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Manufacturing Consent for an Extractive Regime in Rural New Brunswick, Canada

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Abstract

A common narrative for rural regions, maintained by corporate news media, is that extensive resource extraction from the natural environment by large corporations is an economic necessity. This corporate discourse marginalizes voices advocating for rural and community-based social and economic development. New Brunswick is one of the smallest and most rural provinces in Canada, with almost half of its residents living in rural areas. Our study explored how news editorials discussed rural issues in the province. News editorials function to maintain a dominant discourse in society. Unique in Canada, one family in the province has extensive business interests in resource extraction while owning a company, Brunswick News, that has a near-monopoly of the news media in the province. Our study conducted a content analysis of Brunswick News editorials focused on the term 'rural' over a recent five-year period. Our results highlight that in a vastly rural population, only one percent of editorials included this term. Of these, 87% backed claims of diminished rural communities, and 43% supported claims that corporate development of extractive industries was necessary to provide the economic boost to rural New Brunswick and ensure their sustainability.

Keywords: news media, editorials, New Brunswick, resource extraction, diminished rural communities

1.0 Introduction

News media make choices about the themes, narratives, and individuals or groups that they profile and highlight, and those they marginalize through willful or accidental inattention. Voices advocating rural and community-based economic development may fall into either category. Even though technological shifts allow for news to be shared via social media, traditional news sources continue to influence public perceptions.

The larger research project, of which this paper is a part, explores how to sustain rural environments as well as transform perceptions of rural communities using alternative media sources. We began with the present investigation of how our current corporate news media represent rural New Brunswick. Unique to New Brunswick, the Irving family has extensive business interests in resource extraction while also holding an English language daily newspaper monopoly, Brunswick News, in the province's three major cities. Our team conducted a content analysis of Brunswick News editorials in these three dailies focused on 'rural' as a specific term, between January 2013 and December 2017. Considering the potential conflict of interest identified in previous research between Brunswick News and other Irving family businesses, we expected that their newspaper editorials would show support for resource extraction (Couture, 2013; Livesey, 2016b; Poitras, 2014). We did find this and more, and we also found less: that the term 'rural' was almost invisible in the editorials. Our discussion explores these findings and considers the implications in jurisdictions where media is concentrated in corporate holdings focused on profit above rural community development.

2.0 New Brunswick, A Rural Province

Canada is a colonial state, with its economy dependent for the past four centuries on resource extraction and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). New Brunswick, located in the Maritime provinces (east of Maine, south of Quebec, and north of Nova Scotia), has a population of approximately 770,000 (Statistics Canada, 2019). It is one of the smallest and most rural provinces in the country; 48% of its residents live in rural areas (Martel, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2016). New Brunswick's urban population is divided between three modest-sized census metropolitan areas located across the southern portion of the province; Moncton (144,810), Saint John (126,202), and Fredericton (101,760) (Statistics Canada, 2017), whereas the northern regions are more rural and home to most of the province's francophone and Acadian populations; it is Canada's only officially bilingual province.

The social, economic, and physical distance between rural and urban New Brunswick is small. None of the cities have large, sprawling suburbs; the rural countryside is reached within a short drive of downtown Saint John, Fredericton or Moncton. Most urban New Brunswickers have grandparents, aunts or uncles, or siblings residing in rural and small-town locales. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the rural and urban residents of New Brunswick are often tied economically to common industrial modes of resource extraction and production. Rural areas most often serve as extraction zones, while urban areas serve as production (and export) zones, but both coexist and co-depend, hand in glove.

At the start of the 17th century, New Brunswick was a source of timber and fish bound for European markets. In the 19th century, it was a hub for shipbuilding for maritime trade. After the Confederation of Canada in 1867, New Brunswick's

economy remained based on commodities, most importantly wood from its abundant forests. In the early years, the Provincial Legislature was dominated by so-called “timber barons” in both numbers and influence (Parenteau, 2013). With almost 85% of its land in forests, the rural and provincial economy continues to be strongly tied to corporate resource extraction. In the context of Canadian colonialism, New Brunswick stands out: a handful of companies in the province dominate particular natural resource sectors. In the agriculture sector, in the western part of the province, many once-independent farmers are now under unfavourable contracts with one dominant company (Glover & Kusterer, 2016). A second company has a dominant position in the provincial aquaculture industry (Berge, 2017).

One family in New Brunswick owns businesses that control not only much of the forest resource extraction activities in the province but also interests in transportation, forest value-added manufacturing, retail building products, and more. Within the province, the Irving family businesses are the largest private sector employers. Collectively the Irving group is responsible for one out of every 12 jobs in the province and more than half of its exports (Livesey, 2016b). The Irving businesses are private (not on the stock market), and much of their dealings are not public knowledge. In 1991, DeMont (1991) identified as many as 300 different business entities owned by Irving. More recently, it was reported that the Irving group is made up of between 174 and 250 companies, collectively valued at an estimated \$10-billion. While they dominate the forest sector, another branch of the family owns an oil refinery and associated businesses. A series of articles about the Irvings that won a national investigative journalism award posited that New Brunswick is: “a 'company province' dominated by one very rich and powerful family” (Livesey, 2016b, p. 3).

2.1 Brunswick News and News Media Editorials

The vertical integration of Irving businesses extends all the way up to print news media; their company Brunswick News owns all of the English language dailies and almost all the weekly newspapers in the province (Couture, 2013; Livesey, 2016a). This ownership did not occur without challenge. Following the purchase of the publishers, K.C. Irving Limited was initially charged and convicted of conspiring to undermine the competition. However, acquittals were secured following appeal where, even though the actions met part of the criteria for ‘monopoly,’ it could not be proven that the company intended to use the resources to operate against the public interest (R. v. K.C. Irving, Ltd. et al., 1978). The concentration of news media ownership is the only one of its kind in Canada, and the dominance of the Irving family businesses in both the news media and the resource extraction industries is unique in the Global North (Walker, 2010)¹.

The news media is based on subjective human construction, and newspaper editorials have a particular role. In their classic analysis of the news media, *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky (2002) identified that newspaper

¹ There is also one French-language daily newspaper, *Acadie Nouvelle*, that publishes news primarily for the Acadian population in the province. *Acadie Nouvelle* is editorially independent, although it is printed by *Brunswick News*. Walker (2010) relates that, in addition to owning all the English-language dailies in the province and almost all the weeklies, until the early 1970s the Irvings also owned a television station that was broadcast into 95 percent of homes in the province. Walker recounts that although the Irvings were eventually forced by the national CRTC regulator to sell their television station to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), several attempts by federal government commissions to break up the Irving print news media monopoly were unsuccessful.

editorials might be purposely crafted to satisfy the opinions of the current government or large corporate interests. Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) drew similar conclusions from their study of the editorials in three major US newspapers. In Canada, Engler (2016) documented many instances of news media owners dictating editorial content favourable to certain political agendas. Editorials in the *Globe & Mail*, the Canadian national newspaper of record, have been the subject of several major studies (Harvey 2018; Henry & Tator, 2002). Harvey (2018) posited that the newspaper's editorial position contributes to a "hegemonic voice on public affairs" (Harvey, 2018, p. ii). Henry and Tator (2002) found that, unlike news discourse, editorials "are evidence of the interlocking power structures of any given society; in fact, they are often addressed not only to the reading public but also to society's economic and power elites" (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 93).

Woodrow and Reimer (2014) conducted previous research on rural newspapers throughout Canada, although not in New Brunswick. Among many limitations of these newspapers, they found a potential conflict of interest: while some news articles present the government as a separate entity imposing their decisions on others, the rural communities in question rely on such entities for funding, services, and resources. Although their research did not focus on editorials, clearly, the researchers raise a question about the extent to which commercial news organizations in rural areas can remain free of editorial influence (Woodrow & Reimer, 2014).

Researchers have highlighted the role of Brunswick News editorials in shaping public discourse while their other business interests are focused on maximizing the profits from resource extraction (Couture, 2013; Livesey, 2016a; Poitras, 2014; Steuter, 2001). Brunswick News editorials about the opening of a second Irving oil refinery in the province were nothing but supportive (Couture, 2013). Editorials covering the proposed sale of NB Power to Hydro-Quebec in 2010 promoted the benefits of such a deal while neglecting to mention that the Irving group would be the largest beneficiary of reduced electricity costs (Couture, 2013). The most recent comprehensive history of the Irving news media documented a shift from investigative and critical coverage to business boosterism in 2005, and in 2006, the promotion of Irving businesses when family member Jamie Irving took over as the publisher (Poitras, 2014). The current study focused on the daily newspapers rather than the local weekly newspapers, almost all of which are also owned by Brunswick News.

The former premier Frank McKenna boasted that the province was "Canada's Laboratory," experimenting with neoliberal policies while the rest of the country took notes. The McKenna government's neoliberal policy framework in the province from 1987 to 1997 included celebrating the free market, restructuring social assistance, stagnating minimum wages, downsizing government, privatizing public firms, and weakening labour laws (Workman, 2003). Neoliberalism is characterized by competition in the marketplace. In this context, the dominance of the Irving family of companies in almost all areas of the economy in the province may seem to run counter to the dominant neoliberal model. However, as McChesney (2001) suggests, the media industry under neoliberalism has taken on the form of a global oligopoly, characterized by media conglomerates. In this context, the various facets of Brunswick News and related Irving companies—the daily English newspapers, weekly English and French papers, radio stations, the printing press, the transportation and delivery service is a media conglomerate limited to one

marketplace. As Deneault (2019) points out, the Irvings “are the opposite of a multinational, as they don’t extend their operations across the globe, but exploit everything in a limited area.”

2.2 The Extractive Regime in New Brunswick

Our study explored two aspects of Brunswick News editorials. First, their support for corporate development, especially resource extraction, in rural areas of the province.

Only four multinational companies effectively control the public (Crown) forest in New Brunswick, and of those, J.D. Irving Ltd. is the largest licensee (Glynn, 2018). Other Canadian provinces such as Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia, while also characterized by corporate domination of the forestry industry, have fared better than New Brunswick as they shift focus to allocate timber supplies to locally-owned businesses rather than large conglomerates (Parenteau, 2013).

Our review of the rural sociology literature about states dominated by resource extraction found a description applicable to New Brunswick: an extractive regime. According to Gellert (2010), an extractive regime has two basic characteristics: its economy is based on the extraction of natural resources, and it can last for decades, relying on “political domination and legitimation to sustain itself over such long periods” (Gellert, 2010 p. 30). In his analysis of the situation in Indonesia, Gellert found that providing legitimacy for an extractive regime depends on creating the belief that extraction benefits the public good, “despite the regime’s frequent appropriation from areas of contested control by Indigenous groups and high levels of private accumulation” (Gellert, 2010, p. 33). In Indonesia, over three decades, one authoritarian leader enacted favourable laws that handed over the extraction of timber, minerals, metals, oil, and gas rights to corporations that also backed him. Today, electoral politics in Indonesia continues to be a transactional space for Indonesia’s oligarch to further their power (Siti Maimunah, 2018).

Similarly, in New Brunswick, the province’s political and economic elite have controlled the governance of the province’s natural resources since the nineteenth century when timber barons also served in the provincial legislature. Today, government and private-sector elites may not be the same individuals but there is widespread public belief that the majority of economic policy decisions are made behind closed doors and in consultation with the economic elite, while government actors distrust the electorate’s ability to process complex technical information enough to make informed decisions (Bronson & Beckley, 2018). Forest governance has long been criticized for being a public-private arrangement between successive governments and industry (Ashton & Anderson, 2005). Supported by both dominant political parties in New Brunswick, the governing Conservatives and opposition Liberals at the time, New Brunswick’s 2014 forest management strategy granted the industry's wish for an increased and guaranteed supply of softwood fibre from Crown lands, a decision that had been delayed for over a decade because of opposition from conservationists, woodlot owners and others (Glynn, 2017). The current political leader of New Brunswick had a 33-year career as a senior executive with Irving Oil prior to his entry into politics, and his style and messaging mirrors the ethos of his former employer quite closely. His first actions in power, lauded by Brunswick News editorials, were to revive interest in two large corporate resource extraction projects.

2.3 The Diminishing 'Rural'

The second objective of our study is to explore if the Brunswick News editorials focus on the common narrative that rural communities are diminishing and that their decline is inevitable. The rural population in Canada declined for more than 100 years until the early 1970s when it became relatively stable; the population in urban areas has continued to increase. Currently, more than 80% of Canadians live in cities (Statistics Canada, 2016). Across the country, a common perception exists that urban regions are the future, and a change towards urbanization is inevitable and positive. Richard Florida, based at the University of Toronto, is a high-profile proponent of this view. Florida's book, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2003), has been cited tens of thousands of times in academic work and has been influential in shaping social and economic policies in Canada and elsewhere (High, 2009).

Critics of Florida's work include High (2009) and Kratke (2010). Kratke highlights Florida's emphasis on the political priority to make urban regions more attractive to the highly creative and educated class as this is where the economic development will occur, suggestive that rural communities do not contain such characteristics. Business closures and an overall deterioration in rural communities are then considered an individual rather than a social problem, a failure of rural workers to tap into their creative potential and show the motivation to catch up with everyone else. High (2009) argues that creativity is widespread at the rural level and that Florida's analysis does not account for the skill and knowledge developed only through long-term positions in the service sector. Markey, Halseth, and Manson (2008) also identify that rural regions contain valuable assets such as access to resources, higher qualities of life, and unmatched natural conveniences. Failure to recognize these unique contributions, especially utilizing urban-based and top-down business models that are unsuitable for rural spaces, ultimately elicits greater financial gain for services that are concentrated in urban centers and contributes to the decline of rural communities (Markey et al., 2008).

New Brunswick's urban/rural divide is not unique, but nor is it modern in the way Florida suggests, with urban centers focused mainly on "cultural production," financial and professional services, or as hubs of innovation. Saint John, until recently the province's largest urban center, is anchored at one end of the city by an enormous oil refinery, and at the other end, quite anachronistically, by a pulp mill, a rare sight in large urban centers in North America today. Both of these enterprises are owned by Irving companies. Other mainstays of the local economy are the Port of Saint John (for shipping out commodities and importing oil for refining), the Canaport liquid natural gas facility (of which Irving is a minority partner), and the Irving corporate headquarters. Fredericton's economy is more service-oriented with the seat of the provincial government and the major universities there, but these institutions are also heavily vested in supporting the natural resource-based economies of the province. Dotted throughout New Brunswick's cities are Irving-owned Kent Building supply stores, transportation hubs, service stations (for selling Irving gasoline products), and more.

3.0 Method and Data

To assess the perception of rural issues in New Brunswick's near-monopoly news context, we evaluated editorials published between January 2013 and December 2017 by all three New Brunswick daily English language newspapers, all owned by Brunswick News, in the province's three largest cities—the *Telegraph-Journal*

(Saint John), the *Times & Transcript* (Moncton), and *The Daily Gleaner* (Fredericton). We focused on a recent five-year time span to ensure our findings reflected the current situation. The newspapers were accessed on a full-text database, *Infomart*. We began by searching for all the news articles and editorials in the three newspapers that contained the word "rural" in either the story, the headline, or the lead paragraphs.

We then collected the editorials and conducted a content analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, counting and then analyzing references and themes within each (Krippendorff, 2004). Our deductive analytical approach began by developing coding frames to identify editorial content, using the theories discussed in the review of the literature above. Our critical discourse analysis examined not only the language used but also the wider socio-political context (Fairclough, 2010). Our coding frames are illustrated in Table 1. The first two authors used analytic software to digitally code and review evidence of themes within each editorial with all final entries agreed upon; therefore, inter-rater reliability was complete.

The first theme promoted the idea that *rural communities are diminishing and this is inevitable* and included references to aging and shrinking rural populations, opposition to change, and vast depletion of employment and schools. The second theme identified a counter-narrative to the first that *rural communities are resilient* and explored acknowledgements of innovation, local initiatives inclusive of tourism and education, and production of local goods. *Corporate development of rural regions*, the third theme, highlighted the privatization of services, rural use of urban resources, and large resource extraction projects that would potentially create or maintain rural jobs. Lastly, *rural community development* reflected the alternative in recognizing volunteer commitments, collaboration, and support of community members, and the unique use of local resources to serve as educational tools.

After the first round of coding was complete, our qualitative analysis of the observable media content suggested we should also look for invisible, or latent, content in relation to the editorial's representation of "rural" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Elo & Kyngas, 2008 Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). This allowed us to interpret patterns of omitted themes and stories that also reflect contemporary rural reality such as Indigenous rights, environmental hazards, or opposition to industrial rural development.

We note several limitations to our methodology. "Rural" was our only search term; we expect that other editorials addressed rural issues without using that specific term; various other terms, such as community, environment, and agriculture, to name a few, may have yielded additional results. Our purpose in using only this term was to explore how the publications used "rural" in specific contexts and to give us a data set of a reasonable size on which we could conduct qualitative analysis. Given that "rural" is the commonly referenced term in the literature as representative of areas outside larger towns and cities, we are confident that searching only this parameter produced substantial evidence. Additionally, our discoveries of latent themes must be considered with caution. As such content is missing from the observable information, it is unclear if this is an intentional act of the media. Therefore, in the discussion of our findings, we provide speculation based on theoretical frameworks as to what these omissions may represent.

Table 1: *Coding Frames*

1. Rural communities are diminishing	2. Rural communities are resilient
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job loss and school closures • Poor rural infrastructure • Amalgamation required to remain viable • Shrinking population • Relocation to urban centers for work • Aging rural population • Rural communities resistant to change • Blaming rural communities for their challenges • Rural life is nostalgic or backward • Reliance on urban resources/ cities know best 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural communities have power/sense of community/good life/courage • Contributions to tourism • Value local initiatives/natural resources/food production • Innovative local opportunities for learning and education • Local consultations with rural/Indigenous communities
3. Corporate development of rural regions	4. Rural community development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate projects bring workers back to rural communities • First Nations as drains on the economy • Privatization of services • Corporate development (Irving-interest companies) creates jobs and boost the economy • Bottom line is economics / the cost of something is the most important metric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of volunteer firefighters • Farms/rural settings as tourism sites • Members of rural communities provide support/collaboration • Land and animals utilized as educational tools • Community-led development (vs. corporate development)
5. Latent themes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollution/environmental hazards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous rights

4.0 Findings

4.1 Making ‘Rural’ Invisible

Our search for Brunswick News articles and editorials found that the term "rural" was almost invisible. This was an unexpected finding. As illustrated in Table 2, of more than 300,000 articles in Brunswick News over the five-year period studied, only 8,000 contained the word "rural" and only 2,000 had "rural" in the headline or lead paragraphs. This translates to fewer than 1% of articles focused on "rural" in a province where rural residents make up 48% of the population. Similarly, of more than 3,500 editorials published during the same five-year period, only 202 mentioned "rural" with only 46, or 1.3%, focused on the term. Serving as a point of

comparison, a search on news media in the province of Manitoba was also conducted. The word “rural” was contained in 2.7% of overall articles, and 1% had “rural” in the headline or lead paragraph, not dissimilar from the New Brunswick results. However, the rural population of Manitoba is much less at approximately 28%; therefore, the term "rural" appears to be marginalized in Brunswick News relative to the regional population size.

Table 2: "Rural" in Brunswick News Articles and Editorials*

Year	All articles**	"Rural" anywhere in article	"Rural" in headline or lead of article	All Editorials**	Editorial, "rural" anywhere in story	Editorial, "rural" in headline or lead
2013	70,153	1,854	512	488	29	7
2014	68,709	1,603	361	1,135	54	9
2015	61,406	1,680	397	656	44	11
2016	59,155	1,565	367	940	50	13
2017	52,605	1,371	366	337	25	6
Total	312,028	8,073	2,003	3556	202	46

**Telegraph-Journal* (Saint John), *The Daily Gleaner* (Fredericton), *Times & Transcript* (Moncton)

**search term "the"

4.2 Asserting that Rural Communities are Diminishing—Inevitably

We found a high prevalence of reports that rural communities are diminishing with 40 of the 46 “rural-focused” editorials (87%) supporting such claims (see Table 3). Many of these editorials repeated that suggestion in more than one phrase; clearly, this is a dominant theme in the rural issues’ editorials. These Brunswick News editorials frequently mentioned business and school closures, as well as the idea that the population is unequivocally aging as younger generations are leaving for the cities or for new provinces altogether either for employment or lifestyle reasons.

Small sawmills in rural communities all across this province closed in the last decade because of the slump in lumber price caused by the collapse of the U.S housing market (Mill power, Jan. 15/14).

...your province is rapidly losing population due to outmigration, the cost pressures attached to a greying population are growing each year, the rural and urban economies are fighting with each other over diminishing opportunities, and there is a growing reliance on government to solve everything (Nova Scotia’s template, Feb. 15/14).

But today, with our population shrinking and growing older, our economy stagnant and our public debt expanding, it threatens to choke any hope for fiscal stability and economic growth (Shift spending to urban growth, Mar. 22/16).

Whether intentional or not, Brunswick News editorials in this period supported Florida's claims that rural communities are too reliant on others and lack the intelligence and technology to sustain themselves. Numerous editorials claimed that rural communities use urban resources to subsidize their services, as well as highlighting the costs and challenges of maintaining rural infrastructure.

Not all New Brunswickers should be expected to live in cities, but all New Brunswickers should reside in a local government that does not have to rely on the economic support of larger communities' provincial officials to maintain their existence (Improving local governance, Dec. 4/13).

We imagine that Fredericton taxpayers already feel they're subsidizing rural residents who use their roads and services without contributing to their upkeep (On the hook, Apr. 10/14).

In our view, there is a good deal more to this than the condition of many of our secondary and rural roads, many of which are without a doubt in poor condition with problems ranging from degraded road beds to a dangerous lack of roadside brush clearing (Rough road, but right direction, Nov. 14/13).

The bridge serving the rural community of Pokemouche is in such dire need of repairs it is closed to traffic, and the auditor-general recently argued that as many as 300 other bridges throughout New Brunswick that are in a poor condition (Spend wisely on capital budget, Dec. 14/15).

As a proposed solution, Brunswick News supports claims that the amalgamation of Local Service Districts into rural communities with municipal structures will improve the state of these rural regions². Those in opposition are perceived as resistant to change, especially communities fringing on city limits that, in the view of Brunswick News, want to continue their use of urban resources without paying a share of the cost. Such presentation is indicative of support for urbanization without consideration of the numerous families that have enjoyed the peaceful nature of rural life for generations.

² A majority of rural regions in New Brunswick do not have an organized local government and are currently divided into numerous Local Service Districts (LSD's), administered by the province with the Minister of Environment and Local Government serving as de facto mayor.

[Rural] New Brunswickers have taken to the streets and community halls to say they are opposed to change and entitled to their entitlements (No future's built on entitlement, Oct. 23/13).

Should it happen, amalgamation in the view of proponents (some would say that's mainly the provincial government) would gain the new community's citizens a greater voice in the democratic process. Opponents (mainly the people actually living there) see little to gain but higher taxes (United we stand, divided we fall, Jul. 15/17).

...But the province can't afford to be guided by idyllic memories of rural life as it reviews the operation of all seven ferry crossings (Ferries can't live on nostalgia, Jul. 23/15).

...it is most heavily resisted among rural residents near Saint John, Sussex, Moncton and Fredericton, where a significant number of people say they do not want higher taxes or amalgamation (Don't wait: Amalgamate, Oct. 30/13).

Contrary to the discourse that rural communities are diminishing, only nine of the 46 "rural-focused" editorials over the five years (19.5%) mentioned that rural communities might be resilient. Unlike many of the neighbourhoods in urban centers, inhabitants of rural communities have often lived in the same place for numerous generations, indicative of greater investment to the area and a stronger sense of power in their ability to support one another and pursue common goals. Brunswick News does acknowledge this sense of solidarity, albeit marginally.

People living here have such a strong sense of place and community, and certainly there's a lot to be proud of (Rural N.B: look in the mirror for solutions, Jun. 11/16).

Rural areas offer experiences and resources that cannot be matched elsewhere. It appears that Brunswick News recognizes the idyllic lifestyles that rural regions can offer, summarizing the experience as follows:

Rural communities are where the most is contributed to the greater structure. It's where tourists want to be for its beauty and quality of life, its where fresh food is expertly grown, its where natural resources are accessed to fund health and education for all, and its where so much potential lies for businesspeople who adore their families too and want to enjoy a balanced life (Rural N.B: look in the mirror for solutions, Jun. 11/16).

Table 3: "Rural" Diminishing vs. Resilient

Node/Theme	Year	# Of Editorials	# Of Counts of Theme
1. Rural communities are diminishing	2013	7	22
	2014	8	21
	2015	10	25
	2016	11	26
	2017	4	8
Total		40	102
2. Rural communities are resilient	2013	1	2
	2014	1	1
	2015	2	2
	2016	3	7
	2017	2	3
Total		9	15

4.3 Boosting Extractive Industries in Rural Regions

The second most frequently occurring theme is that the corporate development of extractive industries provides the much-needed economic boost to rural regions of New Brunswick; this was identified in 20 of the 46 “rural-focused” editorials (43%, see Table 4). While rural initiatives are commended, mass job creation from such projects are claimed to be minimal; in contrast, Brunswick News highlights numerous claims that large corporate projects are quickly able to create hundreds of jobs and ensure rural sustainability. Such a boost in employment would support the provincial economy while simultaneously reducing the unemployment rate long-term. The editorials do not question the legitimacy of the numbers and the promises made in these statements.

Plaster Rock Mayor Alexis Fenner speaks for many when she says that small towns and cities along the proposed Energy East pipeline route want the boost to the economy that it will bring (Everybody benefits, Aug. 24/13).

Imagine 10 rural sawmills with 75 jobs each and then triple that number for total jobs. That would put quite the dent in New Brunswick’s unemployment rate (Mill power, Jan. 15/14).

The benefits to rural New Brunswick – and the entire province – are clear with Sisson Brook. The two-year construction phase will create 500 jobs to be followed by 300, permanent and well-paying positions. The mine is expected to have a lifespan of at least 27 years, pumping an estimated \$500 million into provincial tax coffers (Let's move on Sisson mine, Jul. 18/15).

The result – in a province so desperate for jobs and economic stimulus – is \$70 million in planned investment [in fracked shale gas] by Corridor has been suspended. That's money that would create jobs, send royalty cheques to the government and cash to municipalities and landowners (Fracking brush-off is not acceptable, Jun. 24/16).

Editorials also claim that out-migration of younger generations seeking gainful employment and better services elsewhere could be halted or reversed by the expansion of large corporate projects into rural areas of the province. The incentives of long-term employment opportunities in industrial extractive activities are suggested to bring such populations back to New Brunswick. This plays on the significant public fears that young family members will leave and not return.

Rural communities have seen thousands of New Brunswickers leave for jobs in Western Canada. There is hope that the pipeline project [through New Brunswick] could bring such workers back (Everybody benefits, Aug. 24/13).

...it is a tangible initiative that can lure young people who have left communities like Stanley to seek opportunity in Western Canada back home to put down roots, secure solid employment and contribute to the provincial economy (Let's move on Sisson mine, Jul. 18/15).

The implication is that without public support for large corporate resource extraction projects, rural communities will be unable to survive on their own and cannot expect to receive endless subsidies from nearby urban centers to supplement service delivery. An additional solution, emphasized by Brunswick News, is to support the privatization of services, which would continue to provide various avenues of employment for rural residents.

The transfer of service from the public to private sector doesn't have to cause job losses, since the need to keep roads paved and clear in winter will still exist. (Maintain roads, not DOT garages, Mar. 25/16).

If his government really wants to create jobs it should follow a simple three-step process – listen to a private company that wants to invest millions, let them do it, and repeat (Fracking brush-off is not acceptable, Jun. 24/16).

School closures pose a significant threat to the viability of rural communities. However, in line with the perspective that corporate development can increase populations in rural communities, once again, Brunswick News proposed this as the solution for school revitalization. As one editorial claimed,

New opportunities like mineral and gas exploitation offer a potential second chance to semi-rural communities; leading to population growth and perhaps, the return of schools (Only economic growth can save rural schools, Nov. 4/15).

On the other hand, while briefly mentioned in a few of these “rural-focused” editorials, rural community development accounted for the fewest contributions, with only eight out of 46 (17%) addressing such initiatives over the five years. Several of these editorials expressed admiration for volunteerism and strong community supports. Several editorials acknowledged that members of rural communities have also made efforts to develop new and ongoing employment opportunities, developing local resources to provide seasonal employment and promote tourism.

Given that rural communities have very different resources than urban centers, they are able to draw on access to farmland and animals to develop distinctive educational tools and spaces for novel employment. In one editorial, Brunswick News described the creation of a unique center catered to individuals with autism and other mental health disorders which allow the development of hands-on life and employment skills while working on a farm. The abundance of natural and unpolluted environments is also described as a potential opportunity for expansion of such innovative service delivery.

It occurs to us that learning new skills in a rural setting with animals and gardens to care for would be far preferable to a stuffy classroom or institution (Sackville co-op farm, Jul. 6/16).

And given the amount of beautiful scenery, fresh air, farm settings and sandy beaches here in New Brunswick, perhaps our province could become a go-to place for the establishment of more facilities like it (Sackville co-op farm, Jul. 6/16).

Table 4: *Corporate vs. Community Development*

Node/theme	Year	# of editorials	# of counts of theme
3. Corporate development of rural communities	2013	5	13
	2014	4	7
	2015	7	13
	2016	4	11
	2017	0	0
Total		20	44
4. Community development of rural communities	2013	0	0
	2014	1	1
	2015	2	2
	2016	5	14
	2017	0	0
Total		8	17

5.0 Discussion

Brunswick News editorials offer some recognition of the resiliency and value of rural communities, but two results overpowered that positive coverage. First, the presence of the term "rural" in Brunswick News stories and editorials was exceedingly low – less than one percent of the total - indicating that both rural success and rural issues are overlooked. Considering that almost fifty percent of New Brunswick’s population is rural, this was an unexpected finding. Of the rural-focused editorials analyzed for our study, overwhelmingly they supported the notion that rural communities are diminishing and are in an inevitable decline.

Second, there were ample suggestions that some rural communities could remain viable but only with the support of corporate resource development. We did anticipate this, but as researchers of rural New Brunswick, it was startling to see our only three daily English-language newspapers promote the idea that the future sustainability for rural families and communities depends not on their resilience and innovation but rather on their support for corporate large-scale forestry, mineral and gas extraction, and pipelines.

We anticipated that the rural-focused Brunswick News editorials would also make claims regarding Indigenous rights, pollution, and environmental impacts related to their overwhelming support for corporate development of rural regions. Surprisingly, such topics were non-existent in all 46 editorials under review. While there was no observable content to analyze, the fact that it was missing was an

interesting pattern, considering that environmental issues are prominent in national media editorials (Harvey, 2018). We speculate that Brunswick News, owned by the Irvings who have high stakes in resource extraction, refrain from publishing editorials with content that may challenge their particular presentation of extractive activities. Mention of Indigenous peoples was also absent, with the exception of one editorial in our sample:

The First Nation of Elsipogtog has been criticized because 85 per cent of its residents draw welfare, while the community opposes seismic exploration that could lead to a domestic shale gas industry and job creation (No future's built on entitlement, Oct. 23/13).

This disparaging portrayal of a vibrant Mi'kmaw community impoverished because of the dispossession of their land and denial of their treaty rights was not unexpected, given the racism entrenched more widely in Canadian news media corporations (Anderson, Cronlund & Robertson, 2011). Prior to the current study, we conducted a content analysis of Brunswick News coverage of Indigenous issues over a ten-year period and found fewer than a dozen editorials on the subject (O'Donnell, 2018).

In summary, reading only Brunswick News editorials over the five years of the study that focused on the term "rural" would have one believe that: rural communities in New Brunswick are not relevant, not sustainable and are quickly diminishing. The only hope for the future of rural communities is support for large-scale corporate natural resource extraction and fossil fuel projects; and pollution, environmental degradation, Indigenous rights and land title are non-existent. What can be the impact of all this?

One possibility is that the editorial focus on corporate development reinforces the hegemonic view that only the corporate sector can produce mass employment, otherwise jobs in rural areas would be non-existent. Making "rural" invisible can create a sense of vulnerability in rural communities. This makes rural residents feel dependent on the jobs in extractive activities as these are presented as the only way to save their rural communities from disappearing altogether. These presentations can discourage and disempower rural residents, especially youth, from their desire to live and survive in their communities.

The view that corporate resource extraction will be the saviour of rural New Brunswick is highly doubtful. Forestry is the major extractive industry in rural New Brunswick, and J. D. Irving Ltd. is the largest stakeholder in this industry. Across North America, rural jobs in forestry have been disappearing as corporate forestry companies move their capital into technologies instead of labour³. In New Brunswick, pulp and paper was hit particularly hard, but the story here is not entirely substitution of capital for labour. We traced the situation of job losses in forestry in rural New Brunswick from several complementary sources. According to historian Parenteau (2013), between 2000 and 2008 more than half of the 15,000 jobs in the forest industries in New Brunswick were eliminated despite an overall increase in the value of shipments. Statistics Canada (Natural Resources Canada, 2018) data for the manufacturing jobs in the forestry industry indicate that since 2003, New

³ The Irving family businesses also move their capital into offshore tax havens (Deneault, 2014). According to the 2018 Forbes list of the richest people in the world, James Irving the family patriarch is worth \$8.3 billion.

Brunswick experienced a 43.5% drop in employment for the combined categories of pulp and paper and wood products manufacturing. Several major mills were closed between 2005 and 2008 that were the largest employers in small rural communities. Direct job losses from the mill closures had a profound impact on the entire communities, including local businesses and services that supplied the mills as well as the loss of the paychecks being spent locally. According to Natural Resources Canada (2018), the employment in forestry in New Brunswick has been fairly stable since 2008; although Statistics Canada (2019) reported that employment in forestry (as well as fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas) has been decreasing since 2014, and the Government of Canada (2019) reported that while improvements were made in goods-producing, manufacturing, and construction industries, agriculture and forestry saw losses of approximately 1000 jobs.

Other research on rural communities and corporate resource extraction has demonstrated how a hegemonic view is sustained through media and corporate shaping of messaging. In their study of rural Appalachia, Bell and York (2010) analyzed how in that region the corporations advertised that project development would create more opportunities, while new technology was actually limiting the number of physical workers required. Corporations, in their efforts to convince rural communities of their legitimacy, used media and other means to construct specific identities tied to resource extraction to continue a perception that they are a main source of employment or that such work is what community members excel at even though the jobs may have dried up years ago (Bell & York, 2010).

People in insecure employment are more open to lower standards of healthcare, facilities and wages. They become part of the migration to other centres seeking employment and higher standards of service also described in these media sources. If rural regions are devalued and depopulated the remaining residents do not expect equity of opportunity and benefits, lowering the cost of doing business in rural regions. On the other hand, if there are sustainable infrastructures and communities in rural regions, then corporations have less opportunity for manipulation and control.

As the media is expected to influence public perceptions of current issues, editorials that promote urbanization and resource extraction send a message that communities should be in support of these industries. Providing a heavily one-sided argument not only bolsters the political and social elites' perspectives that their actions are beneficial and welcomed but also gives reason to dismiss differing opinions. Failing to provide adequate editorial messages promoting more positive perspectives presents rural residents as a minority or non-existent population that do not require consideration by the readers in urban centres including government officials.

According to Poitras (2014), the Irving family holdings, since the company started 80 years ago, support both governing parties that have held power in the province over this period. Both political parties support the corporate resource extractive export model. Our analysis of editorials spanned governments from both parties and there was not an appreciable difference between those periods, although presentations about corporate development did drop in the last year. In his interview with the patriarchs of the Irving family businesses, Poitras describes how they see Brunswick News as a glue that keeps the province together. The Irvings want to keep the current political and economic regime stable. They see their work as doing what is good for New Brunswick, to "keep the wheels turning" (Poitras, 2014, p. 287).

6.0 Conclusion

Our study illustrates how the news media supports an extractive regime in a rural region of a modern industrial country. In the case of New Brunswick, news media editorials promote the discourse of an inevitably declining rural population. In the near-monopoly news environment, this discourse supports a deepening dependence for rural regions on the corporate extractive industries rather than bolstering a more agrarian or independent rural sector that supplies many of its own goods and services. Bolstering the corporate vision for where rural space's value lies (resource extraction) allows corporate leaders to pursue this extractivist agenda on both private and Crown land, while ensuring that the rural people who remain believe themselves to be dependent on those industries.

As researchers and local citizens, a key question arising for us from this study is what the future holds for our province. The extractive regime we described in New Brunswick is co-dependent with a political system that fully supports it. Many New Brunswick residents have been critical of provincial forestry practices and believe local community and environmental organizations and Indigenous nations should have more influence over control of Crown land (Beckley, 2014; Glynn, 2018; Parenteau, 2013). However, as we demonstrate in this paper, these voices are not represented in the perspectives expressed in corporate media editorials. Future research on this topic could focus on how alternative media outlets in the province highlight community-based models of forestry and management of Indigenous and public lands for the benefit of all citizens of the province.

We considered if our study found any indicators that this system might be weakening. One finding from the initial article search not discussed earlier was the steady decline in the number of all news articles, a 25% decrease over the five years studied (see Table 2). This decline echoes the widespread crisis of news media outlets worldwide as social media and other online publishing opportunities become almost ubiquitous. In many countries today, more people get their news from social media than traditional news sources. This development was foreshadowed by Poitras (2014) when he described how a Liberal government in New Brunswick was sideswiped in 2009 by news and opinions circulating on social media about a controversial government policy. Prior to the rise of social media, provincial government media strategy "started and ended with *The Telegraph*," the flagship Brunswick News daily (Poitras, 2014, p. 223). Although Brunswick News has built what appears to be a successful strategy to keep its online news content behind a paywall for subscribers, there is no doubt that the dominant ability of Brunswick News to control the public discourse in the province is under threat.

From our larger rural research work, we believe that in the future, the voices of rural activists using alternative media will increasingly challenge the extractive regime in New Brunswick. Social media such as Facebook are replete with sites of lively and critical discussion of rural issues and corporate extractive projects in the province. Alternative media focused on social justice, environmental, rural and Indigenous issues are sharing news and information throughout the province. The use of alternative and independent media resources are crucial to allow wider knowledge mobilization and the inclusion of different perspectives. Newspapers alone do not provide a high degree of diversity. As Woodrow and Reimer (2014) discovered in their Canadian sample, rural newspapers were not inclusive of multiple perspectives, and the corporate influence on such publications may create greater liabilities for rural communities. There are many limitations to the effectiveness of alternative

media, compared to traditional media sources (Atton, 2015). Social media is also limited in their ability to challenge dominant discourses. However alternative media in monopoly news situations are vital to increasing public discourse and broadening the public sphere of debate. Rural voices and rural actions are transforming and challenging the discourse of the corporate extractive regime in this rural region. They are celebrating the resilient nature of people who dare to love and defend their rural existence and develop alternative visions for a sustainable rural future.

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