

# **Countryside Capital, Changing Rural Landscapes, and Rural Tourism Implications in Mennonite Country**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to apply a framework of countryside capital to a culturally unique yet rapidly evolving rural landscape in Ontario, Canada. Countryside capital, a concept used to recast rural resources as capital assets of the rural tourism industry, reassesses the value of rural resources for rural tourism and sustainable rural development in the Waterloo region of Ontario. The region has a distinctive cultural heritage resource, the Old Order Mennonite culture and its unique rural landscapes. It also has a well-defined projected rural tourism product and image that have been altered over a short period of time from that of Mennonite Country to that of St. Jacobs Country. Furthermore, urban encroachment and the commodification of the rural landscape create conflict over the preservation of rural heritage. This study discusses these important issues in the context of countryside capital, as well as the implications for the future of tourism in the region and for rural sustainability in general. Perceptions of rural accommodation operators and their visitors, field observations, and an analysis of promotional literature provide an empirically based discussion. However, the case study acts as an illustration of the theoretical component that is the wider, in-depth application of countryside capital to a Canadian context.

Keywords: rural tourism, countryside capital, cultural heritage, sustainability, bed and breakfast

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The rural idyll is a concept used to describe ideal visions of a peaceful, quiet, simple, and wholesome agricultural lifestyle that has strong attachments to nature and community (Bunce, 1994; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Park & Coppack, 1994). There is a sentiment or mystique for rural areas and their ambience and wholesomeness, and images of a pioneer way of life (Short, 1991; Valentine, 1997). The countryside is imagined to be a more pleasant place to be and live in than the city; the idyll may be how the countryside is imagined from an urban perspective (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Even though heritage is often

contested and deemed a product of the postmodern era, rural tourism began as a result of people's becoming interested in visiting rural areas (Fennell & Weaver, 1997; Graham, Ashworth, & Turnbridge, 2000; Kieselbach & Long, 1990; Nilsson, 2002). Rural tourism, when properly managed, is seen to benefit rural areas in a number of different ways.

While rural tourism in general encompasses tourism in nonurban areas, it often includes tourism in areas where the primary industry is agriculture (Dernoi, 1991; Hall & Page, 2006; Lane, 1994; Oppermann, 1996; Sharpley, 2002). Rural tourism can benefit farmers and local residents economically by contributing to a household income (Dernoi, 1991; Hjalager, 2004; Opperman, 1995). In some regions, rural tourism enables families to maintain their farms and in others it simply assists farmers in engaging in business activities on the farm property (Hjalager, 1996). For rural residents not living on farms, it enables them to upkeep large heritage homes and beautifies their surrounding grounds and landscapes. Rural tourism provides many benefits to local areas by bringing visitors to the region, increasing awareness for agricultural products, and showcasing produce to the local and regional community. It can also provide incentives for local heritage and conservation groups to preserve unique heritage landscapes and built heritage (Mitchell & De Waal, 2009).

If rural tourism has the potential to benefit rural areas then why is it not taken more seriously in some regions? Rural areas are experiencing drastic changes, including the out-migration of long-term rural and farm residents, the in-migration of urban residents, urban encroachment, and commodification of rural heritage. Consequently, if land-use changes, including residential, commercial, and industrial developments on attractive rural landscapes, are not acknowledged or properly maintained then the qualities needed for rural tourism may disappear. There is a need to better understand the value of rural resources not just for urban or nonurban land uses but also for the tangible and intangible value of the resources for tourism. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to reassess the value of rural resources for tourism by applying a framework of countryside capital.

While the academic and professional fields are familiar with such terms as *human capital*, *social capital*, *physical capital*, and *natural capital*, the term *countryside capital* is one that may be less familiar, especially in the North American context. Garrod, Wornell, and Youell (2006) discussed how the term was first used in the United Kingdom by the Countryside Agency. The purpose was to create a means of connecting two of its programs, the Land Management Initiative and "Eat the View." The former aimed to promote sustainable land management and the latter sought to encourage tourism businesses to connect better with their local economy by using and selling locally. This effort meant to help tourism businesses capitalize on their local assets, in other words, to encourage rural businesses to invest in building up their countryside capital (Garrod et al., 2006). Countryside capital, then, a concept used to recast rural resources as capital assets of the rural tourism industry, reassesses the value of rural resources for rural tourism and sustainable rural development.

The framework for countryside capital has been applied in situations in the United Kingdom by the Countryside Agency, where the attraction, nostalgia, and rural heritage resources of the countryside are well established, as are concerns for the loss of rural heritage. This seems a logical transition, since issues involving social capital, rural sustainability, and the management of rural resources have been a

concern in Britain for some time (e.g., see Graw, Shaw, & Farrington, 2006; Mathijs, 2003; Williams, 2003). However, the application of such a model is limited in a North American and specifically Canadian context. This is important, since the rate at which we are losing sight of our rural heritage resources is exponential, whether it is a result of the commodification of culture, creative destruction, or urban encroachment on farmland (Mitchell, 1998). A case study of rural tourism in the Waterloo-Wellington region of Ontario will provide context for the framework. The framework seeks to emphasize the need to manage rural resources for tourism and discusses implications for rural sustainability.

The dynamic nature of contemporary rural tourism and the complexity of land-use change and conflict have resulted in a plethora of research interests, policy programs, and promotional campaigns for rural tourism since the 1990s (Hall, Roberts, & Mitchell, 2003). However, due to the limitations of the scope of the paper, the capital value of rural resources in this case study is determined by two perspectives from a niche rural tourism market, that of rural accommodation entrepreneurs (i.e., bed-and-breakfast [B&B] operators) and their visitors. This represents one unique perspective of rural tourism resources in this region and is not inclusive of all rural tourism consumers, such as other rural tourism entrepreneurs, day-trip visitors, excursionists, and the like.

## 2.0 Countryside Capital Assets

Despite the application of the term, there is still no widely agreed-upon definition of countryside capital (Garrod et al., 2006). The Countryside Agency adopts the definition as “the fabric of the countryside, its villages and its market towns” (Countryside Agency, 2003, p. 43). As Garrod et al. (2006) suggest, this might be considered a simplistic definition. The discussion is expanded to include various components of the countryside, including *natural*, such as wildlife populations, *built*, such as rural settlements, and *social*, including local cultural traditions.

Countryside capital may be either tangible or intangible resources. For instance, tangible elements of countryside capital are rural villages and market towns, which are considered functional elements of the rural economy (Garrod et al., 2006) and are also referred to as Heritage Shopping Villages (Mitchell, 1998). Other specific features and elements that can be considered countryside capital assets are illustrated in detail by Garrod et al. (2006) and consist of landscape, wildlife, hedgerows and field boundaries, agricultural buildings, rural settlements from isolated dwellings to market towns, historical features, distinctive local customs, and traditional ways of life. Intangible features of countryside capital consist of friendly hospitality, perceived images, sense of community, and quality of life. Countryside capital is said to add specific value to these intangible aspects of rural tourism. This can be from the initial pre-visit images and information to the warmth of the welcome as guests in the local community, to places to eat, to leaving the countryside community with views from the window of the vehicle, and finally as post-trip photographs (Garrod et al., 2006).

Elements of countryside capital “can be thought of as essential components of the asset base of rural tourism businesses. This implies that the quality of the rural tourism experience depends on the quality of the countryside capital that supports it” (Garrod et al., 2006, p. 119). Garrod et al. (2006) commented that a shortcoming of the Countryside Agency’s definition of countryside capital is that it does not sufficiently emphasize the capital dimension. “The principal merit of

depicting the fabric of the countryside as capital is that doing so highlights the critical role it plays in putting together the products of rural businesses” (Garrod et al., 2006, p. 119). Therefore, the application of the model to this particular case study addresses the importance of the capital in this region, that of B&B rural businesses. The reconceptualization also addresses characteristics specific to an agricultural region. It has a distinctive cultural heritage resource: the Old Order Mennonite community and their unique rural landscapes.

The model below has been adapted from the countryside capital model devised by Garrod, Youell, and Wornell (2004), as cited in Garrod et al. (2006) (see Figure 1). The adapted model considers rural tourism as tourism occurring in regions where the primary economic activity is agriculture. In this particular model, agricultural and tourism resources are separate even though some of the infrastructure and capital stock may be interchangeable. The justification for this distinction is threefold and central to the application of the countryside capital model in this particular region. First, rural tourism resources should be perceived as balanced and equal to that of agricultural resources. Second, by separating tourism from agriculture, the linkages and connections between these sectors become more apparent. Third, the use value of rural landscapes is significant from an agricultural as well as tourism perspective, and change to the rural resource base in terms of lost or altered rural landscapes implicates both tourism and agriculture.

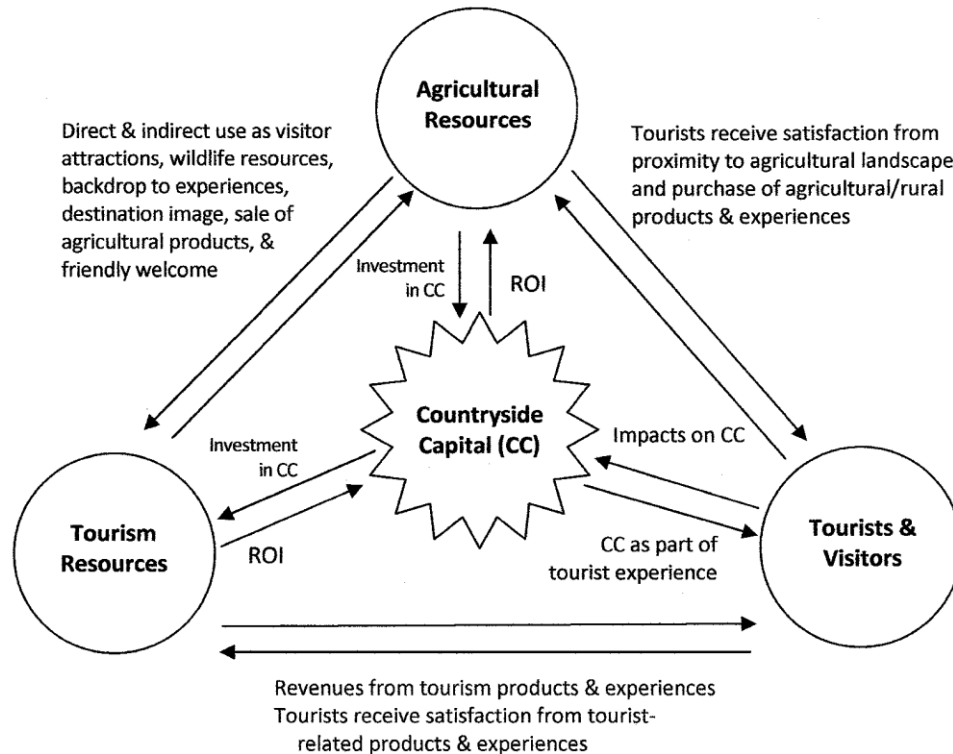


Figure 1. Model for countryside capital assets in an agricultural/tourism region, adapted from Garrod, Youell, and Wornell (2004), as cited in Garrod, Wornell, and Youell (2006).

An example of the linkages between tourism and agricultural resources could be the sale of agricultural products at a farmers' market, which consists of the agricultural produce (agricultural resource) itself as well as the visitor attraction of the farmers' market (tourist attraction/resource). Similarly, a rural or cultural tour (the tourist attraction/resource) of agricultural heritage landscapes (agricultural resource) consists of the working farm fields, farm buildings, livestock, and homes of rural residents (agricultural resource).

As mentioned previously, there are direct and indirect uses of tourism and agricultural resources that are also considered aspects of countryside capital. These include visitor attractions, nature and wildlife resources, rural heritage landscapes, and the backdrop to tourist experiences. If these resources are available to visitors and tourists in a pleasant, attractive, authentic, and welcoming manner, then the visitors' experience will be more positive. As displayed in the conceptual model, the more satisfied the visitor experience, the more likely they are to purchase agricultural and tourist products and, more importantly, to return to the destination and recommend it to others. As Garrod et al. (2006, p. 121) stated,

[C]ountryside capital may also have an indirect role in providing a backdrop to the rural tourism experience and in generating an image that attracts tourists to a particular destination area. This role should be considered no less important than the direct role. Attracting tourists, satisfying their expectations and, perhaps, most importantly, encouraging them to return in the future, are all vital elements of successful rural tourism.

An important component of countryside capital must also be investment in capital assets. The rural tourism industry as well as the agricultural industry need to invest in countryside capital. As with other products and assets, the more often and well-planned the investment is, the higher the return on investment (ROI). The main focus is that investment in countryside capital assets will ensure a high ROI for both tourism and agricultural economies and thus benefit local communities. An example of this investment are the income tax incentives that B&B owners receive for the upkeep of their home. Rural entrepreneurs are able to preserve the built heritage of their century homes or create attractive parklike gardens with these added economic benefits. Furthermore, countryside capital is to be enjoyed and experienced not only by visitors and tourists but also by local residents. A stronger sense of community and place and a higher quality of life can be achieved if there is continual investment and management of countryside capital assets.

### **3.0 Application of Countryside Capital: Mennonite Country, Waterloo-Wellington Region**

#### **3.1 Study Area**

Waterloo and Wellington counties in southwestern Ontario, Canada, have a rich cultural heritage, based on settlement by Mennonites, Scottish, English, and German settlers. This has created a unique rural cultural landscape distinguished from that of nearby counties. Rural landscapes in Waterloo County are characterized by rolling hills, with small-scale family farms where crop fields and paddocks are divided by post, rail, and wire fencing and maple woodlots are located at the far end of the properties. Farm homes tend to be large, constructed of wood or stone, and farm buildings consist of barns and sheds. Farm properties are

well kept and clean with large vegetable and flower gardens. Mennonites, including the Old Order Mennonites who wear black and dark blue clothing, ride in horse-drawn buggies, and do not use electricity in their homes, make up much of the farming population in Waterloo County. However, rural villages that were once service communities for the Mennonites have become rural attractions in themselves, with antique and craft shops, gift stores, bakeries, and meat shops.

Wellington County has a population of Mennonites residing near the Elora and Fergus areas. The rural landscape is similar, however. Homes are more often constructed out of stone, and farms tend to be larger. The rural population consists of a mixture of heritage backgrounds, especially those of British and Western European descent.

The close proximity of the urban markets in Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Cambridge, as well as the Greater Toronto Area, enables rural tourism to be a profitable addition to the rural economy in this region. While we acknowledge that there are different types of rural tourism consumers in this region, the application of this model focuses on the B&B operator and visitor perceptions.

### ***3.2 Methods***

Data were collected using personal interviews of B&B operators, content analysis of brochures, visitor questionnaire survey, and field observations at the accommodation sites. A list of farm vacations and country B&B establishments revealed a target population of 71 rural accommodations within the Waterloo-Wellington area. Of the 71 potential rural operators, 40 people agreed to participate in an interview. Interviews were conducted by the first author of this study at the rural accommodation properties and took approximately 45 minutes each. Rural accommodation brochures were collected from 34 of the 40 respondents, as six of the accommodations did not have a brochure. The content of the brochures was analyzed for key descriptive words and phrases, then coded and grouped according to relevant themes. Visitor questionnaires consisted of mostly structured questions with one or two open-ended questions. Visitor questionnaires were distributed at the completion of the rural host interview in 20 of the 40 rural accommodations. This was a purposively selected sample based on geographic location, type, and size of rural accommodation.<sup>1</sup> There were 280 visitor questionnaires distributed and 106 were returned. Questionnaires consisted of a combination of types of questions, such as multiple choice, Likert scale, and closed and open-ended questions, relating to respondents' perceptions of the rural landscape and rural life.

### ***3.3 Characteristics of Data***

Most rural accommodation operators were owners of B&Bs, not vacation farms or country inns, in the country or village. Although rural accommodations were also open all year-round, rural operators considered their B&Bs to be part-time business ventures (usually because they were retired or already had full-time employment, such as farming). The majority of B&Bs had been in operation less than 10 years, and the majority of hosts lived in the region for less than 20 years. Even though

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<sup>1</sup>Visitor questionnaires were distributed to 20 of the 40 B&Bs. This was a purposively selected sample. I (first author) selected the B&B operators for visitor questionnaires in order to capture B&Bs in villages and the countryside. I also selected the sample according to the size of the establishment, thus including properties from very small B&Bs (with one or two rooms) to larger country inns. The original sample consisted of 22 B&Bs; only 2 declined to distribute visitor questionnaires.

these businesses were owned by both the man and woman of the household, most of the respondents of the interviews were women, and women tended to be the host most in contact with guests.

Similarly, the majority of respondents to the visitor questionnaire were women, but most of the visitors stayed as couples. Visitors were between 40 and 59 years of age. Income levels of visitors varied from high to moderately low, and most visitors were from other regions of southern Ontario, with a few from other provinces, the United States, and Europe.

### ***3.4 Countryside Capital Assets***

The uniqueness of the rural landscape of this region definitely sets it apart from other rural regions in southern Ontario. According to Garrod et al. (2006), landscape including flora, fauna, biodiversity, geology, and field boundaries provide a key reason for visitors to visit. These qualities also provide positive and panoramic views contributing to initial images of the area as well as an aesthetic backdrop to other experiences. The rural landscape in the Waterloo-Wellington region is characterized by the built heritage of the Mennonite culture, geologic features such as rolling hills of a postglacial topography, and the natural heritage associated with the Grand River.

The accommodation base in the Waterloo-Wellington region is obviously an essential component of the capital assets associated with rural tourism. Several elements of countryside capital support the accommodation businesses in this region, and B&B operators have alluded to this through their promotional materials. Most of the B&Bs have a brochure advertising their accommodation in association with rural tourism attractions, restaurants, and activities as well as describing attractive aspects of the rural landscape (34 of 40 B&Bs). A content analysis revealed (see Table 1) that one half of the B&B operators described their accommodations as being a century home or century farm (a provincial heritage distinction). As mentioned earlier, farm and village homes tend to be large and constructed of a combination of wood, stone, or brick. Rural hosts also promoted relaxation in association with a peaceful, quiet, and tranquil experience with a backdrop of country fields. The warm welcome and country hospitality were also described, and these elements were more frequently referred to than nearby attractions. Clearly the B&B operators understand the value of these more indirect contributions to countryside capital.

Field observations of the interior and exterior of the B&Bs also showed how the quality of the countryside capital impacts the quality of the rural tourism experience (see Table 2). The criteria used for field observations were generated by initial visits to B&Bs and by the content analysis of the B&Bs' promotional material. The most prominent features of the exteriors of the B&Bs were manicured flower gardens, well-kept older homes, and naturalized and parklike lawns and surrounding landscapes. The interiors of the accommodations were also decorated in such a way so as to add an aesthetic and memorable appeal to the experience of guests. Some had antiques, old furniture, themed rooms, and even a specific country craft decor. Rural hosts spoke with pride about their homes and expressed a distinct pleasure in knowing that the cleanliness, comfortable atmosphere, and attractive qualities of their homes contributed to the satisfaction of their guests' experiences.

Table 1. *Rural Descriptions from Content Analysis of 34 Accommodation Brochures*

Phrase and description	Frequency	%
Century home, old home, century farm	17	50
Relaxation, described, e.g., as “relax by the fire place,” “relax on the porch”	12	35
Farming area, country, fields	11	32
Country hospitality, described also as warm welcome, friendly	9	26
Quiet, used in descriptions of area surrounding accommodation (e.g., “quiet countryside”)	7	21
Activities described nearby:	10	29
Attractions (theatre, Stratford, Drayton)	22	65
Shopping	8	24
Antiques	11	32
Cultural heritage attractions—Fergus Highland Games, Elmira Maple Syrup Festival, Wellesley Apple Butter and Cheese Festival, museums	20	59
Mennonite Country	10	29
Peaceful	2	6
Tranquility	2	6

Similarly, the questionnaire asked visitors to select all applicable criteria that made their stays enjoyable. Respondents were asked to select all criteria that applied. The criteria for this question were generated by initial interviews with B&B operators and the content analysis of B&B brochures. *Clean, comfortable, rural accommodations* was selected most often, with *friendly hospitality* and *quiet, relaxing atmosphere* also considered important (see Table 3). Good meals and the rural landscape contributed to the enjoyment of the visitors’ experiences.

The B&B is an accommodation that fits well with the surrounding countryside. B&Bs allow for the warm welcome of guests by rural hosts and is a vital connection to the local community. B&Bs also enable visitors to view attractive aspects of the working agricultural landscape and consume local food products. Garrod et al. (2006) suggested a set of similar criteria as being rural resources that add value to the region as a rural tourism destination.

Visitors to country and village B&Bs were clearly motivated by these natural and cultural resources. Respondents were given a list of motivations for staying in rural accommodations and asked to rank them, with 1 being the most motivating and 10 the least. Table 4 shows visitors’ rankings of their motivations for staying in rural accommodations in this region. The top three most highly ranked motivations—*relaxing environment, rural landscape, and escape into the country*—exemplify the importance of the rural environment in their decisions to visit. Also interesting



is that these criteria ranked higher than *tourist attractions* or *friendly hospitality*, even though those are also aspects of countryside capital.

Table 2. *Field Observations of Rural Accommodation Homes*

Description	0 (not prominent)	1	2	3	4 (very prominent)	Mean	SD
Manicured flower gardens	2	2	11	10	9	2.65	1.13
Century/older home	2	2	5	5	14	2.44	1.64
Naturalized lawns & landscape	10	3	2	7	12	2.24	1.71
Parklike lawns & landscape	4	6	13	6	5	2.06	1.20
Antiques/old furnishings	8	5	6	8	7	2.02	1.49
Theme rooms/ decorated	5	9	8	7	5	1.97	1.31
Country crafts, patterns, decor	6	7	9	6	6	1.97	1.36
Stone architecture	14	3	5	5	7	1.64	1.63
Ginger bread trim/fancy detailing	10	11	2	9	2	1.47	1.33
Rustic/natural exterior	17	9	4	1	3	.941	1.25
Modern home	23	2	3	2	4	.882	1.45
Working farm	16	7	2	1	8	1.68	1.75

While friendly hospitality, warm welcomes, aesthetic values of agricultural landscapes, and good meals are important aspects of countryside capital, they are considered indirect contributions of capital and therefore difficult to measure. On the other hand, direct contributions of countryside capital, such as rural tourist attractions, restaurants, and accommodations, are also considered by visitors to be important to their rural tourism experiences. Respondents were given a list of preferred activities and asked to select all that applied. Table 5 displays the results of these selected preferred activities: Shopping and/or browsing in local shops and markets equals that of eating and drinking in local restaurants. Thus, visitors

staying in local B&Bs contribute much more to the rural economy than their overnight stays. However, enjoying the rural landscape and relaxing was selected third most often, which demonstrates the importance of the landscape as a backdrop to other experiences. It is no less important but contributes equally to the overall satisfaction of the experience.

Table 3. *Criteria Contributing to An Enjoyable Stay*

Criteria	Frequency (n = 106)*	%
Clean, comfortable, rural accommodations	91	85.5
Friendly hospitality	85	80.2
Quiet, relaxing atmosphere	83	78.3
Good meals	77	72.6
Rural landscape	53	50
Nearby rural attractions	44	41.5
Other	7	6.6

\*The results total more than 106 because respondents were asked to select all criteria that applied.

Table 4. *Rank of Visitors' Motivations for Staying In Rural Accommodations*

Visitors' rank	Motivation
1	Relaxing environment
2	Rural landscape
3	Escape into the country
4	Tourist attractions
5	Friendly hospitality
6	Natural environment
7	Host/guest interaction
8	New experience
9	Inexpensive vacation
10	Visit with family and friends
11	Learn about rural lifestyles
12	Active vacation

Table 6 reveals the descriptions that visitors gave when asked to describe the rural landscape in this region. (The total frequency is greater because study respondents gave several descriptors.) Words such as *pretty*, *beautiful*, and *nice* were stated most often, followed by references to the natural environment (hills, trees, fall colours, and gardens), farmland and fields, peacefulness, and a restful, relaxing, slower pace. Other words included *charming*, *scenic*, *tranquil*, and *serene*. These

descriptions are much the same as the commonly held images of rural areas known as the rural idyll or countryside ideal (Bunce, 1994; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Park & Coppack, 1994). These aspects of the rural landscape and rural life attract visitors to rural areas and are important elements of countryside capital.

Table 5. *Visitors' Activity Preferences*

Activity	Frequency	%
Made purchases/browsed local shops/markets	86	81.1
Ate/drank at local restaurants	86	81.1
Relaxed/enjoyed rural landscape	55	51.9
Visited local cultural heritage attractions	30	28.3
Went for nature walks	27	25.5
Other	15	14.2
Community theatre	14	13.2
Learned about rural life	11	10.4

*Note.* Respondents were asked to select all that applied (interviews with hosts help set criteria).

The perceptions of rural B&B operators can also indicate countryside capital assets. These entrepreneurs, through close interaction with guests, have a good understanding of their needs, motivations, and activity preferences and know what types of tourism attractions are available. They have an investment not only in rural tourism resources but also in other components of countryside capital. Thus their perceptions on rural tourism are vital for understanding the value of rural resources for tourism.

Table 6. *Visitors' Perceptions of the Rural Landscape*

Description	Frequency*	%
Beautiful/pretty/nice	27	32.1
Natural/hills/trees/woods/colours/gardens	16	19
Farmland/well-kept fields/crops/agriculture	16	19
Peaceful	15	17.9
Relaxing/slower pace/restful	13	15.5
Quaint/charming	12	14.3
Scenic/picturesque	12	14.3
Quiet/tranquil	12	14.3
Pleasant	5	6
Serene	4	5
Mennonites	4	5
Clean	4	5

\*The total frequency is greater because visitors gave several descriptors.

Table 7. *Hosts' Perceptions of the Benefits of Rural Tourism for the Area*

Hosts' description of benefits	Frequency*	%
Economic	30	75
Guests learn about area, heritage, and culture	6	15
Guests become more aware of agriculture, farming, and country living	6	15
Encourages development that benefits locals, e.g., trails and parks	2	5

\*The total frequency is greater than 40 because rural operators gave more than one response.

Hosts were asked what they perceived were the benefits of rural tourism for the region, as shown in Tables 7 and 8. The majority of hosts suggested that the region benefited economically from rural tourism, yet other benefits included visitors' learning about the cultural heritage of the region and becoming more aware of agriculture, farming, and country living. Hosts were also asked about their perceptions of the importance of rural tourism resources to the region (see Table 8). The majority of hosts stated that their B&B businesses were important for rural tourism, since without these types of alternative forms of accommodation, people would not be able to stay overnight in the rural area and thus would not contribute to the rural economy. Other important benefits included the economy as well as education and learning about rural and farm life.

Table 8. *Hosts' Perceptions of the Importance of Rural Tourism*

Hosts' description of importance	Frequency*	%
Provide alternative accommodation	19	47.5
Benefits local economy	9	22.5
Educational, learn about rural life/farm	8	20
Personal income	7	17.5
Increase the awareness of the area	6	15
Interaction with guests/more sociable, friendlier accommodation	5	12.5

\*The total frequency is greater than 40 because rural operators were able to give more than one response.

#### **4.0 Changing Landscapes and Implications for Countryside Capital**

This region is unique from other rural regions because of the influence of the Mennonite culture, a culture literally frozen in time. Thus continued development in the area requires a different perspective from that of Swarbrooke (1996), who argues that rural tourism should promote emerging modern cultures rather than seek to conserve traditional cultures. Young people in the Old Order Mennonite

community simply want the opportunity to own a farm, raise a family, and contribute to their ways of life, much like generations before them. Other cultural heritage elements in this area also contribute to unique qualities of rural tourism such as traditional farm buildings, well-kept rolling agricultural landscapes, clean, comfortable heritage accommodations, friendly hospitality, rural shopping villages, and local agricultural marketplaces.

It is evident that there are many intertwined linkages between the tourism and agricultural resource base in the Waterloo-Wellington region. Tourism resources, such as rural accommodations and attractions, benefit the area economically. The management of both tourism and agricultural resources would benefit from the application of a countryside capital model. Capital assets significant to tourism are also part of the agricultural economy. Understanding tourism and agricultural resources as countryside capital assets places an increased value on the elements that are vital to both industries.

This is especially true in terms of the indirect components of countryside capital such as the rural idyll: Images of rural life and landscape that attract visitors to the area act as a backdrop to visitors' experiences and contribute to a sense of community and quality of life for residents. However, if locals become dissatisfied with tourism or begin seeing their needs not being met (i.e., urban needs and development taking over rural needs), then feelings of antagonism may be reflected onto visitors (Doxey, 1975). Thus it is important to understand the potential loss and mismanagement of rural resources. The following section discusses the need for reassessing rural resources as countryside capital assets and better understanding the significance of these resources for rural tourism. This ensures that the value of these resources is seen not just for their tangible qualities but also for their intangible qualities as well.

#### ***4.1 Urban Encroachment and Land-Use Conflict***

Among the issues threatening the quality of countryside capital assets in the Waterloo-Wellington region is encroachment of urban development. Developers and local governments often value agricultural land adjacent to rapidly expanding urban areas more highly as residential, commercial, or industrial property than as a component of the agricultural landscape, tourism resources, rural idyll, or countryside capital. For example, a recent commercial development adjacent to the St. Jacobs Farmers' Market known as the Power Centre was heavily disputed by several citizens' groups, namely Concerned Citizens of Woolwich Township, the City of Waterloo, the Waterloo Uptown Business Improvement Area, First Gulf Developments, and the Hudson Bay Company ("Power centre," 2002). The Power Centre contains one of the largest Walmart retail stores in the region and other retail and office opportunities. It is sufficient to say that the global image of Walmart does not fit well with the image of the traditional rural idyll of the area. These concerns, however, failed to initiate any action, because a final approval granted by the Ontario Municipal Board in 2003 allowed construction to begin in 2008.

Urban encroachment in the Waterloo-Wellington region is occurring at an alarming rate. Farmlands, aesthetic landscape, and built heritage, all elements of countryside capital, are being eroded not only around large cities but also around smaller rural villages as well. The suburbanization of traditional small rural service communities, such as Heidelberg, St. Clements, Petersburg, St. Agatha, Ayr, Fergus, and Elora, is creating an epidemic of similarly designed cookie-cutter

homes on large lots with snaking streetscapes, all characteristic of the suburbs. These villages have become bedroom communities for large urban centres. They have minimal services and businesses that cater to them. The solution, often initiated by outside developers, is to construct big-box developments, similar to those in the suburbs of Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, and Guelph.

The concern with these less attractive landscapes is that they are no longer unique and actually mirror the urban landscapes that tourists are trying to escape. Mitchell (2004) refers to rural newcomers as “anti-urbanites” who are drawn to an idealized countryside as a place in which to live, work, or retire. They tend to have different views on the preservation of rural heritage, most likely because they have not lived in the area for long (one half of Mitchell and de Waal’s [2009] resident survey respondents in St. Jacobs had lived there for less than 10 years). This suggests that the severity of rural landscape change may not be reflected in community residents’ perceptions. Mitchell and de Waal (2009) suggested that an out-migration of residents dissatisfied with development may occur as well as a decline in tourism visitor numbers if the consumptive experience is less attractive. Furthermore, Lapping and Marcouiller (2008) acknowledged that rapid in-migration of exurbanites and recreation-amenity development, along with corporate agriculture, footloose and globally competitive firms, and mass tourism, are drastically changing rural America. The needs of original rural residents are not being met due to these radical changes to the societal makeup of rural regions. Moreover, in the past, long-term rural residents more rooted in their place and local landscapes would have identified more strongly with the cultural landscape (Bell, 1992; Crouch, 1994), but as these residents move out and exurbanites move in, there is less attachment to the rural landscape and thus to an intangible element of the countryside capital.

The loss of traditional family-operated farms, the enlargement of farms, and urban encroachment on valuable farmland in southern Ontario raise significant concerns for future rural development (Walker, 1995). Specifically, the lack of agricultural land within the region has forced many Mennonites to move north and west to Huron, Grey, and Bruce counties, which have more agricultural resources available (Mage, 1989). This is a significant component of the unique countryside capital in this area. Moreover, if younger generations move away, older generations may feel forced to sell their farm properties to land developers so that they can be closer to their children. The result is a loss of cultural heritage in the Waterloo-Wellington region, a decline of countryside capital, and a drastic impact on rural tourism resources.

#### ***4.2 Commodification of Rural Culture for Tourism***

Visitors were first attracted to the rural landscapes of the region because of the unique influences of the Mennonites in Waterloo County as well as the British heritage and built infrastructure in Wellington County. Early commodification of rural culture began in the 1970s and centred on the villages of St. Jacobs and Elora. The theme of development was central to the preindustrial era, with commodities such as agricultural produce at markets and roadside stalls, quilts, pottery, antiques, ironworks, crafts, and the preservation and reconstruction of historic streetscapes (Mitchell, 1998; Mitchell & de Waal, 2009).

Initial developments were controlled by one or two local investors. However, as time progressed and the benefits of tourism were coming into fruition, other investors came knocking. Mitchell (1998) documented the stages of tourism

development around the village of St. Jacobs and suggests that St. Jacobs fits within a model of creative destruction based on the commodification of rural cultural heritage in the region. Creative destruction occurs when the tourism product that initially interested visitors and tourists evolves and eventually destroys the unique product due to a series of events such as external investments, large-scale developments, and commercialization through less authentic rural cultural tourism products and attractions (Mitchell, 1998).

Presently, development around Elora and Fergus includes international franchises such as Tim Horton's and McDonald's, as well as a casino. Development around St. Jacobs includes an outlet mall, a Best Western Spa and Conference Centre (named the St. Jacobs Country Inn), a Power Centre retail space, Riverworks shopping centre, a Sunday market, and a Tim Horton's. These developments, despite the high level of investment involved, clearly are not in accord with the images of the rural idyll and rural heritage that are attractive to visitors (Mitchell & de Waal, 2009). Even though the exterior architecture of the outlet mall, Sunday market, and Tim Horton's seems to exhibit a bygone era, their contents suggest otherwise. Retailers consist of modern-day global chains offering mass-produced wares, flea market consumables, and typical food products of any urban community in Ontario. Furthermore, many of the retail spaces are open on Sundays, most obviously the Sunday market. This goes against the Mennonite cultural tradition that Sundays are a day for rest, worship, and family time.

Many rural tourism attractions and rural tourism promotional materials utilize the concept of "country" without considering the ramifications of, quite literally, false advertising. For instance, Hopkins (1998) suggested that the tourist landscape in southwestern Ontario is signified in the promotional material as a symbolic space where an imaginary, mythical countryside is situated. Here the "rural" is commodified and sustained by "uneasy pleasures" (p. 65): the tensions created between consumers' willing suspension of disbelief and their knowledge of an advertiser's persuasive intentions. Changes to the rural economy create a "new countryside," one that consists of commodified rural culture with signs and symbols befitting appropriate images for the rural tourism consumer (Kneafsey, 2003).

The following examples reiterate this point. First, the exterior architecture of the outlet mall, Tim Horton's, and Best Western hotel mimic the built heritage of a preindustrial era but do not connect with local rural agricultural or cultural products. Second, the Best Western is called the St. Jacobs Country Inn, yet it does not accurately contain any typical country inn-like qualities. Similarly, the Sunday market seems like it may house local agricultural produce and handiwork much like the regular market across the street but it is actually a flea market. Third, promoting the Waterloo region as "St. Jacobs Country" does not do justice to the countryside capital assets that exist all over the region and that fit more closely with the rural idyll than with the recent developments outside of St. Jacobs.

The commodification of rural culture for tourism has taken place recently in this region despite the supposed initial efforts of entrepreneurial investors to prevent the loss of traditional Mennonite culture by centralizing developments to heritage villages. This is primarily due to the influence of external investment, which has circulated capital assets away from the unique countryside assets that initially attracted visitors. Some residents in St. Jacobs have noticed that many local farm families, particularly the Mennonites, have sold their properties and relocated to more distant locales where their rural lifestyles may be practiced in a more

peaceful and less commercialized setting (Mitchell & de Waal, 2009). As stated earlier, this is a great loss of unique countryside capital assets for this region.

### ***4.3 Local Investment and Management of Countryside Capital Assets***

As mentioned above, investment in rural tourism development in the area surrounding St. Jacobs has led to the commodification of heritage and the destruction of the rural idyll (Mitchell, 1998). Initial investors attempted to maintain an image of restored heritage villages, small-town main streets, and country antique stores, which have become popular for those seeking “country” things to do and consume (Bunce, 1994; Mitchell, 1998; Park & Coppack, 1994). However, more recent commercial developments appear to fit the rural theme but only as an external façade, while others do not even hide their lack of cohesion into the surrounding rural landscape.

Investment in rural tourism resources has been a subject of great concern for rural tourism sustainability (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Sharpley, 2002). In particular, Garrod et al. (2006) discussed the importance of investment in countryside capital assets in order to maintain their unique qualities for the enjoyment of future generations of both tourists and residents. But land-use developments in this region have, on several accounts, not been invested for the benefit of countryside capital assets. This is despite the importance of these unique direct and indirect components as outlined throughout this discussion. While several concerned citizens’ groups in both urban and rural areas have joined together to question further development, local and provincial governing bodies have ignored their requests. Public decision makers perhaps have difficulty recognizing the diversity of societal demands, and users of rural areas have difficulty vocalizing their preferences. Therefore participatory approaches have become important land-use planning strategies in certain areas (Mann & Jeanneaux, 2009).

This is where a reassessment of rural resources could become most important in managing future development. Currently, the value of rural land is seen as a commodity, and top-down land-use planning and management seek to maximize profits and returns on investment. However, little is understood about the value of the rural landscape as both a direct and indirect component of countryside capital assets for both rural tourism and agriculture. A higher return on investment may be the result if rural lands are protected from such uncompromising development projects. Top-down, bureaucratic land-use decision-making processes need to be replaced by community-based, participatory approaches commonly applied in resource management (Mitchell, 1997). Therefore, investment in rural tourism or other rural development is only beneficial if it seeks to maintain countryside capital: namely, the land resources that are crucial to maintaining the agricultural landscape and rural community necessary for rural tourism sustainability.

Raising the profile of rural resources may contribute to their sustainability. For instance, reconceptualizing rural resources as countryside capital provides a more holistic and integrated understanding of rural tourism and the adoption of a sustainable development approach (Garrod et al., 2006). Consequently, future investment that fits with a sustainable development paradigm must therefore keep the landscape intact, foster a healthy social structure of the local communities, promote optimal quality of life for residents, relaxation for visitors, and increase the potential for added value to the tourism industry (Gannon, 1994).



Several initiatives based in resource management could be applied to appropriately manage rural resources as countryside capital in the Waterloo-Wellington region. Community-based partnerships, such as cooperatives, may also be very effective at ensuring that rural culture, a valuable resource, is preserved in rural areas (McDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). Wilson, Fesenmaier, and Fesenmaier (2001) also suggested the importance of the community approach to tourism development and that rural tourism development and entrepreneurship cannot work without the participation and collaboration of businesspersons directly and indirectly involved in rural tourism. Farrell & Twining-Ward (2005) used a complex systems approach, adapted from ecosystem management, to encourage a greater understanding of sustainable tourism systems. New modes of governance and institutional arrangements for collaborative regional and local landscape planning should also be implemented in order to reassess the value of countryside capital to rural tourism and more generally to the rural and urban communities that utilize these resources on a daily basis (Mann & Jeanneaux, 2009).

## **5.0 Limitations of the Countryside Capital Model**

The purpose of this paper is to apply a model of countryside capital to reassess rural resources for rural tourism and thus contribute to rural sustainability. However, this model is not without limitations in its application. One limitation, for example, is the difficulty in assessing or managing rural resources for countryside capital assets without being able to measure them. Reallocating rural resources as capital assets that benefit tourism and agriculture can only go so far in convincing local and regional governances to reassess land-use planning policy, tourism promotional campaigns, and commercial development investments. The reassessment of rural resources as countryside capital is only one step forward that must be accompanied by a method of measuring these capital assets. Countryside capital includes both direct components as well as indirect components that tend to offer more intrinsic value to rural resources. However, they are difficult to quantify in a capitalist society where land-use planning policy is often dictated by land, as commodity and planning approaches tend to be top-down, heavily bureaucratic, and political.

In particular, measuring countryside capital is challenging with regard to intangible or indirect elements. In this context, measurement and management techniques might require a constant monitoring or evaluation of residents' and visitors' perceptions on current and future development projects, with legitimate development policies being adapted to include local participatory knowledge. For example, residents and visitors should be consulted on how they perceive a future development would impact their perceptions of the rural landscape or aesthetic appeal of the region. Furthermore, given the rapid residential and commercial developments occurring in these areas, residents' and visitors' satisfaction rates should be addressed on a more frequent basis and so should the opinions of local heritage preservation groups and concerned citizens' groups. In this region, it is not customary for Mennonites to voice their dissatisfaction with certain types of development; rather, they would prefer to quietly move away peacefully than protest planning and development initiatives. Therefore, it is imperative that government planning and corporate development organizations consult citizen interest groups, as they may be the only voice available for this unique yet dwindling rural population.

A method for measuring tangible and intangible capital in rural regions can be adapted from Svendsen and Sorensen (2007). Essentially, Total Stock of capital (TS) is a function of Physical capital (P), Natural capital (N), Human capital (H), Social capital (S), Organizational capital (O), and Cultural capital (C). The authors suggest several methods for estimating utilization and availability of stock in an area. For example, a community may have an abundance of cultural capital or natural capital but may not be actively utilizing these potential resources to increase the value of these assets (Svendsen & Sorenson, 2007). Perhaps a similar measurement technique could be applied for countryside capital. Rather than include generic forms of cultural capital, human capital, and natural capital, it could be a function of very specific elements of countryside capital, such as number of family farms, size of farms, quality of rural tourist attractions, rural image promotion, built heritage designation and preservation, quality of rural accommodations, local tourism investment initiatives, conservation group involvements, and so on. The measurability of the direct and indirect components of countryside capital is one such area that deserves more explicit attention.

A second limitation of the model is that it suggests that rural tourism and agricultural resources are perceived as equally important, but this is based on the assumption that the majority of concerned groups agree that rural areas are experiencing creative destruction, commodification of cultural heritage, and the loss of the rural idyll. Perhaps some of the rural residents, being exurbanites, may actually prefer to some degree the urbanization of rural landscapes. Big-box store developments, kitschy flea markets, and fast-food franchises are a welcome site for exurbanites who have gotten tired of the so-called inconveniences of rural life, such as the longer drives for goods and services. This is again why constant monitoring and measurement of residents' and visitors' perceptions through survey questionnaires, focus groups, and information sessions for the community are paramount. More important, educating the public and private sectors on the significance of the linkages between tourism and agriculture and especially the intangible elements of countryside capital is crucial to the management of these resources.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

This paper has applied a framework of countryside capital to reassess the value of resources for rural tourism in a culturally unique region. It recognizes that the value of the rural landscape as a rural resource needs to be re-examined insofar as these lost and changed landscapes create negative implications for rural tourism as well as agriculture. Through a detailed case study focusing on one niche market, the B&B, it acknowledges the importance of countryside capital assets in terms of direct and indirect components associated with rural cultural heritage landscapes and lifestyles. However, current land-use planning and development and investment initiatives are wreaking havoc on countryside capital assets. It may only be a matter of time before development "kills the goose that laid the golden egg," as one study participant said.

Further research on countryside capital assets and rural tourism needs to investigate the various components of capital assets in more detail, perhaps even devising a measurement scale similar to that of Svendsen and Sorenson's (2007). Future studies should apply the model with a greater empirical fervour to address the specific components of countryside capital assets and analyze concerned groups' perceptions on the importance or value (both tangible and intangible) of

these rural resources for tourism. Furthermore, research needs to address other niche rural tourism markets, such as that of day visitors, and other rural entrepreneurs, such as the business owners in St. Jacobs and Elora. Studies are also needed that apply the framework of countryside capital to other rural regions in Canada so that comparative discussions can be made. Finally, the application of community-based and collaborative planning approaches, participatory approaches, and systems approaches to managing countryside capital assets and rural resources for tourism is suggested for future research.

Care needs to be taken to ensure that rural areas are marketed appropriately, because “such dissonance [inappropriate marketing] creates confusion in visitors’ perceptions and represents lost promotional opportunities, possibly having a negative effect on rural tourism” (Beeton, 2004, p. 125). Morgan et al. (2002) suggested that destination image includes physical aspects, such as location, accommodation, attractions, and activities, and “emotional” aspects, such as landscape, atmosphere, and friendliness of the host population. These attributes combine to form the overall identity of the rural tourism destination and represent a critical link between rural tourism and countryside capital.

Rural landscapes in the Waterloo-Wellington region are unique because of the combination of natural elements, including rolling hills, maple woods, the Grand River valley, and cultural heritage elements, including the Mennonites and the resulting built heritage. These cultural landscapes consist of “a historical layering in which the present is merely the sum of past episodes, but is also an *active*, present- and future-oriented engagement with the environment” (Lee, 2007, p. 88). Perhaps there is a value, a need for people to hold on to rural places, a connection to their roots, the past, or the origin of their food. These places bridge a gap between urban and wilderness, and their importance has yet to be realized. Rural landscapes connect people to the cultures and history that have created them. They are distinctive places worthy of sustaining, and as one study respondent stated, “There is something worth preserving here, something worth keeping.”

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