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Building Capacity: The Role of Rural Traditional Media and the New Rural Economy

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This paper is one of five in this issue of the JRCD that was prepared for a Festschrift for Bill Reimer, Professor of Sociology at Concordia University and Director of the SSHRC-funded New Rural Economy Project (NRE) from 1998 to 2007. Indeed, the concept of the JRCD was conceived at a research workshop of the NRE in May, 2002. All five papers were peer-reviewed through the co-editing efforts of Dr. William Ashton and Dr. Ray Bollman.

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Building Capacity: The Role of Rural Traditional Media and the New Rural Economy

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Abstract

Using content analysis, this research focused on how three Canadian rural community newspapers over eighteen years, from different regions, communicated content about the shift from the old economy to the new economy during the period of neo-liberal policy adoption and the growth of globalization. We learned that local news coverage in the three rural communities, although present, provided superficial coverage of the changes that were occurring during the years of study. Therefore, the information that could have generated enough information to help address priorities for the community was mostly absent. The data demonstrated that while newspapers can act both as an asset or a liability and can increase capacity and Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure (ESI), they are being underutilized.

Keywords: capacity, community mobilization, community newspapers, new rural economy, rural change

1.0 Introduction

The New Rural Economy Project, as part of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, has focused on understanding rural change since 1997. The research here reported that a community newspaper is a form of capital that, if used effectively, can build community capacity, improve community connectivity, generate discussion, mobilize resources, and expand power and control through knowledge dissemination. Using Freshwater's framework (2000) exploring the differences between the Old and the New Rural Economy¹, as well as Reimer's Capacity Model (2002b), the research identifies how three different community newspapers, over eighteen years, from different provinces, reported on the shift from the old economy to the new economy during the period of neo-liberal policy adoption and the growth of globalization. This investigation was driven by the question: Did community newspapers, during a period of change in rural areas, effectively

¹ For clarification purposes, while Freshwater (2000) uses the terms the New and Old Rural Environment, this paper will replace the word environment with the word economy and use the acronym NRE. The acronym refers generally to the conception of the New Rural Economy and is never used to describe the New Rural Economy Project, a cross-Canada research team, headed up by Bill Reimer at Concordia University, Montreal.

communicate information about the shift toward a new rural economy? It is proposed that Capacity (Reimer 2002b) and Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure (Flora, Sharp, Flora, & Newlon, 1997) could be increased if news articles critically discussed rural change, and/or provided clear facts, debatable positions, and practical suggestions about the next steps that could be taken by a community. The data demonstrated that while newspapers can act both as an asset or a liability and can increase capacity and Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure (ESI), they are being underutilized.

1.1 Context

Research has clearly signalled that local newspaper readership has remained strong, even in a digital age (Althaus & Tewkesbury, 2000; Newspapers Canada, 2014). Moreover, newspaper readership has been linked to community engagement (Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001), satisfaction with a community's quality of life (Jeffres, Lee, Neuendorf, & Atkin, 2007; Shaw et al., 2001), and greater political involvement and engagement (Althaus et al., 2000; Dhalgren, 2009; Emig, 1995; Flora, 1998; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). When the information accessed from a newspaper (or other form of traditional media) is *shared* and *discussed* with others, a deeper understanding may develop by opening an active space between mass media reception and the subsequent interpersonal communication (McLeod et. al, 1996; Inayatullah, 2002; Scheufele, 2002; McLeod & Sotirovic, 2001).

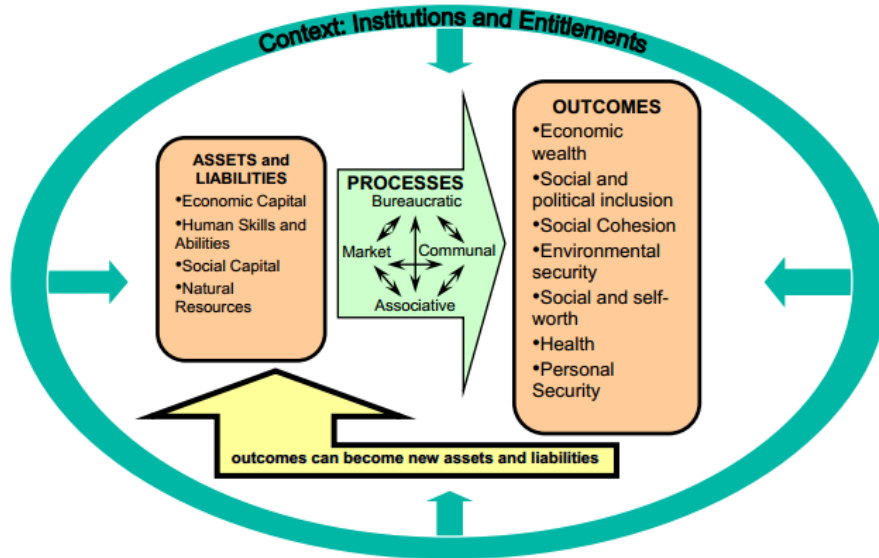
The agency of the reader is an important part of this process, and the act of sharing or discussing the content of community newspapers produces opportunities for social change and what Habermas calls *communicative action* (1987). This act allows for transmission of cultural perspectives, renewing and restating of values, coordinating connectivity between community members, and reifying local identities (Habermas, 1987, p. 140). Given the knowledge that community newspapers remain widely read, specific content can create discussions among local community members, provide relevant information, and generate greater participation in local affairs. As represented in the community development and engagement literature, processes of revitalization and resiliency have included such elements as capacity, including institutions and entitlements (Bird & Tassanyi, 2001; Reimer, 2006); different forms of capital, including social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 1995); connectivity, or community integration (Jeffres et al., 2007); and political engagement (Dhalgren, 2009; McLeod et al., 1999). Community capacity is defined as the ability for an individual, group, or community to access and mobilize resources to meet challenges and/or enable opportunities. This definition has been adapted from Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal (2001) who state,

Community capacity is the interaction of human capital, organizational resources and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain well-being of that community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organized efforts by individuals, organizations and social networks that exist among them and between them and the larger systems of which the community is a part (p. 7).

A more concise definition can be found in Reimer (2006): "capacity is reflected in the ability of communities or groups to reorganize assets to produce valued outputs" (p.

156). The model, which describes capacity building, includes the concepts of assets and liabilities associated with different forms of capital, institutions and entitlements, and the processes that enable outcomes (and new assets and liabilities). Extreme ‘connectivity’ could become a liability rather than an asset, depending upon the situation (Reimer, 2000b) as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The New Rural Economy Project Capacity Model.



Source: Lyons, T., & Reimer, B. (2009).

Community newspapers themselves can be seen as holding and generating many forms of capital: economic (financial), through advertising and promoting local businesses and services; human skills and abilities, via story creation, editorials, and letters to the editor; and social or cultural capital, from relevant content that connects content to local sentiments about identity and place. How they can do this is also of interest. The model above includes the dominant norms through which capacity may be mediated. Norms around business practices are predominantly market-based; those for schools, hospitals, and social service organizations are mostly bureaucratic; voluntary associations are primarily associative; and churches or family events are seen as largely communal (Reimer, 2002b, 2008). These norms have been instrumental in understanding which types of news stories generate opportunities to build capacity in communities.

Social capital, appearing on the left in the model, is defined by Bourdieu as:

the aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248-9).

Using this definition of social capital, it is argued that a local newspaper crosses social, cultural, and political boundaries, which can be present in any group. In the case of a rural community, newspapers may be used to increase, or stifle, capacity

through communicative action, depending upon decisions that are made at the editorial desk, as well as in the hands of the reader. Newspapers, as a form of capital, may therefore be an asset and/or a liability, depending upon the situation, the issue, the timing, and the people involved. Nonetheless, when *agency* is linked with social capital:

a community that has a well-developed social infrastructure tends to engage in collective action for community betterment: in a word it is *entrepreneurial* [*social capital*, (or ESI) which,] privileges horizontal over hierarchical relations...facilitat[ing] inclusion of diverse ideas, groups, and values in the public discourse within the community (Flora, 1998, pp. 489-90).

Flora's theory of ESI also considers diversity and inclusion within a community as it is possible for community members with different interests to coalesce around a flow of information that is not specific to one perspective. The result of this is a greater ease of acceptance about and implementations of decisions related to change (Flora, 1998, p. 490).

Additional research on ESI (see Flora et al., 1997) found that successful communities possessed "a newspaper that stimulated information flow regarding local issues," and by permitting different perspectives to flourish, or what he calls the *Legitimacy of Alternatives*, community engagement increased and had a great change of flourishing (Flora, 1998 p. 498). Other important factors from Flora include the importance of *resource mobilization* and *network qualities* (p. 498). The ability to mobilize different forms of capital including social, economic, human, and even natural capital, as well as the strength of internal bonds via horizontal networks, and external ties that bridge internal needs with external resources was also useful for understanding what was reported by community newspapers and how it was reported. While this research does not claim that capacity is generated by the knowledge or information found within community newspapers, it does enquire what (if anything) was made available to rural readership *about* the changes in the NRE and therefore asks if newspapers can provide an infrastructure for increasing capacity with ESI? The Capacity Model works well with this research, and also fits with the factors of resource mobilization (via input/outputs and assets/liabilities) and network qualities (via norms). It is recognized that the model would be better suited if it could also recognize the horizontal (internal/bonding) and vertical (external/bridging) ties as part of the norms, and the discussion of the data provides a means of reconciling these additional flows of communication with ESI and *communicative action*.

The research questions for this project focused on whether or not the sampled community newspapers communicated information about a new rural economy. If so, *which* categories were included, *how* were they reported, and were there similarities or differences among the regions selected? The method for this analysis is outlined below.

2.0 Method

Content analysis provides an effective means of analysing newspaper materials. The methodological framework was based first on the years 1985 and 2003 when significant change had taken place in Canada. These included the implementation of

the Free Trade agreement (1988) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994); the environmental movement of the late 1980s; and the changes in Canadian policy including further deregulation of the environment and a restructuring of government services such as health and education (Laxer & Soron, 2006; Manjunath & Harris, 2002; Suzuki & Dressel, 2010). Beyond the frequency of articles, the research also considered whether the stories critically discussed rural change, and/or provided clear facts, debatable positions, and practical suggestions about the next steps that could be taken by the community.

Determining the sample for the newspaper selected for this research was based first upon the selection of three New Rural Economy Project sites: a cross-Canada project which involved communities from every province and territory in Canada (Reimer, 2002a). It was practical to select three different sites from within this research project's sampling frame since a great deal was already known about the communities. One weekly community newspaper that was easily available and widely read was selected from Quebec, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. The newspapers did not have to be produced within the community, but each needed to have had a section that included local information. Key informants in the communities were contacted to confirm which newspaper was most suitable.

Beyond geographical, language, and cultural differences, the research sample included different community types from within the sampling frame of the New Rural Economy Project. These additional characteristics included exposure to global markets, proximity/distance to/from urban centres, levels of economic fluctuations, capacity, and well-being (Reimer 2002a). In the end the following three communities were selected:

- The village of Spalding, Saskatchewan has a population of 242 residents (2011), but when the surrounding region of Spalding is included, the number grows to over 1,000. Spalding is primarily agricultural with many thriving businesses and services as well as easy transportation with other town centers. The newspaper was called *The Naicam News*.
- The community of St Damase, Quebec has a population of 2,506 (2011) which was increased by over fifty percent when the village amalgamated with the Parish of St. Damase in 2001. Primarily agricultural, there are a number of services and associations within this community. The newspaper is called *Le Journal de Saint Damase*.
- The community of Tweed was also amalgamated to include five surrounding hamlets in 1998, and went from a population of 1,572 in 1996 to over 6000 in 2011. There is no major employment sector within the village of Tweed and many residents travel out for work each day. Many of the services have also been moved out, causing some stress for local residents. The newspaper is called *The Tweed News*.

Budgetary and time restrictions limited the number of newspapers per year that could be evaluated, so one month of the year was randomly selected (April), and the final newspaper of the month was acquired for evaluation for each year between 1985 and 2003². Included in the evaluation were all news stories, council minutes,

² Due to economic issues the Newspaper selected for Spalding was not in production between 1985 and 1988, and stopped again for the year of 1990. As a result there exists only 13 years coverage compared with the 18 years coverage for the other two sites.

and editorials. Excluded from analysis, were all advertisements, announcements, and classified sections. In order to select which news stories were relevant, a framework related to the new rural economy (Freshwater, 2000) was adapted to create classification categories for the content analysis. Based on this framework, Table 1 identifies the indicators of the new economy and lists the frequency of occurrence by community. Each article was read to determine if it fit into one or more of the categories above and articles were often listed across multiple categories.

Table 1. *Number of Articles by Community and Classification*

	The Tweed News	Le Journal de St. Damase	Naicam News (Spalding)
External markets	8	0	7
Natural resources	77	48	11
Change in industry	14	32	8
Service sector	74	75	52
Employment	18	43	3
Transportation	12	27	0
Communication	5	66	0
Role of government	73	43	15
Immigration and emigration	4	1	0
Local Politics	68	56	6
History/Heritage ³	16	32	1
Total	368	423	102

In retrospect, the limitation of having only one paper per year was recognised. While it was possible to track changes over time, the snapshot was limited to early spring which omits issues that might have occurred during the planting or growing months, harvest, and winter months. While randomizing the selected month for each year would have provided coverage of other seasons, in the interest of consistency over time, this approach was rejected.

The newspaper analysis was necessarily divided among three people who worked independently but included a detailed methodological framework and frequent exchanges early in the coding process to ensure inter-coder reliability. While the categories of measurement were extensive and detailed, issues of consistency were

³ This category was added in after research began and is not a part of Freshwater's original paradigm. Heritage or history provide a category which speaks to community as *place*.

taken seriously and required extra diligence and time. It is recommended for future research that the coding is conducted in a group setting to ensure immediate feedback and diminish the amount of time required to complete the coding cross-checks. Since two of the newspapers were in English and one in French, bilingual researchers completed the analysis and attention was paid to ensuring the terminology between French and English was being interpreted in the same way.

Evaluation of the sample of newspapers involved some variation in the number of articles considered within each site. The smallest of the three newspapers, *The Naicam News*, (which was eventually just a sub-section of a larger newspaper and was also missing five of the eighteen years of production), had a much smaller number of articles to be evaluated than the two other newspapers. Nonetheless, when considering the information that was presented it was often more directly critical and informative than the other, larger newspapers from Ontario and Quebec. For this reason it was retained as a representation of information that was available about the NRE in the region as well as a good example of how content can transfer meaningful and relevant information. In total, among all three community newspapers, 895 classifications were made under at least one of the categories related to the NRE. For the sake of brevity and clarity, those categories with the greatest representation across the sites were considered for inclusion in this paper.

3.0 The Data

The objectives were two-fold for this data collection; the first identified which of the categories, or indicators of change in the NRE, were reported about in the sample of rural newspapers, and the second sought to evaluate how the content was presented. Could it generate further discussion and encourage communicative action, build capacity or increase ESI? It is already known that regardless of the location or type of community, many of the challenges being faced by rural Canadians are shared. In all three sample newspapers, news articles regarding service provision, natural resources, the role of the government, and employment, were prevalent. Freshwater's categories provide one approach to identifying the changes in the NRE, and of particular interest was the frequency of reporting by local newspapers across the 18 year period. In Figure 2, the articles by the selected categories from each newspaper are presented.

The one category with the most coverage was the service sector (St. Damase, n=75; Tweed, n=74; Spalding, n=52). Freshwater's discussion of services states that small rural communities are unable to provide all the services they will need, and some will need to be sought elsewhere (2000 p. 37). While this is true, changes to government service provision as well as community amalgamations during the 1990s meant that rural communities had to adapt. When considering the coverage of changes to service provision over the eighteen-year period there were a number of concerns about water services, health, elder care, youth, postal service, and education. Figure 3 shows how each community reported about services over time. Spalding's *Naicam News* remains fairly consistent, whereas both in Tweed and St. Damase, the increase in coverage reflects the time period where water provision was of great concern in each community and coverage drops after the issue was resolved.

Continuing to provide local education services to the young in rural communities remains a struggle for municipal and provincial jurisdictions. Overall there was little mention about **education services**, with a few exceptions. In 2003 an article pointed out that educational enrolment was down in Naicam ("Naicam School Board

highlights”, 2003); and another article in Naicam news pushed for technology to be better integrated into the schools (“Tiger Lily School Division: Annual report and general meeting of electors”, 1996). Another article in Tweed called for the need for education in schools to adapt ‘globally’ (“Moving Towards Global Education”, 1997). Beyond those few examples, little else was said about changes in education.

Figure 2: Number of Articles by Category by Newspaper.

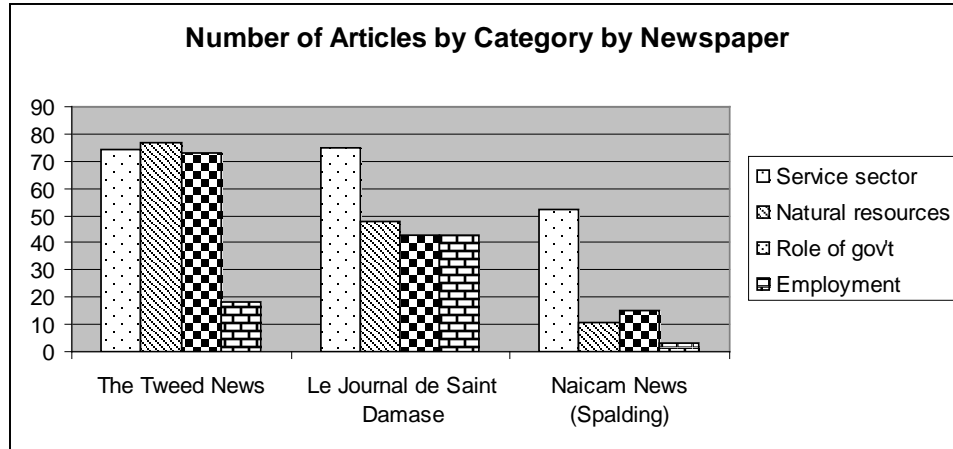
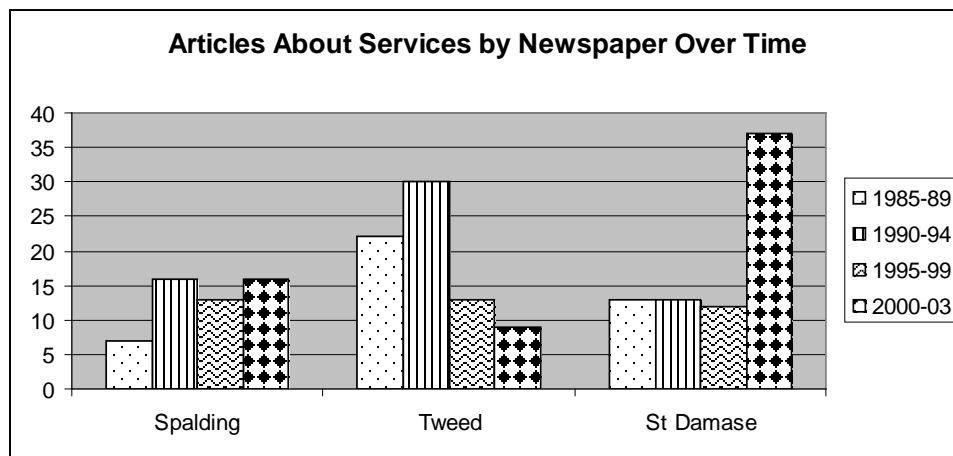


Figure 3: Articles about Services by Newspaper over Time.



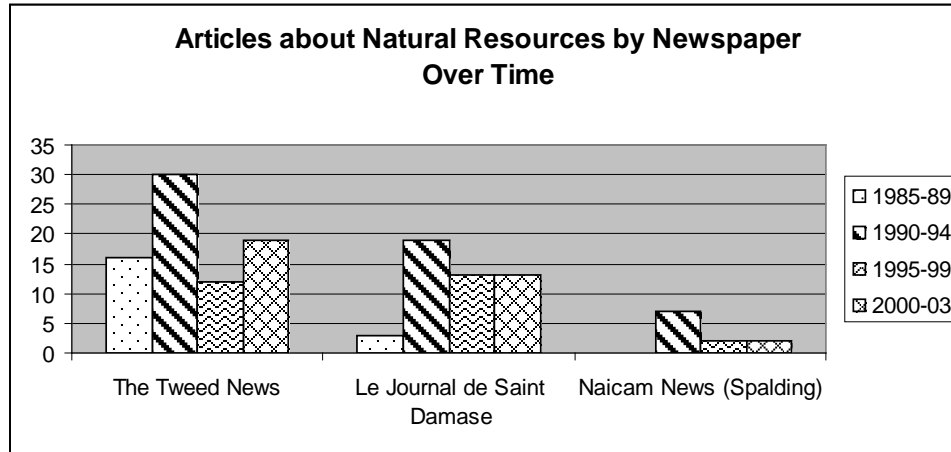
Health services are also worth a mention as they have also undergone change since 1985 including hospital closures and relocation of services, and many rural areas struggle to attract and maintain adequate medical staff. There were very few direct mentions about these challenges in the news articles. Instead, information about health services was usually presented as matter-of-fact announcements or important information about changes that were taking place, with little discussion about how to best adapt to these changes.

Natural resources, another indicator of the NRE, were more often mentioned in relation to environmental problems, rather than natural resource extraction, which generate income in many rural communities. Articles often depicted the responsibility of different government ministries to intervene when there was an

environmental problem, by regulating permits, providing authorization, imposing sanctions, or funding a solution.

Numbers in this category were increased as the sample of newspapers each year coincided with Earth Day (April 22) activities and advice about how individuals could help to preserve the environment (“Every day Earth Day”, 2001). Figure 4 presents the breakdown of articles about natural resources, by community newspaper, over time.

Figure 4: Articles about Natural Resources by Newspaper over Time.



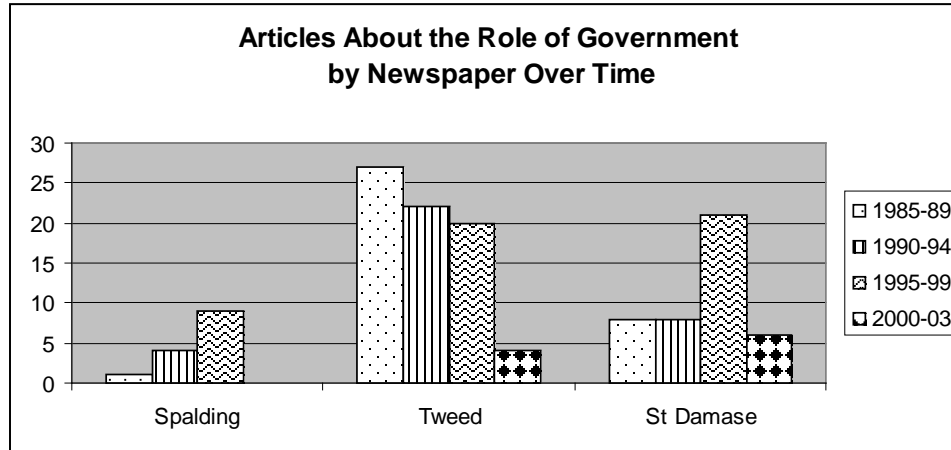
The high number of articles about natural resources and/or the environment represented in the early 1990s across all three newspapers might be explained by the environmental movement of the late 1980s. *The Naicam News*, even with its limited coverage, placed more responsibility on the individual and community for adapting to change, while the Tweed and St. Damase papers externalized environmental issues and presented environmental issues as a problem the government was expected to solve.

Content analysis also considered how the newspapers reported the **role of the government** which according to Freshwater is to support rural development through funding and regulation (2000, p. 40). Figure 5 provides the frequency of articles that reported on the role of the government, however, little of the content supports Freshwater’s argument that the NRE must invest more in human capital if a community is going to adapt. One example that was setting expectations about changes in the economy was found in *The Naicam News* with coverage of the Saskatchewan budget in 1991. This article outlined a shift in government policy to tighten up spending, called for a need for reasonable wage guidelines, achievable deficit targets, and limited growth in operating budgets (Saskatchewan Finance, 1991). Nonetheless, two proactive examples are found in *The Naicam News*, one stemming from a government initiative from the Rural Secretariat which discussed the need for local business development, tourism, farm improvement, and different cooperative loans (“At Work in Rural Communities”, 1997) and a second about strategies to bring more doctors into the region through special agreements (“Appointment of Doctors Approved”, 1995).

The greatest number of articles about the **role of government** among the three newspapers was found in the Tweed News (n=73), and while it included coverage

about the closure of the Minister of Natural Resources' office in 1996 and the responsibility of the government for better water testing, there were higher numbers reporting about political candidates and electoral outcomes than in either of the other two newspapers.

Figure 5: Articles about the Role of Government by newspaper over Time.



Freshwater's position on employment is that for a rural community to remain competitive, it either needs to "upskill" its human capital or "increase its productivity" in the new economy (2000, p. 41). For this reason, it was expected that numerous articles would cover training for new employment opportunities, and/or changes in employment as businesses closed or relocated. While articles about **employment** were present (see Figure 6) and all three communities discussed training for summer jobs and temporary employment opportunities, there were very few articles about career training, or "upskilling." Tweed had one ("Ready to Take Charge of Your Career", 2002) and St. Damase covered an Emploi-Quebec opportunity for free counselling to find jobs ("Club de recherche d'emploi. Tremplin vers l'avant", 2001). In Spalding, *The Naicam News* reported only about babysitter training ("Ready to babysit", 1995) and possibly future jobs with the new Parkland Replacement Project, which would renovate an old health care centre ("Naicam Town Council holds regular meeting", 2001) into a long-term care facility. The higher numbers of articles about **employment** in St. Damase represent neither career path training nor long-term employment, but highlight new businesses or temporary job opportunities, such as summer employment.

The previous section of the data considered if the changes that were taking place in the NRE were being presented in the sample of rural newspapers and were based on a few of the main categories of Freshwater's framework for changes in the NRE. It was discovered that many categories were present, but the articles were less numerous than expected and often show a trend of diminishing over time. The next section of data considers each newspaper separately, over time, by category, beginning with Spalding.

Spalding's newspaper, *The Naicam News* provides a consistent discussion of **Services** over time, beginning with an early 1990s concern about **natural resources** and the environment, and also including a late 1990s increase in discussion about the **role of government**—in relation to editorials about gun control. A vision for long term care services began in 1989 when an application was submitted for senior

housing project with 24 units (“Village of Spalding minutes”, 1989). Unfortunately, the Town of Naicam also made an application for a similar project, and in the end neither received funding. Over the next decade, applications were made, health care personnel hired (“Appointment of doctors approved”, 1995), hospitals converted (“Naicam Town Council”, 1996), other specialists lost (“North Central Health District Highlights of the April 7, board meeting”, 1998), and a new long term care facility proposed by upgrading a former care centre (“Naicam Town Council”, 2001). Other service concerns in Spalding included a volunteer fire fighters association, which created a new fire truck fund-raising committee (“Naicam Town Council”, 1996) and the implementation of user-fees for garbage collection after it was announced that twenty-four of the twenty-six landfill sites would be closed (“User pay for garbage to start June 1st”, 1997).

Figure 6: Articles about Employment by newspaper over Time.

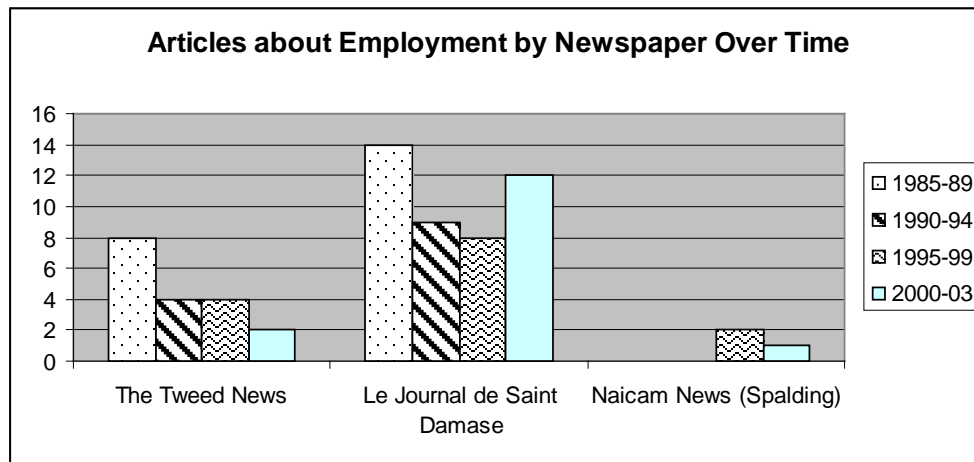
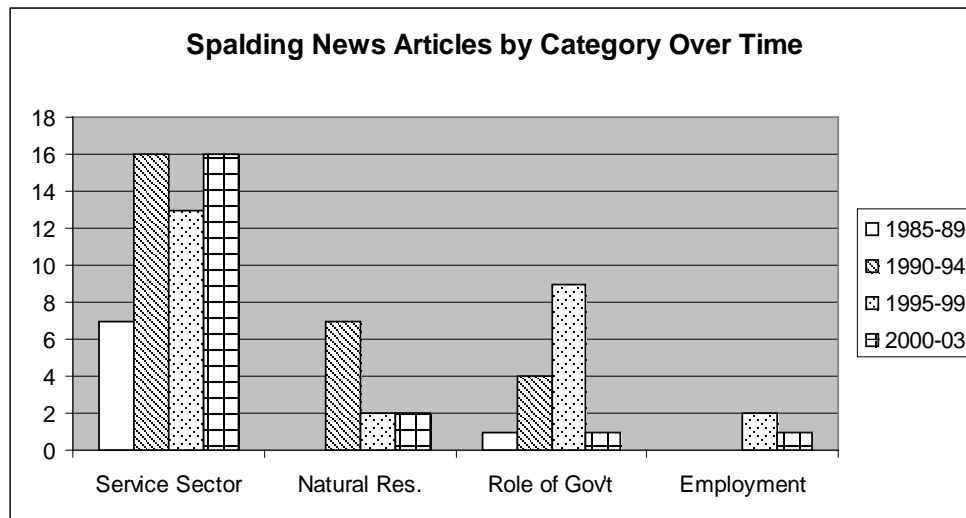


Figure7: Spalding News Articles by Category over Time.

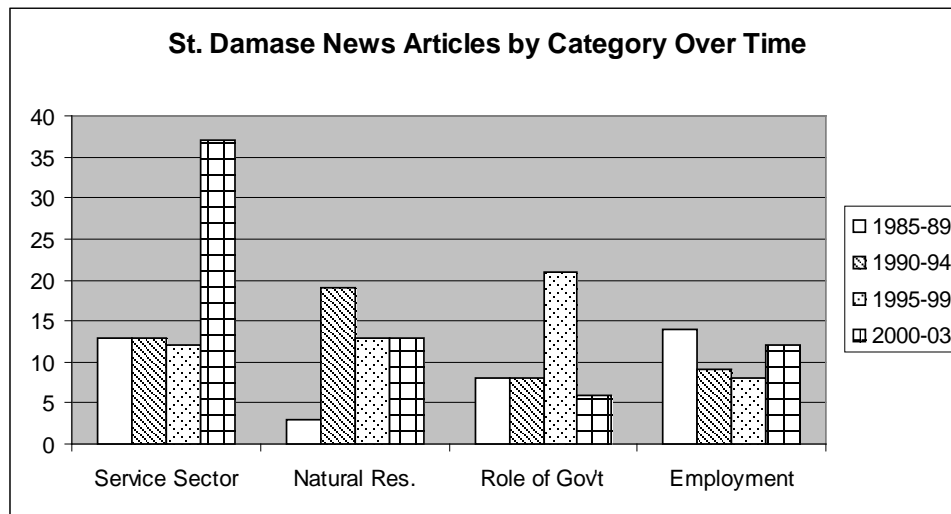


In the **natural resources** category, while fewer in number (n=11), these articles demonstrated a much broader range of concerns. These included: the impacts of a local elevator fire (“Firemen assess their week”, 1990); soil erosion (“R.M. of

Spalding #368 annual meeting”, 1990); establishing a new recycling centre (“Sherrie Smith proud to recycle at Naicam SARCAN”, 1992); zero-till and sprayer technology and custom seed treating (“Naicam Co-op manager attends conference”, 1993); and the need to conserve energy and for everyone to do their part to help the environment (“Linda looks at life: Earth”, 1994). In addition, in 2001 due to agricultural and environmental change, an editorial suggested adapting to a more holistic agricultural management system, which would keep more native grass plants rather than planting crops (“The New Agriculture”, 2001).

Articles from *Le Journal de St. Damase* are grouped in Figure 8 and consider the coverage about NRE indicators over time. **Services** were also fairly well represented over the years in this community; however, there is a notable increase in service coverage after 2000. This increase resulted from changes to the provision of health services and the articles reflected a theme of “services going to the people, rather than people going to the services”. The Mobile Health Unit began travelling into St. Damase on a schedule to ease the commuting pressures of non-emergency cases (“Du nouveau dans votre municipalité. Carrefour mobile maskoutain”, 2000). In addition, many medical tests required travel into St. Hyacinthe after 2002 (“Transfert du centre de prélèvements au CLSD-CHSLD des maskoutains à partir du 6 mai”, 2002).

Figure 8: St. Damase News Articles by Category over Time.



Articles about **natural resources** in St. Damase communicated concerns not only about water treatment, but also about a specific issue of applications to change land zoning from agriculture to commercial and residential (n=48). This type of re-zoning was presented as creating a tremendous, positive, financial impact, causing stress among residents of the surrounding rural community parish that had been amalgamated with the village of St Damase in 2001. Numerous discussions about this took place, at least ten times in fourteen years. From the perspective of the village, the zoning changes could increase its tax base, but from the perspective of the parish, once agricultural land was re-zoned it could never be returned to the original agricultural use.

The increase in articles about the role of government in St. Damase from the late 1990s reflected the need for a better water treatment plant, better regulations, and

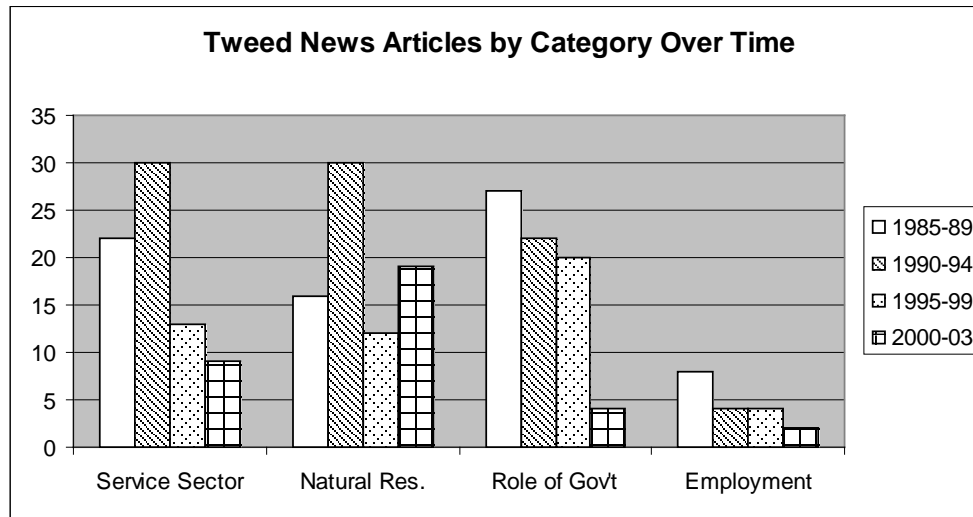
early discussions about the rumoured amalgamation of the parish with the town. **Employment** articles about temporary summer jobs remained consistent over the years and part of this higher number could also be related to the proximity of St. Damase to the larger communities of St. Hyacinthe and Montreal.

In Figure 9, the numbers of articles about employment in Tweed are not nearly as high as in St. Damase, even though the community of Tweed is also fairly close to Belleville and Kingston. There is probably another variable to consider such as the number of people who work locally, or the willingness of the editor to include employment related content in the Tweed News. In other categories, increases in **service sector** and **role of government** coverage are propelled in part by a concern about water services as well as the amalgamation of Tweed with the surrounding hamlets in 1998. Early on in the sample years there are a few articles which propose ways of adapting and meeting the **service** needs of an aging population. Senior citizens supported by the Ministry of Community and Social Services in Tweed set out a plan for Meals on Wheels, a drop-in centre, and a nursing home (“Pelona Golden Friendship receives \$5000 grant”, 1988). This followed from a 1987 proposed program for seniors and the disabled that suggested a service to provide transport to appointments or shopping outside of the town. The proposal was made to the ministry and would combine a small fee paid by the seniors with volunteer drivers (“Transportation for citizens and physically disabled adults”, 1987). A few years later, one article announced the hiring of a doctor (“There is a Doctor in the House”, 1995).

When exploring the category of **natural resources** in the Tweed News, the articles (n=77) differentiated between the individual’s role in preserving the environment (“The Three Rs of Garbage”, 1990), and the government’s responsibility to conserve or protect a particular area or species (“Amendments to the Fisheries Act”, 1991; “Gypsy Moth problem discussed”, 1985; “To test water problem in Tweed”, 1987; “MNR Monitoring Walleye Spawning”, 1989; “White Water in Tweed”, 1993). Articles presented rural areas as being under threat from external forces. For example, global warming was considered an uncontrollable event impacting the community with no connection to local residents’ behaviours and the expected changes in global temperature (“Climate change threatens Ontario agriculture”, 2003).

While many of the categories related to the NRE were present over the selected time period, beginning in the mid-1990s, there was a reduction in the number of articles with socio-economic information, political facts, figures, or other external research. Such articles were replaced with more about local history, local identity, or other human interest stories. The clearest example of this came from Tweed. After 1997 The Tweed News no longer published the town council minutes; after 2000, information about church events no longer appeared in the paper; and by 2001, volunteering issues were no longer reported. More of the critical news articles were replaced with greater coverage of historical events, features about local residents who had travelled or won prizes, donations that had been made, and reports about fundraising. Reducing the coverage of local volunteer organizations, churches, and local town council meetings can limit ESI by silencing the local voice and diminishing network qualities and resource mobilization necessary for local agency to respond to rural change (Flora 1998).

Figure 9: Tweed News Articles by Category over Time.



4.0 Discussion

The frequency of articles in rural newspapers demonstrates that there was certainly coverage of many of Freshwater's indicators found in the sample newspapers over the time period concerned. Not all categories were well represented but many had at least some coverage. The other objective of this research questioned if a rural newspaper was itself a form of capital, and if the coverage found in rural newspapers could increase capacity? Reimer's Capacity Model and Flora's Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure are useful tools to address these questions. The Capacity Model makes use of the governance or the various social mechanisms through which the communication and social agency are channelled. These are Market, Bureaucratic, Associative, and Communal. These governance mechanisms are the resources that are mobilized when trying to achieve an outcome. Flora's ESI appreciates the ability of resource mobilization, and acknowledges the benefit of a community that possesses a local newspaper in doing so, if different perspectives are presented to the active reader of a news article, or through a discussion started from this form of communication. Furthermore, while the capacity model presents the flow of income/outcomes or assets/liabilities, Flora's *network qualities* acknowledge the internal, horizontal networks (bonding) and external, vertical networks (bridging), necessarily implicated in Habermas's *communicative action*.

4.1 Are newspapers a form of capital and are they an asset or a liability?

Our sample of rural newspapers provided very few examples of multiple perspectives being presented, although there were some occasionally. For example in *The Naicam News* there was a strong critique of the banks which had tripled their revenue since the 1980s by "unbundling" services, increasing user fees, and Interac withdrawal fees. The published statement was that they were "ruining relations with clients" (Wychs, 1992). In *Le Journal de St. Damase*, Le Club de l'Âge d'Or made the case about the importance of elders in society ("Le Club de l'Âge d'Or. Profiter de l'intelligence des vieillards", 1994). This was the only article found in any of the newspapers that positioned seniors as an *asset* for the community. From the same community, but in a different vein, when the softball team was cancelled in 2003

due to lack of interest and volunteers, and when the youth centre closed in 2000, editorials blamed parents for allowing their children to stay home and play video games rather than being engaged in community sports or other activities. From the market and bureaucratic norms involved in a banking service, to the communal and associative norms found with golden age or youth organizations, the role of the newspaper in all three examples here could act as an asset to strengthen internal or external ties among generations, businesses, other communities; or to weaken them, resulting in liabilities for some.

Weaker ties and/or liabilities for some could create stronger ties and assets for others. In the case of the financial institutions, with enough communicative action, individuals could shore up the clientele of a local cooperative bank. Money and effort not being placed in a softball league could be invested in other organizations. Irrespective of outcomes, local newspapers can influence the discussion about where organized energy ought to be invested. In the case of the youth centre closure in St. Damase, it was reopened again, demonstrating enough value was placed on the outcome given the efforts required. Newspapers therefore can be both an asset or a liability. Given that the data demonstrated a very low amount of *Legitimacy of Alternatives* (Flora, 1998), or relatively few stories that critically discussed rural change, provided clear facts or debatable positions, or made practical suggestions about the next steps that could be taken by the community, newspapers are more a liability than an asset to a rural community.

Having said that, if not for the community, for who do they serve as an asset? Could the interests be served for newspaper owners, advertisers, external business interests, government agencies, or international market interests? Furthermore, if the communications of a local newspaper are designed to better fit with the Market or Bureaucratic norms, can greater use of the Associative or Communal norms via letters to the editor, council meeting topics, or more local freelance journalism alter the balance of asset/liability in favour of community interests? To address the question, about how norms of capacity interact with local news stories, the four selected categories presented in the Data section regarding change in the NRE have been evaluated by considering the role of the four norms present in the capacity model.

4.2 Capacity and Services

Services build and support capacity in a number of ways and they rely on many different forms of capital (human, economic, social). Those necessary forms of capital are filtered through all of the processes of capacity: bureaucratic processes for the organizational operations and ties to government; market processes for those services that are provided by the private sector; associative processes for all services supported by volunteers; and communal processes for charitable services, and the often unrecognized support of family and social networks. Service provision has been provided in the past by government agencies (bureaucratic), the private sector (market), volunteer organizations (associative), or family/friends (communal), and while the underlying value of universal access to services remains important, the debate about the division of cost and responsibility between the different providers is not a new one. It is also recognized that many services, which may be externally funded in part, also often rely heavily on internal volunteers (such as a rural fire brigade). With the understanding that this line is often blurred between external and internal support, it was found that the news articles on services tended to divide along the line of principle providers. Externally supported government services

(health, infrastructure such as roads or water treatment, and education) made use of the market/bureaucratic norms. Locally supported community services (youth/elder support, communication, and local security) were best described as using communal and associative norms.

4.3 Capacity and the environment/natural resources

Environmental issues/natural resources through individual and collective organization, governmental regulation, and public/private partnerships make use of all four of the processes of capacity depending upon the situation. The capacity model applied to this category explores the tension between the bureaucratic responsibilities of the different levels of government to address environmental issues, and the responsibility of readers to collaborate with associations or community members to address issues related to the environment. One particular article from Spalding rejected the more market based land-use model of monoculture and continuous cropping, in favour of longer term protection and responsible stewardship of the land (“The New Agriculture”, 2001). As the data shows, *The Naicam News*, even with its limited coverage, argued an internal responsibility (communal/associative) for protection of natural resources and the environment, while the other two newspapers externalized the problem (market/bureaucratic) and expected the solutions to be provided from one or more vertical ties.

4.4 Capacity and the Role of Government.

Freshwater using Barkley’s observation “that rural places tend to see their future in terms of their past” (2000, p. 40), expected that governments would be slow to change direction, even if a new rural economy demanded it. How community newspapers presented the role of government, and whether government support would provide a traditional investment in space and resources instead of investing in human capital and place, ties directly to Freshwater’s analysis (2000, p.40).

Across all three sites, articles present the government as a separate entity which imposes decisions on the community to which there is little recourse other than voting differently in the next election. Occasional frustrations from dealing with bureaucratic government departments emerge but it is clear that the communities rely on the government for funding, important services, and the regulation of resources. When dealing with support of the community services and businesses it is the norms of market and bureaucracy that predominate as they are better structured to access the available assets of government organizations. However, if more communal and associative processes could be utilized, outcomes of bottom-up, grassroots development could be encouraged.

4.5 Capacity and Employment

There is a natural fit between market/bureaucratic processes and employment. However, the lack of information available about changes to local employment in the NRE demonstrates a clear gap in the discussion that is taking place, versus the one that needs to take place. Prevalent attitudes in western society place the individual at the centre when allocating responsibility for success in wages, job satisfaction, job security, and candidacy. While the world view exists that hard work will eventually pay off, and there is always work for those who want/need it, this is an attitude rather than a reality, and in the NRE, quality work with quality pay continues to evade many rural residents. Freshwater’s analysis of the NRE points to

rural residents' persistent lack higher education and urban centres' higher levels of high-skilled to low-skilled labour (p. 43). Furthermore, topics such as the value of women's work in the home and on the farm or affirmative action were negligible, compared with the broad discussion about temporary or seasonal work. Further discussion about work and capacity from the perspective of a volunteer organization of fire fighters or a community committee for a local festival that benefits the local market could generate action around what matters most to a community and how such events are subsidized, and by whom.

4.6 How can rural newspapers build ESI?

Accessible services are a requirement for all rural community residents, and when changes take place in one area, other support mechanisms must be activated to fill in the gap. The coverage in rural newspapers should articulate where gaps exist, and provide the core knowledge base about where to invest time and energy in filling those gaps. The longitudinal nature of this study exposed the extent of delay in responding to a community's service needs as they arise. If funding and/or infrastructure were required, then those with an immediate need were not easily accommodated and had to find alternatives in the interim. For example, those who needed long-term elder-care in Spalding were unable to have their needs met while applications went back and forth, and caused stress between the Town of Spalding and the Town of Naicam, since they were competing for funding. Community newspapers could do a better job of addressing the needs of those residents caught between the arrival of the problem and the implementation of the solution. In considering the extent of coverage of services by each of these newspapers, Spalding and St. Damase had more consistent coverage of what the problem was and what was being done to solve it. Tweed could have been more proactive and less reactive in its approach and the decline of coverage over time diminished its capacity.

There remains also a tension between the market (private) and bureaucratic (public) provision of services, as well as the important role that associative and communal processes play in filling the market and bureaucratic gaps. Nonetheless, volunteer energy and family ties become stretched thin if the public/private responses to changing service needs experience any delays. One mechanism for adapting when change arrives is having reliable income through employment which helps to temporarily fill service gaps.

5.0 Conclusions

Freshwater's paradigm regarding what has changed for rural areas along with Reimer's Capacity Model and Flora's Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure provide a synergetic framework for integrating community agency and building local capacity. Local news coverage in three rural communities, although present, provided only a superficial treatment of the changes that were occurring during the years of study. Therefore, the information that could have generated enough information to help address priorities of the community was mostly absent. In an era of continued rural change, one must acknowledge the important role local newspaper communication plays in capacity building as one of the ties that can mobilize internal and external resources.

If rural communities are to develop their communicative capacity further, they must first reclaim their local newspapers as a place for information delivery, rather than

simply human interest narratives. Improved communication for the purpose of building capacity includes:

- consistent coverage of content that is relevant and proactive, not reactive;
- more direct information which includes current data, facts, and figures that are locally based but externally connected; and
- working to increase ties with other knowledge centres and human capital, internally and externally.

Such an approach could invoke deeper discussions among a concerned and informed group of residents, connect residents across regions and political boundaries with similar concerns, issues or needs, and empower local residents as they adapt to the next rural economy.

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