerge in the middle decades of the century either. Instead, the pockets of dissent that had existed, faded. Managers at the mill successfully promoted a community ideology that emphasized teamwork and the parallel interests between the mill and the community. The mill-dominated elite operationalized a public relations campaign, through the media, company publications, and “good works” that resulted in a hegemonic regime of power.

From the 1920s to the late 1950s there was truth to Oxford executive’s claims that what was good for them was good for the community. The paper mill was owned mostly by Maine business men, and though its headquarters were first in Portland, Maine, then New York, it was considered a “local” company. In the early years, Oxford Paper enjoyed a near monopoly. It was one of a handful of widely scattered facilities that produced high quality, coated papers. The company enjoyed huge profits and reinvested much of that profit back into the community. Continual expansions of the mill were made. In addition, the company also built and staffed a community center, donated funds for the hospital, and maintained high quality housing for their workers. Labor continued to be organized, but in the middle part of the century, labor relations were calm. Strikes were infrequent and of limited duration. The local union recognized its dependence on the mill and supported the company in its expansions and local social welfare efforts.

The company successfully cast themselves and were accepted as the great providers for the community. The leaders of the mill were the de facto leaders of the community. Their authority was not questioned.

A current mill salaried employee explained community/ company relations from that period in the following manner:

... you hear stories of Oxford Paper. Everybody (in local government) was called in to somebody’s office (at the mill) and told, “Here is what you are going do.” There was a much more tight relationship, but at the same time, Oxford took care of the town.

Virtually everyone familiar with life and politics in the community in the middle decades expressed similar sentiments regarding the degree of control by the paper company and the lack of dissent by the local community.

... at that time the Oxford officials and the local business men were very prominent on that (finance) committee and they

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9 At one time there were four paper mills in the community, as well as chemical, sulphite, and hydroelectric plants.

10 The community’s perception of Oxford Paper as a “local company” had much to do with the fact that the company’s only processing facility was in Rumford until 1926. The board of directors and sales staff resided elsewhere, but all the top executives of Oxford Paper on the operations side lived and worked in Rumford/Mexico, as did a significant staff of research scientists. Plant managers spent their entire working lives at the Rumford facility, their kids grew up to take jobs there, and they retired there. While “owners” resided elsewhere, the deep integration of many top company officials into community life in Rumford/Mexico led to the perception of Oxford, not as a local firm, but the local firm.
The mill and its owners provided many benefits to the local community, but not without certain costs. However, it was taboo for local residents to dwell on those costs. It was considered disloyal to discuss the horrible pollution in the Androscoggin River, or the fact town fathers did little to encourage diversification of the local economic base. The absence of significant dissent despite latent conflicts of interests between the company and community is evidence for a hegemonic regime of power. While a degree of hegemony existed for some 30 years, it was destined to wane in the face of a rapidly changing industry and society.

In the mid-1960s, William Chisholm (grandson to Hugh) sold the Oxford Paper Company to Ethyl Corporation, a petroleum company that wished to diversify its product line. The new owners did not invest the human and financial capital necessary to reproduce a hegemonic regime of power. They kept the mill running, but made few investments to keep it competitive in a rapidly changing economic environment. Ethyl laid off one-third of the workforce during its 9 year tenure of the mill. Some of those workers stayed in the community, but many were forced to relocate given the lack of local employment opportunities (see Figure 1). Ethyl’s corporate headquarters were in Virginia, and local residents began to realize that the corporate managers were interested more in the bottom line than in the health and well-being of the community.

A decade later, the mill was sold again—this time to Boise Cascade—a huge multinational forest products company. Boise invested 600 million dollars into the mill over their first 10 years of ownership, and local residents thought that the “good old days” were back. The new company was clearly committed to making quality paper and revitalizing the mill. People hoped that the new corporate owner would also concern itself with revitalizing the community, which by then had lost a quarter of its residents. Boise did not replace the jobs that had been lost under Ethyl’s tenure. Instead, Boise managers increased efficiency and productivity through automation.

Another reason the “good old days” did not return was that the macroeconomic situation had changed. The mill was now one of dozens across North America producing fine, coated papers. They were now operating in a competitive market, not under a virtual monopoly, and rates of profit declined accordingly (Ohanian 1993). New laws at the state and federal level regarding labor relations and environmental issues also changed the outlook of the company and its relations with the community. As air and water emission standards were put in place, they began to play a greater role in the company’s cost calculations than minor changes in the local property tax rate (Gaurier 1971). Predictably, Boise officials concentrated their political activities at the higher levels of government that generated these new economic pressures.

The new company has adopted a different philosophy regarding relations with the local community. Company managers are no longer in the residential real estate business. They no longer run the community center. Nor are they interested in the day-to-day workings of local government. Current Boise managers emphatically express that their role in the community is to serve as ambassadors of their corporation. They view the role of the corporation as that of a “good corporate citizen,” no more, no less. One high ranking official confessed that he lives outside Rumford/Mexico explicitly so that there is less pressure on him to participate in and lead community affairs. He expressed his personal preference as follows.

Litely everything you do gets watched. Everyone is making you. They want a job, they want a contract, they want something. They've got a relative who wants a job, or they've got a brother who is a contractor. I am trying to stay as far away, as arm's length as I can from the affairs of the community and the town.

The same individual commented on Boise’s corporate policy on community involvement by mill managers.

Boise wants us, and recommend that we be excellent corporate citizens. They do not have an expectation that we become the founding fathers replacements in the town.

The current communications director commutes over 100 miles per day to work at the mill. In former days, that individual was a key liaison between the company and community and correspondingly had a high position in both institutional structures.

The current mandate of Boise managers is much more narrow than those of past mill executives. They are instructed by their superiors at corporate headquarters to concentrate on producing paper, and more importantly, to create profit through the manufacture of paper. Boise Cascade has continued the retreat from community affairs begun by Ethyl in the 1960s. Boise managers do not maintain the social infrastructure—personal contacts, high profile “good works,” local control over the media—necessary for the reproduction of hegemonic power.

The effect of this long, historic transition has been the creation of a leadership vacuum. Despite the reluctance of mill salaried executives to participate in local affairs, the community still expects these individuals to lead. They look to the mill manager, in particular, for leadership, but the nature of that position has changed dramatically over time. The average tenure of mill managers from 1906 to 1967 was 12.2 years. These mill managers were company men, but they were also community men who had worked their way up through the ranks, and who often continued to live in Rumford/Mexico following their term as mill manager. Since 1967, the nine men who have held the position of mill manager had an average term of only 2.8 years. The new breed of mill manager is a corporate man who comes in from somewhere else, who likely lives outside Rumford/Mexico during his term, and who leaves the region upon promotion, retirement, or reassignment from corporate headquarters.

The popular name for the Vice President of Maine Operations—the top management position at the mill.
Discussion

The historical analysis of the power structure in Rumford/Mexico reveals that the exercise of power has changed considerably in this community over time. It is also clear that the powerful have been those who control the forest-products firm upon which the community has depended for the last century. The historical analysis also provides a greater understanding of the nature and structure of the pluralist politics that exists today.

A classic elitist power structure came into being as Rumford/Mexico rapidly transformed from an agricultural backwater into a booming industrial community. As in the classic model outlined by dependency theorists, local elites ran the community, with the formidable backing of wealthy, politically connected, extra-local owners of the resource-based industries. These elites used their influence to gain tax concessions for the pulp and paper mill. They sat on key town committees, particularly the finance committee, to ensure that the local tax contribution of the mill was not squandered and that an adequate level of key services (primarily fire protection) were in place to protect the investment of corporate owners.

As the community became more homogenous and accepted the mill as its own, a hegemonic regime of power developed in the middle decades of the century. Strife with organized labor waned, as did virtually any overt dissent over the mills' practices or policies. Mill managers doubled as community leaders in the political, social, as well as business spheres. For at least 2 decades following World War II this hegemonic regime flourished. These are remembered as the “good old days.”

Those days came to an end gradually as the mill was sold twice and mill executives made a tactical retreat from community affairs. Local authority and autonomy was compromised by increasing state and federal roles in legislation effecting the mill. Today, Boise’s political lobbyists spend time in the state capital and in Washington, DC. They do not attend local selectmen’s meetings as a matter of course. Lower level mill employees remain active in local politics, but the local political arena itself is considered less significant than in years past. So while pluralism reigns in Rumford/Mexico today, it bears little resemblance to the pluralism described by champions of that model. It is a weak form of pluralism. People know that they have access to local government, that one can get elected to the local board of selectmen without the tacit approval of mill officials, but people do not seem to care. Twenty people is considered a large crowd at selectmen’s meetings in towns that have 3000 and 7000 residents. Local elected officials do not command the respect that they once did, largely because they are viewed as ineffectual and powerless in the larger scheme of things.

Conclusion

To understand power relations in Rumford/Mexico, one must appreciate the nature, scope, and history of forest-dependence in that community. Initial results from reputational and decision-making analyses suggest that pluralism is the appropriate model for describing local power relations. A closer and more historical analysis reveals that the power structure in Rumford/Mexico has changed over time, and that relations between the dominant local paper mill and the community have been central to those changes.

Power structures are fluid, not static. The local power structure in Rumford/Mexico has evolved from an elite model, in which the elites were nearly all managers from the mill, to a hegemonic model, in which the power and authority of elite leaders went unquestioned and unchallenged, to the prevailing pluralistic model. As the needs and interests of the dominant forest products firm changed due to transfers of ownership, and nonlocal political and economic change, so too did a transformation occur in company/community relations. As local politics exerted less influence on the corporate bottom line, corporate leaders withdrew from local politics. The relationships between local elites, local mill managers, and extra-local owners of the paper mill have been central determinants in the structure of community power.

The historical analysis revealed what the decision-making and reputational techniques alone could not—that Rumford/Mexico’s contemporary pluralism is a pluralism by default. It is not a healthy, lively, thoroughly democratic pluralism as typically described by political theorists. Rather, it is an anemic, apathetic, anarchical pluralism that lacks both direction and intensity. Local politics are less vital because residents feel that they have little relevance in the late twentieth century. Changes in the larger political economy have transferred considerable power and authority to institutions outside the community. The current perception that no leaders exist may be due to the fact that no local leaders can effectively promote or defend the community’s interests against extra-local authorities.

This research, while providing a detailed analysis of the consequences of forest-dependence in one instance, suffers from the problem of generalizability common to all case studies. Further case study research will shed light on whether the sociopolitical effects of forest-dependence are similar in other communities in other regions.

The economic pressures, such as increasing competition, vertical and horizontal integration of forest products companies, and historical factors, such as increasing roles for state and federal government policy and the declining power of organized labor, are undoubtedly felt in other forest-dependent communities as well. In cases where such communities depend on surrounding forests for an industrial base (as opposed to recreation, tourism, or subsistence), and particularly in cases where that industrial base is comprised of only one company, the progression from an elitist, to a hegemonic, to a pluralist community power structure may not be uncommon.

12 The author is currently undertaking such studies in forest-dependent communities in Western Canada.
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