Planning and Place: An International Perspective on Private Property and Collective Action

Abstract

In this chapter we cite evidence from Norway and the United States to demonstrate how place is manifest in rural responses to planning and land use change. We draw from interviews to establish place as it is perceived by those who participate in, or react to, land use planning. We argue that while place meanings are often perceived as individualistic, subjective, and benign, they are, in fact, collective, objective, and conflictual. Our research is not framed as a direct international comparison. Instead, we apply the extended case method to explore how modifications to urban-based theory of place and property interests can more fully illuminate rural events. Thus, we draw from our cases collectively in highlighting the universality of rural property interests as well as to meet the need for greater theoretical focus on the rural planning environment. Our research should be of interest to those who are involved with rural planning processes and who confront the now common debates arising around land-use decisions. This includes rural planners, elected officials, residents, and land managers in the case of public or managed holdings.
Introduction

Truly democratic decision making invites the collision of multiple interests. When communities make public decisions about land use, divergent relationships to property give way to competing rhetoric, culminating in a discordant chorus of individual interests. In rural amenity areas,¹ where connections to place are simultaneously influenced by prominent desires for both economic growth and preservation, planning incites particularly fervent debate. Individuals organize around property interests and mobilize civil society to maximize their influence in the public dialogue. In this chapter we examine how private place orientations become public as they are absorbed into planning processes and civil society.

We base our work on field research conducted from summer 2005 to summer 2007, in two rural regions facing similar challenges. As part of a collaborative study of amenity-driven community change, ninety stakeholders were interviewed in Norway and the United States.² Participants were first asked to photograph scenes of personal importance from their community. These photos were then used to initiate conversations based on their perceptions of social and environmental change. This format helped facilitate particularly deep interviews – as participants were encouraged to preemptively reflect upon their surroundings’ meaningful characteristics when selecting scenes to photograph – and effectively captured place attachment. To add important context, additional interviews were completed with key informants,³ participant observation was employed at several land-use meetings and community activities, and events and discourse were followed via local newspapers. We then performed iterative

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¹ Our working definition of amenity is “a feature that increases attractiveness or value, especially of a piece of real estate or a geographic location” (“Amenity,” 2008).
² Informants were initially selected from a random sample of property records in each area and later by snowball methods. Much of the research was conducted in conjunction with Svein Frisvoll of the Norwegian Center for Rural Research.
³ Generally people active in local government and planning, business and civic associations, and real estate.
qualitative analysis, to which the extended case method (Burawoy, 1991) was applied. The extended case method prescribes a detailed comparison of in situ observations to an established theoretical framework. The goal is to understand how a specific context may instruct a refinement of existing theory.

While it was not anticipated, our Norwegian and American sites were found to be in the midst of similar land use struggles. Despite being located on separate continents and having divergent approaches to public planning, these areas demonstrated remarkable similarity in how their residents responded to land use planning initiatives. Together, our cases offer compelling evidence of collective action around rural property. We observed in both settings that a complex array of property orientations have informed competing reactions to planning among stakeholders. These reactions have converged around axes of collective action to form cohesive and organized groups. To dismantle the all-too-common logjams in rural planning, our observations suggest we must first understand how and why groups organize around property.

Contemporary land use theory has tended to focus only on urban environments (see for example Logan & Molotch, 1987; McCann, 2002; Perkins, Thorns, & Newton, 2008). Our research suggests that rural settings warrant specific attention, particularly where planning initiatives are being met with unexpected dissent. We propose that a political economy of rural land engenders collective action around property. Lacking a contemporary theory of rural land politics, we use the extended case method to contrast our observations with Davis’s (1991) theory of collective action around urban property. Like Davis, we find that local stakeholders adopting a particular political position about land use may in fact maintain multiple personal interests. However, our rural informants evince a pervasive group of interests related to common interpretations of place, and these property interests prove to be a crucial factor in dividing local
stakeholders in the politics of land use. Thus, we argue that the process of place making is profoundly impacted by many distinct but overlapping property orientations that are unique to certain rural scenarios.

This research may help to direct sorely needed innovations in rural planning and decision making. Though amenity communities and the place concept have begun to appear on the radar of rural planning practitioners (Spain, 1993; Manzo & Perkins, 2006), rural land use planning continues to spur conflict, even among those who seem to share intimate place meanings (Golding, 2006; Van Auken, 2007). In line with other rural sociologists, we contend that rural planning “necessarily must include the individual, and often divergent, interests of the landowners and residents” (Jensen & Field, 2005, p. 259). Further, we show how specific interests around property instigate collective action in response to specific land use actions or proposals. We find that although collective action may evoke opposition to planning processes, it also engenders the democratic ideals that planning increasingly tries to emulate.

U.S. Case

The first study area, Bayfield County, Wisconsin, lies on the northern periphery of the American Midwest, bordering Lake Superior. It encompasses several hundred thousand acres of public forest as well as the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Bayfield County has transitioned away from dependence on extractive industries, and amenities now sustain a highly seasonal service-based economy. The county attracts roughly $130 million in annual tourism revenue,\textsuperscript{4} much of it in historic Bayfield,\textsuperscript{5} due to its bucolic charm and proximity to the Apostle

\textsuperscript{4} This represents a 126% growth rate since 1994 (Wisconsin Department of Tourism, 2007).
\textsuperscript{5} Here we refer to the city of Bayfield. There is also a town of Bayfield in Bayfield County. When we refer to simply Bayfield from this point forward, we are referring to the city of Bayfield, which had a population of 587 in 2007 (USCB, 2007).
Islands. New housing is increasingly built on hillsides with lake views and according to one local informant, “backing up to public lands is a huge attraction,” which is consistent with national trends (Davenport & Anderson, 2005). Such development has led to concerns about erosion and water quality, forest fragmentation, and habitat loss. This trend is slowly extending into rural townships and working class communities like Washburn. Land use issues such as these are under the official jurisdiction of the county’s twenty-nine small municipal and tribal governments.

In recent years, land use conflict in Bayfield County has been the most visible in Washburn, where a new group known as Washburn Alive supported pro-smart growth candidates in the local election of 2004. Their efforts helped to elect a relative newcomer and strong champion of comprehensive planning as mayor, along with two new city councilors. Together they formed a new regime in local politics driven by concern about development and interest in sustainability, which led to Washburn becoming the first eco-municipality in the U.S.6

Support for Washburn Alive had flourished in response to the city’s proposed sale of downtown lakefront property to a private developer who seemed out of touch with community interests. The developer proposed to erect a 60-unit condominium facility near a popular walking trail, and argued that his relatively older target market would not “cost the community anything, because they don’t need anything. Their kids are all grown up; they don’t need the schools” (O’Brien, 2004). Many residents regarded these remarks as an affront to the community, especially in light of its declining school enrollment and major ongoing investments

6 This means that the local government has pledged to make the environment a key consideration in all decisions. Bayfield, which has a long history of environmental concern, is also an eco-municipality. This distinction and the results of the 2004 election were noteworthy for Washburn, which for more than six decades was a DuPont company town.
in local infrastructure. Still, many interests welcomed the proposed development. It complied with an existing land-use plan and was supported by the previous administration and other stakeholders. A local realtor argued that the development of Washburn’s “biggest jewel” is “one of the only things we have to bring income into” the community (ibid.). The lack of local consensus and Washburn Alive’s collective action led to a spring 2004 ballot referendum, in which the proposal was defeated by a count of 638 to 163 votes. In the pendulum of local opinion, this victory for preservation over development proved to be short-lived, as the momentum around sustainability became bogged down by politics.

As in many rural areas of the state, Wisconsin’s Comprehensive Planning Act of 1999 caused division in Washburn, helping to perpetuate community conflict. The “smart growth law” requires all municipalities to draft a detailed and standardized comprehensive plan by 2010, or lose their planning autonomy and funding. On the surface, smart growth seems tailor-made for rural amenity areas, where community planning and natural resource management are inherently intertwined. Indeed, some credit the law with helping to curb sprawl and protect natural resources. Others, however, assert that the state uses it to appropriate power over local land-use decisions (Jacobsen, 2004). We observed that mandated planning draws starker contrasts between property interests without offering a venue for resolving the clashes that result.

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7 Residents of new condominiums in a nearby township had previously objected to contributing to Washburn’s infrastructure upgrades, setting a worrisome precedent for long-time residents.
8 Interestingly, referendums are one of the ways localities in the U.S. have chosen to take action around land use issues *in lieu* of participatory planning like that encouraged by Wisconsin’s smart growth law (Benjamin, 2004).
Following the momentous election of 2004, local stakeholders began working on Washburn’s smart growth plan. It was approved in the spring of 2007, narrowly passing after significant contestation. Some local stakeholders perceived that the plan’s emphasis on sustainability came at the expense of needed economic development. One of them, Washburn’s former city administrator, subsequently won a bid for city council, spurring a return to a pro-development governing body. Among his first actions upon joining the council was to move that the new plan be rescinded (Hollish, 2007).

**Norway Case**

Hitra and Frøya are neighboring islands, located off of Norway’s mid-western coast. Like Bayfield County, the area features an archipelago of islands that has been designated a national preserve. Fishing and agriculture have undergone significant restructuring, which caused population loss of 16 percent in the region from 1951 to 1971 (Almås, 2003). Fish farming has since grown into a major employer, but industry volatility has led some to look to amenities to spur place-oriented development. An undersea tunnel connected Hitra to the mainland in 1994 and to its neighbor Frøya in 2000, which improved access to an attractive destination, leading to additional seasonal homes and growth.

Governance in historically-statist Norway has begun to decentralize in recent years (Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002), yielding increased municipal autonomy in planning. According to Jacobs (2006), since 2004 “there has been a formal policy of devolving competency towards local governments” (p. 50). One of the primary reasons for this shift is unprecedented Norwegian

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9 The administrator had left his post in 2006 after a public conflict with the new mayor and city council. In another interesting twist, the man who was defeated as mayor along with the condominium project in 2004, defeated the pro-smart growth mayor and was reelected in the spring of 2008.

10 The population of this area has only begun to stabilize during the current decade.
wealth, which has brought private property rights to the fore, particularly vis-a-vis second homes (ibid.) in rural amenity areas. Our Norwegian sites demonstrate the complexity of local decision-making in this context.

In Hitra-Froya, decades of centralized governance loom large; residents turn out to vote, but continue to play a very passive role in planning. Hitra’s chief planner argued that local politicians are unwilling to have open, democratic discussions about development. His attempts to better regulate seasonal homes and enforce the national shoreline preservation law have met resistance.11 According to him, “if we would have had municipal autonomy in every case...we would have developed all of Hitra’s valuable areas in one generation.” Further, Hitra has “a built-in conflict between the permanent residents and second home owners;” nevertheless, 600 additional seasonal home lots were recently plotted.

A substantial proportion of Froya’s undeveloped land was also set aside for seasonal homes in a recent land-use plan. According to a year-round resident, “We are not supposed to talk about it. Why don’t we have a discussion about the development? No – they are completely silent. And silence – that scares me.” Further, Froya is being negatively impacted by the traditional local mindset that land is simply meant to be reshaped:

The value is in the sea. So we end up with terrible solutions. There’s very little in this plan about living. A municipality is dependent on the people who live in it, but they have included – in already separated properties…(hundreds of) lots to be used to build vacation homes. And they are not doing much concerning (year-round) housing sites.

While many local people support amenity-led development, several other informants also complained about the government’s focus on seasonal residents. A 21-year old from a low-

11 A national shoreline protection law that went into effect in the 1970s prohibits new (non-industrial) construction within 100 meters of a shoreline. Most applications for exemption from this law in Norway are approved (Statistics Norway, 2008).
income family asserted that recent changes are turning his rural area into “a summer colony for the…privileged.”

While a number of individuals expressed concern about seasonal home development, collective action in Frøya mobilized in opposition to a different development threat. A land-use plan drafted in 2001 zoned nearly one-fifth of the main island of Frøya for wind energy, based on plans by a regional utility to construct a 63-turbine facility. Frøya’s planning director indicated that he writes municipal plans, and while citizens are invited to provide feedback, they rarely do. Consistent with this, when the land-use plan was created, “it tied up huge areas and nobody reacted,” according to the mayor at the time. When the partnership applied for a permit to proceed with the project in 2004, however, there was an “enormous” reaction, led by a newly-organized oppositional group called Perikum. The planning director noted that “seasonal people are very much against it because it would wreck their idyll,” but supported the project due to the modernity and self-sufficiency it would engender for Frøya. A local carpenter asserted that, “you have to tolerate something for progress,” and “we, too, need to be on the map.” A retired couple, lifelong residents who had made their living farming and fishing, were actively opposed to the plan. Like many, they feared it would “ruin Frøya,” for them and tourists, “because those who come here find the nature very beautiful.” A relatively young urban couple and recent seasonal migrants said they would leave if Frøya becomes “a little pin cushion with a lot of pins.” Indeed, “visual pollution” from the “industrialization” of the landscape was the project’s most commonly identified negative externality.

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12 A number of others held a positive view.
13 The name is a reference to verbiage in the wind park proposal. The quote stems from the then-mayor.
14 While the power would not be consumed locally, the then-mayor argued that the project would produce the largest single source of income for the municipality.
After months of rancor and nearly 400 signatures of opposition gathered by Perikum, a local referendum was held in 2005. It passed in very narrow fashion, and the municipal council subsequently approved the utility’s permit. Due to the local opposition and complaints about a “flawed” referendum, however, the plan remains on the shelf (Kothe-Næss, 2005).15

Why have rural land use planning efforts, dispensed through different channels on different continents, incited a similarly place-oriented and collective response?

Contested Ground: Urban theory tested in a rural setting

Since rural areas have not been the focus of contemporary land development theorists, we turned to urban sociology to better understand the political economic process through which development proceeds. In Contested Ground, John E. Davis (1991) advances a framework for the analysis of collective action in urban neighborhoods that provides a useful starting point. Davis argues that factors such as race, class, gender, and religion often lead to conflict, but locality-based cleavages generally develop along the lines of domestic property interests (those related to housing). People engage in collective action – latent interests become manifest – in response to threats to their domestic property interests or to pursue opportunities to enhance them. According to Davis (ibid.), “Those who have a stake in property have a stake in place as well” (p. 58, emphasis in original).

In general, there are but two primary property interests, accommodation and accumulation, which are based on the use or exchange value of the property. Broadly, conflict develops between people and groups who attempt to make money from residential real estate and those who see intrinsic value in the use of a home. Davis further divides the two primary

15 Other media reports suggest that the plan was put on hold because the economics of the project were not favorable at that time.
interests into six “relational advantages” of domestic property. Accommodative interests are characterized by security (stability of tenure and physical safety), amenity (quantity and quality of one’s living space), and autonomy. Accumulative interests, on the other hand, are distinguished by equity (unencumbered value in land and buildings), liquidity (income potential), and, legacy (inheritability). These interests are material, in that they originate in relations surrounding a physical unit – land and property used for shelter. Further, they “are objective in the sense that one’s position in relation to domestic property carries a probability of particular benefits, a susceptibility to particular costs, and a propensity to act in certain ways that inhere in the position itself” (ibid., p. 56, emphasis in original). A key point is that people have certain inherent interests, whether or not they consciously realize it or act upon them. These interests “are a latent relational bond, existing among similarly situated individuals, which may become the basis for solidarity and collective action among persons who are otherwise isolated and very different” (ibid., p. 57).

Davis argues that in general, cleavages develop between people and groups whose mosaic of domestic property interests cluster around the enhancement of community and those whose interests tend towards the exploitation of commodity. Those with community interests are most concerned with the social amenity of neighborhoods, the “communal living space” characterized by trust, support, and friendship. Capitalists may utilize the rhetoric of community, but do so to enhance commodity, engaging in “colonization of urban land as a means of accumulation” (Cox, 1981, as cited in Davis, 1991, p. 297). Davis notes that while these are useful ideal types, the reality is often less clear cut. For example, threats to equity can turn community-minded homeowners into (perhaps reluctant) defenders of the status quo. Nonetheless, Davis argues that the homeplace can be the site of resistance to capitalist relations,
in part because accommodative interests are generally antagonistic to accumulative ones. Finally, Davis notes that while local solidarity is elusive and fragile because of the complex domestic property interest mosaic, it is not impossible, nor infrequent. When interests are similar and compatible, communities do act.

We believe that an extended version of Davis’s framework for collective action can be fruitfully applied to our rural research. The primary actors from Davis’s urban case are represented – household and acquisitive homeowners, tenants and developers, and even stakeholders in social property – and the community and commodity interest categories are clearly important in Bayfield County and Hitra-Frøya as well, as elaborated upon below.

**Community Interests:** Whether they are long-time residents or relative newcomers that have come to the area for employment, or are homeowners or renters, those in this cluster have a defining interest in being secure in their housing tenure and use status. They may also have a strong interest in autonomy, amenity, equity, and legacy stemming from their domestic property. First-and-foremost, however, they wish to be able to afford to live in a community in which they have long-standing ties or have found gainful employment. They believe in the “right to stay put” (Hartman, 1984).

Frøya inn i Framtiden (FIIF) is the clearest example of a civil society group that embodies the community interest cluster in the case study areas. FIIF was created in 2002 in the aftermath of a large local employer’s (a farm-raised fish processing plant) relocation to Poland. This event meant the loss of 170 jobs, leading to the closure of several small businesses and a

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16 While household homeowners are interested in equity, their primary concerns tend to be with accommodation. Acquisitive homeowners, on the other hand, are primarily interested in liquidity.

17 An interest in quantity of living space, like security, hinges upon affordability. For the other aspect of amenity - quality of living space - incumbents to this cluster may also have a strong affinity for the landscape, but perhaps more due to historical practices than the aesthetic qualities of landscape or inherent value given to “nature.”

18 Frøya into the Future
The local government, industrial development commission, and business leaders subsequently decided to launch FIIF to encourage the “cooperation of all forces in Frøya to create a local community with a high standard of living, a living culture, and an industry aimed at development and sustainability,” according to one of its leaders.

Commodity Interests: According to Logan & Molotch (1987), “All capitalist places are the creation of activists who push hard to alter how markets function, how prices are set, and how lives are affected” (p. 3). While she has done very well financially in Bayfield County over the past two decades and has played a role in shaping its landscape, one informant expressed discomfort in being such an “activist.” She has been heavily involved in local smart growth planning and indicated that “trying to balance preservation and development is always a big dilemma for me as a realtor.”

Realtors, developers, and acquisitive homeowners are the primary commodity interest actors in the two study areas, which have historically been shaped to a significant degree by people seeking accumulation in various ways. In Norway, residential real estate had generally not been one of them, but Fløgnfeldt (2004) argues that in the 1990s, “second home ownership turned from a hobby and family activity into a professional real estate business” (p. 242). Hitra’s chief planner agrees that new attitudes and players have become important in recent years. According to him, “we are opposed by the real estate agents. They advertise what they know are (year-round) houses…as second homes...They systematically undermine the laws and the municipality’s possibility to provide housing for younger people.” As noted, politicians in both Hitra and Frøya have advocated for additional seasonal home lots to be made available, which dovetails neatly with the aims of real estate agents, since seasonal property commands higher
prices. Similar shifts have taken place in Bayfield County. According to a year-round resident of Washburn, “in the last 10 years there’s been a huge influx of people coming from somewhere else to cash in on what’s here.” A year-round resident of rural Bayfield indicated,

*You go down this road to the golf course, most of those homes are second homes...and for many years, there were one or two real estate brokers in town. Now, I bet there’s 8 or 10...and the real estate market or brokers are really driving prices up. And, um, that, I think, is a real negative to our community.*

Those with commodity interests may support (in action or rhetoric) efforts to maintain a “living community,” but their defining interest is in facilitating liquidity from the sale of houses, rental of property, and development of the landscape. Therefore, the interests of these “place makers” inherently and antagonistically conflict with community interests.

**The Role of place interests**

To understand the events unfolding in Bayfield County and Hitra-Frøya, we modify Davis’s framework to account for a major difference between rural and urban contexts. Davis illuminates the diverse interests involved in development and accentuates the central role played by material relations to property. Like much of the writing on place-making he emphasizes that either use or exchange value shape settlement patterns. In this literature, place attachment is interpreted as a subset of a property stakeholder’s use value, and communal visions of place are relatively inconsequential (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Davis, 1991). Our rural cases, on the other hand, are defined by struggles over place itself.

Strong place orientations have emerged through responses to change in Bayfield County and Hitra-Frøya. As increasingly popular destinations, they project publically-oriented place identity, or place brands. These brands are used to harness impending development by inviting change that is deemed appropriate. For example, while Bayfield has been a destination since the
nineteenth century, its brand started to develop after the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore was created and a comprehensive plan was written in the 1970s. The current mayor recently explained how this initial land use plan helped establish a place identity that persists.

_The plan said, ‘Bayfield is a great place.’ It looked at all the past times, the good and the bad, and ‘here’s all the things that we need to do to keep it nice.’ And they went and put in place architectural standards, the world’s toughest sign ordinance, and created an historic district. These things were a hard sell in place like this, but thirty years later they are reasonably well accepted._

According to him, the biggest challenge facing the community is “just trying to keep Bayfield as Bayfield – the same thing they were dealing with thirty years ago – and having the fortitude to stick with it.” His primary reason for optimism is also the same as it has been for decades: that “Bayfield still looks like Bayfield. We still have the Apostle Islands, hundreds of thousands of forest acres, and Lake Superior.”

Washburn, Hitra, and Frøya now face a similar imperative to develop a brand, as spending by seasonal residents and tourists has become vital to their modern economies. In Washburn, authenticity is part of a public image and developing brand. The former mayor asserted that “what everybody likes about (Washburn) is that it’s a residential community, and they like the amenities that are here, so as far as amenity development for me, it’s quality of life. That’s the only thing we’ve got here.” She and other informants argued that such a focus will not only serve current residents’ interests but also attract certain visitors and newcomers as well.

Hitra’s emerging brand is shaped by the widespread desire for oceanfront homes. Public officials have recently argued that the municipality needs to make it easier for cabins to be developed within protected areas. According to the director of the chamber of commerce, “People want cabins with ocean views. If we want to have additional seasonal residents on
Hitra, we must offer attractive lots near the sea.” (Hulsrud, 2006, p. A1). As discussed, Frøya faces similar pressures.

In light of this pervasive and resonant stake in place, we suggest that place interests can be reified to the extent that they comprise a third cluster in an interest mosaic for rural amenity areas (See Figure 1). There is overlap between the three categories – community interests, commodity interests, and place interests – but each has a defining interest inherently at odds with the others. Davis gives relatively little attention to the community versus commodity interest divide because his focus is upon tenurial categories (e.g. tenant versus homeowner), which clearly have important ramifications for locality-based collective action. We believe, however, that in our rural cases the interest clusters are more relevant. Having already discussed the first two, we present our ideal type of the third cluster below.

*Place Interests*: While we would assert that this interest cluster is largely comprised of highly educated, middle-class homeowners, it may also include renters. The key is that their interest is rooted in the quality of their living space, both the bricks and mortar of their homes and the *landscape* in which they lie. Like those defined by community interests, many incumbents to this cluster likely have concerns with interests in their property such as security, autonomy, equity, and legacy. In general, however, their relatively high education and income levels have allowed them to live in certain places precisely due to the myriad amenities found there. These place-based amenities are their defining interest, which they will work hard to protect.

The commitment to preservation by people with place interests may be tolerated or even welcomed by those with commodity interests (due to increased property values near protected places) and community interests (who may also value amenities). But their defining interest
inherently clashes with the pursuit of liquidity, since an overarching goal of the place interest cluster is to restrict development. Further, the preservation of land and historical buildings may help to “produce a thoroughly gentrified, affluent neighborhood that is eventually devoid of all who are different than themselves” (Davis, 1991, p. 246). In other words, the defense of amenity by those primarily with place interests can jeopardize the security of those with community interests, placing them at odds with this cluster as well.

Whereas actors pursuing both community and commodity interests have very long histories in these study areas, place interests have congealed more recently. The place-oriented but ad-hoc Washburn Alive and Perikum proved to be fleeting associations. Their purpose was to defend valued places from development, and after the referendums in this regard, these groups for all intents and purposes ceased to exist.

The Bayfield Regional Conservancy (BRC), on the other hand, is a relatively longstanding place-based group that preserves land through acquisition, conservation easements, and partnerships. Focused as it is upon removing priority landscape features from the free market and creating public access to private space, the BRC advocates radical change, according to Davis’s framework. Founded in 1996, the BRC now has a full-time director and one of the few farmland preservation programs in the Midwest, which has preserved 200 prime fruit-growing acres. The BRC now has more than 1,100 acres in conservation overall, successfully filling the void between the market and the state in this arena, and generally without direct connection to local planning efforts. It has over 400 member households and twenty active volunteers. Of those actively involved with the BRC, “half the people have been there 20-25 years – these people started it,” according to one of the group’s leaders. “The other half came up in the last ten years for the natural beauty and want to see it preserved.” There are no “old-
“timers” on the board, as “they see it as their entitlement to make money on selling the land.”
According to her, “They love the land, but in a (hardscrabble) way…we don’t have a real
conflict with them – it’s people coming in from the outside with money that antagonize them.”

Those with community interests may, particularly in backstage discussions, decry the
influence of “treehuggers,” or the “kayak crowd.” But they seem less likely to implicate those
with place interests as threatening their security as they would the more visible developers or
investors from the commodity interest cluster. The BRC board promotes the perpetuation of a
“living community” and there may, in fact, be issues of common interest between all three
clusters. The BRC’s primary interest, however, is in preserving the landscape, which attracts
most members – and amenity migrants. An upper-income seasonal resident from Minneapolis,
for example, recently renovated a former fisherman’s home in Bayfield after she and her
husband “fell in love with the lake.” She indicated that they have not yet made relationships with
local people, but hope to be more involved and join the BRC in the future.

In the same era as the BRC began operations, the progressive-minded leaders of Bayfield
created the Bayfield Housing Trust, one of only a handful of such trusts in Wisconsin. The top-
down creation of this entity was driven by community interests, yet only one home has been
converted into “social property” (Davis, 1991). In contrast to the vitality of the BRC, the
organization is basically dormant at this time, according to one of its founders. This helps to
underscore the fact that several decades of amenity migration and gentrification have resulted in
the local political and civic scene being dominated by people interested primarily in place and
landscape preservation.

*Place-based conflict and collective action*
Our research reverberates Davis’s urban observation that “to have an interest in a parcel of domestic property, within a specific territorial space is to become enmeshed in a complex web of local and extralocal relations…that ‘orient’ one’s behavior in a particular way” (Davis, 1991, p. 59). Planning forces the issues of future development and landscape preservation onto the local stage, compelling stakeholders to make decisions as if there were a caravan of bulldozers en route to the places they love. Though use and exchange values are important considerations for stakeholders in our study areas, we observe that place-related considerations have inspired many of them to organize and act collectively in reaction to or in lieu of planning.

The most notable collective action that has occurred in recent years has generally been by relative newcomers with place interests. Historic preservation is an important consideration for some, but most that belong in this cluster are primarily interested in scenic and recreational values. This aspect of amenity has been under increasing threat.

Washburn Alive objected to the local government facilitating private liquidity (by the condominium developer) and had other concerns with the proposed development. Its primary motivation, however, was the preservation of amenity – the lakeshore walking trail and relatively “wild” lakefront, the development of which was encouraged by the government’s land use plan. Condominium advocates included those seeking liquidity in land development and others who perceived that such a project would enhance their interests by improving the overall economy.

Community, commodity, and place interests inherently clashed, and the local government became the target of and arena for collective action. Davis (ibid.) argues that while governmental entities are “part of the encapsulating social structure” (p. 259) in which local groups act, they do

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19 Particularly in Bayfield. According to the current mayor, the community’s 2000 comprehensive plan helped stakeholders realize that two major needs remained unaddressed: a waterfront plan and a stronger set of architectural guidelines for historic property. He worked on a committee that developed the guidelines. According to a local realtor, “people love…that this is ‘quaint’ and ‘charming’… that the historic integrity seems to be there.”
not fit neatly into the framework. As alluded to, however, we observed in our cases that their intervention in local land-use decisions often seems to be based on particular property interests. In the case of the City of Washburn, its decision on but one relatively small parcel was perceived to be of major consequence, highlighting the pivotal role played by governmental actors in the rural property interest mosaic.

The BRC has taken significant action throughout the region to preserve amenity. It has mobilized in response to action by stakeholders with conflicting interests – those looking to develop land for liquidity or personal consumption and equity, which threatens the amenity of others. While the BRC may not have experienced opposition from “oldtimers,” its perception that these stakeholders “are not too interested in what we do” may actually point to inherent conflict that has simply not crystallized into action. As noted by Davis (1991), “People may find themselves antagonistically related, even if they neither recognize nor want such enmity, simply because of a different and conflicting stake in domestic property” (p. 59). The efforts of Bayfield County place defenders, such as historic preservationists and the BRC, have been very tangible and are supported by many. They could have long-term detrimental impact on community interests, however, by contributing to gentrification or the loss of year-round businesses due to increased seasonality, which their efforts encourage, albeit inadvertently.

In Hitra-Frøya, collective action and conflict also seem to relate to the inherent antagonism between preserving amenity and facilitating liquidity. Opposition to the wind park seemed to be primarily motivated by a defense of amenity interests; the numerous, tall windmills on a flat island were perceived as a serious threat to the quality of living space for many residents of Frøya. Adjacent landowners also raised vocal concern over a potential decrease in their property values, but the primary opposition was from Perikum. This group included long-time

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20 BRC also has a strong interest in legacy, but in terms of inheritance of amenities, not wealth.
year-round residents, a few seasonal homeowners, and some Frøya natives who had returned from being educated or working elsewhere, which may have helped them to better appreciate local place values. This indicates that issues related to land use and the environment are about much more than simply demographics. As noted by Kaltenborn and Williams (2002),

> In Norway, as indeed in a number of other countries, debates concerning natural resource and cultural heritage management often revert to a simplistic distinction between locals (insiders) and non-locals (outsiders) when it comes to explaining different attitudes in conflicts. This is understandable because media and other public forms of communication are prone to simplify highly intricate problems. (p. 196)

In our study areas, the best examples of direct interpersonal conflict related to these issues have, in fact, been between seasonal residents. We argue that more important than categories such as insider versus outsider or newcomer and oldtimer are domestic property interests, which can place people from all of these categories into the same cluster.

Further conflict may be on the near horizon in the Norway case. The level of concern over the number of seasonal housing lots designated for Hitra and Frøya suggests that latent interests may not be converted into manifest conflict until these subdivisions move from plan towards reality; “people tend to take their ‘communities’ for granted – until they are jolted by a destabilizing disturbance” (Davis, 1991, p. 265).

Collective action may have been inhibited by other factors as well. In Bayfield County, gentrification has led to rural neighborhood stratification. A number of former residents and current local workers – who would likely fall into the community interest cluster – have moved to more affordable homes in Washburn, the nearby Red Cliff reservation, or out of the area. Their defining interest in security may be objectively and antagonistically related to the defining interests of the place and commodity clusters, but the potential for collective consciousness\(^{21}\) is hampered by a lack of population density in this isolated rural area, as well as by their

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\(^{21}\) Recognition of shared interests in domestic property, the first step towards collective action.
diminished numbers. While Bayfield’s proportion of seasonal housing units doubled in the 1990s, the year-round population dropped by ten percent and has decreased by an additional six percent since 2000 (USBC, 2007). Historical and cultural factors may also be salient, but in any case, it appears that inherent conflict has not produced effective collective action by members of this cluster.

Finally, while Davis (1991) stresses that conflict is between interest groups and not classes, there is often a convergence between the two. For example, according to Bayfield’s current mayor, the creation of local architectural guidelines was a battle. Two people appointed to the committee were diametrically opposed to any governmental action around historic preservation, which turned a “six-month project into an eighteen-month one.” One of them was an acquisitive homeowner who profited from “flipping” local houses, while the other was a wealthy woman and relatively recent migrant. Said the mayor, “some of us were concerned about how our guidelines might limit the options for lower-income people, new teachers, and so forth, and the woman…said, ‘those people don’t belong here.’” Similarly, a highly-educated, relatively wealthy new pair of seasonal residents with no previous ties to Frøya indicated that they were proud to have “discovered” the area before their urban peers. In regard to the proposed wind park, they argued that more people with place interests like themselves were needed to help “save Frøya from itself,” as some might suggest is occurring in Bayfield County.

Discussion/Conclusion

22 The current mayor supports the notion that many people were displaced by higher taxes and rents and loss of year-round jobs.
23 E.g. an independent North Woods mentality, a “company town” legacy in Washburn, and poverty and disorganization at Red Cliff
24 Others would argue that landscapes and buildings are being preserved, but year-round communities are not.
We hope that our chapter will make three primary contributions. Planning’s effective failure in some of our most threatened natural places has puzzled many. Thus, for planners, we first offer a more nuanced perspective on who stakeholders are and how they organize. Residents of our communities seem to unanimously cherish the landscape and pace of life that are characteristic of minimal development. Yet, when presented with an opportunity to curtail future development through planning, communities are unable to reach consensus. Though it is convenient to blame partisan politics for this stalemate, it is a cursory and ineffectual explanation.

The rural property interest mosaic provides appropriate focus to the complex array of interests influencing rural land use politics. Specifically, this perspective recognizes that one stakeholder can embody multiple conflicting interests, but relies on public consciousness and organization in deciding which interest to champion politically. Stakeholders are often classified by planners under a single land use interest, such as development, conservation, preservation, speculation, or gentrification. While convenient, this labeling strengthens the prevalence of political stereotypes and disenfranchises stakeholders from the very interests that must be tapped in order to reach compromises around land use. Even as planning becomes increasingly participatory, it often overlooks the interests in property that underlie divisions in planning perspectives. This supports the need for decision making processes that emerge independent of polarizing land use policies, and for conservation measures that recognize the complex diversity in personal attachments to land.

Second, this work should challenge scholars of planning, politics, and the social sciences to draw connections between the similar place themes evolving in our respective fields. Place is widely understood as being space imbued with human meanings, which has been demonstrated
at multiple social scales (see for example Tuan, 1977; Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002; Hanna, Dale, & Ling, 2009). Place meaning can be born from and maintained by individuals or it can be agreed upon and maintained by groups (see for example Davenport & Anderson, 2005; Perkins, Thorns, & Newton, 2008). In addition, place is invoked as a socially nuanced substitute for geographic location. Place-making, for example, often refers to the political economy of growth and development in a specific locality. However, we have established that as commitments to spatial and economic patterns of development, land use plans are an important link between place meanings and the capitalist process of place-making. We feel this chapter charts a conceptual terrain between place concepts and literatures that is in need of further exploration as place becomes an increasingly jargonized term.

Finally, for scholars and practitioners alike, we hope this framework for understanding rural land use sheds light on the importance of using community-oriented benchmarks for measuring success. Incorporation of place values into planning seems to be viewed by some as the salve that will bring harmony and rootedness to bureaucratic and ineffectual processes. However, the success of group decision making is reflected not in economic growth, or even in political unity. As we observed, profitable place making often translates into heightened inequality, and thus, the politics of planning, conservation, and development will shift inevitably and interminably. As Wilkinson (1991) proposes, it is the “free flow of authentic interaction among people whose lives are interconnected in a local society” (p. 104) that defines successful community. Accordingly, we maintain that land use conflicts such as those we have described represent instances of authentic, collective interaction that has the potential to build community, a key to social and ecological well-being (ibid.).

25 According to Wilkinson (1991), while economic growth may exacerbate it, the development of community intrinsically works against inequality.
We observed that while place meanings are often perceived as individualistic, subjective, and benign, they are, in fact, collective, objective, and conflictual. Though recent planning efforts and the reactions to them failed to unite residents around areas of common interests, they inspired community-based collective action. Stakeholders from competing interest groups were forced to interact and publicly debate issues of local import. As noted by one Norwegian informant, it is not the debate but silence that is truly “scary.”

In conclusion, place-based conflict can yield fruitful public discussion that may prove to be a first step toward democratic community-based decision making. Planning and decision making are complex and divisive, not because place is absent from these processes, but because planning is not engineered to recognize the complex ways in which place interests are manifest. A locally-informed understanding of the rural property interest mosaic may help to harness the inherent potential in strong but diverse interests in place.
Figure 1. Rural Amenity Area Property Interest Mosaic

[Accommodative Interests]       [Accumulative Interests]

- Security *
- Autonomy
- Amenity
  - Quantity of Living Space
  - Quality of Living Space △

...... Community Interests;       * = defining interest
----- Place Interests;           △ = defining interest
----- Commodity Interests;       Δ = defining interest
References


