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**The Urban-Rural Nexus:  
The impact of urban growth on bordering rural communities**

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## ABSTRACT

As cities continue to expand and push into bordering rural areas, the pressure destroys traditional ways of life and replaces them with urban solutions for growth. With this expansion of the city, the urban-rural nexus has become a contested space where conflicts over the exchange value and use value of land are only a part of the larger problem. In areas where independent municipal governance is favoured over the collective regional approach, rural towns and suburban municipalities are competing directly with bordering cities to assess the desirability and perceived benefits of development projects. Additionally, resident groups within these rural areas are in conflict with each other over preservation of opposing ways of life. This paper examines Rocky View County, which surrounds the Canadian city of Calgary, as a rural jurisdiction layered with the urban complexities that result from being situated within a growing metropolitan region. The four basic questions that frame this research project are: 1) How does the constituency of an urban-rural nexus change over time? 2) Why do people who are essentially urban, as determined by their employment and leisure activities, establish residences outside the city? 3) How does the long-standing rural population respond to this intrusion into their space? 4) What conflicts surface as a result of the changing constitution of the county? A community profile is developed from census data and review of development plans. Discourse and narrative analysis methods are used to identify and analyze the claims and conflicts between groups.

## **The Urban-Rural Nexus: The impact of urban growth on bordering rural communities**

The urban setting is no longer limited to the core city with its surrounding suburbs, as urbanization has created metropolitan regions that include spaces outside the borders of cities. As cities continue to expand and push into bordering rural areas, the pressure destroys traditional ways of life and replaces them with urban solutions for growth. With this expansion of the city, the urban-rural hybrid zone has become a contested space (Logan and Molotch 2007) where conflicts over the exchange value and use value of land are only a part of the larger problem. In areas where independent municipal governance is favoured over the collective regional approach, rural towns and suburban municipalities are competing directly with bordering cities to assess the desirability and perceived benefits of development projects. Additionally, resident groups within these rural areas are in conflict with each other over preservation of opposing ways of life.

This paper examines Rocky View County, which surrounds the Canadian city of Calgary, as a rural jurisdiction layered with the urban complexities that result from being situated within a growing metropolitan region. With new residents moving into the county and land uses changing significantly, multiple constituencies have emerged in this area which was previously a single community. The four basic questions that frame this research project are: 1) How does the constituency of an urban-rural nexus change over time? 2) Why do people who are essentially urban, as determined by their employment and leisure activities, establish residences outside the city? 3) How does the long-standing rural population respond to this intrusion into their space? 4) What conflicts surface as a result of the changing constitution of the county? Using these questions, the primary goal is to understand the dynamics of conflict within metropolitan regions through a case study approach. Census data and review of development plans are used to build a

community profile of Rocky View County. Then, discourse and narrative analysis methods are used to identify and analyze the claims and conflicts between groups.

## OVERVIEW – ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

Rocky View County is the sole municipal district in the Calgary census metropolitan area (CMA), which also includes the cities of Calgary and Airdrie, three towns, two villages and one Indian reserve. Calgary has experienced Canada's highest percentage growth of any major city between 1996 and 2006, pushing its population past one million residents (Hiller 2010, 33-34). The county's population has also grown dramatically in the past ten years, largely as a result of pressure from Calgary's urban growth. Between 2001 and 2006, Rocky View County's population increased by 14.2 percent, rising from 29,925 to 34,171 (Statistics Canada 2007c). It is significant to note that the county surpasses Calgary's annual average population growth rate and sixty-one percent of its residents are currently employed outside the county (Statistics Canada 2007a; Statistics Canada 2007c).

Covering a total land area of just over four thousand square kilometers, Rocky View County surrounds the city of Calgary on its north, east and west borders. In addition to bordering Calgary, the county envelopes the city of Airdrie and the towns of Cochrane and Chestermere. Several hamlets also fall under the jurisdiction of Rocky View County, including the tourist destination of Bragg Creek. Prestigious communities within the county include Springbank, Elbow Valley, Artist View Park West and Heritage Woods, the latter two communities holding "designated place" status defined as "a small community or settlement that does not meet the criteria established by Statistics Canada to be a census subdivision (an area with municipal status) or an urban area... created by provinces and territories, in cooperation with Statistics Canada," (Statistic Canada 2011). Rocky View County is home to 11,604 private

dwellings, of which ninety-four percent are single detached homes and ninety-two percent are owned by the occupants (Statistics Canada 2007c). Sixty-one percent of residents lived at the same address between 2001 and 2006, with the figures rising to eighty percent when residents were asked if they lived within Rocky View County during that period (Statistics Canada 2007c).

From an economic perspective, the annual median family income in the county is \$108,476, well above the median for Calgary (\$77,658) and the province of Alberta (\$73,823) (Statistics Canada 2007a; Statistics Canada 2007c). This is also sixteen percent higher than the median family income of the neighbouring Municipal District of Foothills (Statistics Canada 2007b). Of the population over the age of fifteen years, there is a seventy-six percent rate of participation in the labour force, and fifty-nine percent of the population has some form of post-secondary education (Statistics Canada 2007c). Sixty-one percent of the employed labour force works outside the county and eighty-eight percent of those commuters drive to work (Statistics Canada 2007c). Finally, the 2006 Census of Agriculture shows that Rocky View County is home to 1,551 farms and 2,295 individuals are farm operators, indicating that only eleven percent of active labour force participants are involved in traditional agricultural pursuits.

To summarize, residents of Rocky View County are generally well-educated people who own their homes and earn above average family incomes. While most residences are single detached dwellings, there is diversity in the types of neighbourhoods and styles of housing within the county. Residents tend to put down roots in the community as indicated by their low mobility over a five-year period. Rocky View County residents are less involved in agricultural careers and are more likely to be employed in Calgary (ISL et al. 2009). Commuter lifestyles are indicated by the reliance on personal vehicles for transport to work outside the county.

Apart from the residential communities contained within Rocky View County, there are recent developments that demonstrate the changing constituencies of the municipality. Cross Iron Mills shopping and entertainment complex opened near the hamlet of Balzac in fall of 2009 as a private development that has since grown to include numerous box stores and light industrial facilities. It is marketed as being located in “Rocky View, Alberta”, a manufactured non-place for the purposes of attracting consumers, workers, investors and businesses to the area. If the theoretical position that people follow jobs proves true, it will mean a dramatic change to the landscape and population of surrounding areas as employees in the Cross Iron Mills complex seek out desirable residential locations.

Another example is the Cottage Club subdivision which began selling lots in 2009 for a gated recreational community on the northwest edge of Rocky View County, bordering the Municipal District of Bighorn. Similar to the suburb style cottage communities of Ontario’s cottage country (Luka 2010), this development provides secondary homes for residents of Calgary, Rocky View County and neighbouring towns. This planned development has introduced a new kind of owner who is not a permanent resident.

From its humble beginnings as a rural municipality, Rocky View County has evolved into a rapidly changing jurisdiction with a diverse constituency. While at one time it may have been appropriate to speak of it as a rural community, that designation is being continuously contested by urban pressures and exurbanites who have a different view of country living than long time residents. With the persistence of the antiurban sentiment in popular culture (Jacobs 1961; Lofland 1998), rural areas have become a residential haven away from big city stresses and urban-rural relations are impacted by extended commuting patterns surrounding urban centres (Ali, Olfert and Partridge 2010). Rural residents with agricultural roots, however, continue to

view their land as an investment that provides economic viability. Social cohesion of the urban-rural hybrid zone is in jeopardy from the conflicting interests of those who wish to preserve the aesthetic appeal of their land and those who wish to earn a living from it.

#### URBAN-RURAL NEXUS AS SEGREGATED SPACE

As the urban-rural nexus has been influenced by urbanization patterns (Seeley, Sim and Loosley 1956; Clark 1966; Garreau 1991; Beauregard 2006), it has also mirrored the city in becoming a segregated space with conflicts over land use, way of life and definition of space. Through suburban development on the edges of the city and annexation of adjacent lands, cities have seeped into areas that were traditionally considered part of the countryside (Sandalack and Nicolai 2006). Many urbanites utilized periphery development and transportation infrastructure to take up residence in the urban-rural nexus while commuting to employment in the city. Long time residents of the urban-rural nexus have seen their land and way of life change dramatically in a short period of time, creating crisis of meaning and belonging.

Not unlike the city, the urban-rural nexus is a segregated space with the greatest similarity being segregation by class. For the elite, migration out of the city is both a symbolic and economic act. Relocation to expensive exurban communities acts as a marker of arrival in the elite circle (Garreau 1991), and also allows further accumulation of second circuit capital in the form of real estate (Gottdiener and Feagin 1988). For middle class migrants, however, relocation is generally to less expensive areas where they purchase existing homes, small acreages or build in moderately priced new developments. Residential built form varies dramatically between parts of Rocky View County, ranging from small farm homes in Indus to expansive mansion-style homes on small acreages in Springbank and clusters of high end homes in country-residential areas like Bearspaw. The visual representation of status in Rocky View

County is similar to the city, with estates clustered in specific sections and more affordable homes relegated to other areas with lesser views and amenities.

Second circuit capital also plays a role in segregation in the urban-rural nexus as increased consumption has created a demand for leisure activities and corresponding accommodations (Butler 1984; Whitson 2001; Koster, Lemelin and Agnew 2010; Senese 2010; Eberts 2010). It is not uncommon to see condominium developments near PGA-rated golf courses or major ski resorts, with many of the units acting as secondary residences for seasonal enjoyment of leisure activities. Also, many urbanites purchase cabins or cottages in lakeside settings in the urban-rural nexus to “get away” from the city and partake in idyllic natural surroundings for summer weekends (Seeley, Sim and Loosley 1956; Halseth 2010; Luka 2010). Along with the classic Canadian example of Ontario’s cottage country, the Cottage Club development near Ghost Lake, Alberta is a recent example of this second home phenomenon.

Space for “shoppertainment” is another form of segregation in the urban-rural nexus (Hannigan 1998). Vast spaces on the edges of cities have been appropriated for theme parks, nature-based tourism, farmers markets, golf courses and factory outlet malls (Koster et al. 2010). Rocky View County boasts the Calaway Park amusement centre and Cross Iron Mills mall as tourist destinations. Additionally, small hamlets and villages with natural appeal are transformed into tourist hot spots (Judd and Fanstein 1999), with Bragg Creek as a prime example in the county. Interdependence between the city and its hinterlands is also demonstrated by the phenomenon of leisure spaces providing residual benefits of tourism flow to the city.

Another significant spatial separation in the urban-rural nexus is between agricultural and non-agricultural lands. From a landed property perspective, farms bring together both the productive and reproductive spheres through containment of the agricultural operation and



homestead on the same parcel of land. Although some small acreage residents may own as much land as a small farming operation, there is a marked absence of any agricultural activity in favour of a stately home with professional landscaping. Just as it is common to see pockets of prestigious estate communities, rows of expansive farming operations are commonplace in this hybrid environment. Similar to the land use zoning policies of the city, the urban-rural nexus employs zoning as a means of controlling growth and managing the diversity through designations that may include agricultural, residential, leisure and commercial (Hanna and Noble 2010; Bunce 2010; Caldwell 2010; Gayler 2010; Taylor 2010; Bryant and Marois 2010). Segregation in the urban-rural nexus is both formally and informally structured, very much like the city with which it shares a border.

#### WHY MOVE TO THE COUNTRY?

The notion of “escaping” the city is a dominant theme in the migration of people from the city to outlying areas. Momsen (1984) uses data from Winnipeg and Red Deer to demonstrate that one third of rural residents in the commuter belt lived in rural areas because they had a “preference for rural living” (170), with an equal number reporting they had lived in rural settings as children. Many urbanites wish to connect with nature in a way the city has not afforded them (Senese 2010). Alexander (1977) advocates “city country fingers” (21), essentially strips of urban areas extended into the surrounding countryside, to accommodate the human biological necessity for nature.

Along with the focus on nature and escape from the city is the increased attention to the leisure and recreational value of the rural area. Butler (1984) discusses how various recreational pursuits - hobby farming, cottage ownership, timeshare properties, off-road vehicles, hunting – all create a very different usage pattern in the rural setting. The trend toward lifestyle-oriented

development (Whitson 2001) in the Canadian Rockies creates a recreation-focused population migration, where urbanites establish recreational cottages or permanent residences that allow for access to urban amenities (e.g. employment, social events) as well as rural leisure attractions (e.g. skiing, hiking).

Goddard (2009) describes the metropolitan mind's creation of a "hybridized leisure countryside" (431) to escape the trappings of the city. The concept of creating a countryside according to a mental image has ties to the urban design literature that focuses on the importance of the "image of the city" (Lynch 1960) in creating meaning and enabling negotiation of the urban landscape. Similarly, the rural landscape conjures up different images for the diverse residents who occupy it.

"Penurbia" is a relatively new term that captures the clash between metropolitan and rural residents' images of the urban-rural hybrid zone. The following definition outlines the geographical and etymological roots of the term:

Penurbia is a term that refers to countryside regions located close to metropolitan America which are largely settled by metropolitan émigrés. These penurban areas are difficult to qualify precisely as places with a start and a finish, as they blend the look of the countryside and the mentality of the metropolis. The term penurbia has two roots: penumbra from the rays of the "solar" or "galactic" metropolis, and peripheral as in visual awareness without focus (Goddard 2010).

Within penurbia, one can find hobby farms, country homes, agricultural fairs and horses – all indicators of the city-dweller's imagined countryside. This metropolitan view of the landscape is in direct contrast to the perception of the longstanding agricultural resident who views the land "as a factory" (Goddard 2009, 417), placing value on the production value of the land over the aesthetic appeal.

## URBAN-RURAL NEXUS AS CONTESTED SPACE

The issue of contested space within the urban-rural nexus is most commonly focused on the conflict between those who favour use value of land against those who wish to realize full exchange value potential. The dynamics of change are visible in the urban-rural nexus, particularly when the issue revolves around development of traditional agricultural lands. Many farmers take the position that their farms constitute their livelihoods, through agricultural income or through sale of the land (Hanna and Noble 2010; Gayler 2010). Using the argument that agriculture has become a devalorized industry (Sassen 1994; Sassen 2002), farmers cite hardship from low resale value of land for agricultural purposes and prohibitive operating costs as contributing to increasing poverty. This argument has similarities to the theory of systemic disadvantage of the underclass in cities (Liebow 1967; Massey and Denton 1993). Agricultural segregation is argued to perpetuate poverty for the farming segment of the population.

On the other side of the argument is the conservationist position taken up by small acreage owners and activist groups. From their perspective, agricultural lands and green space must be preserved in the interest of sustainability and environmentalism (Lee 2009; Schmidt and Paulsen 2009; Caldwell 2010; Gayler 2010). Each side is suspicious of the true intent of the other: conservationists feel farmers are interested only in profit from their land, while farmers feel that conservationism is being used as an argument to protect residential exclusivity and property values. Which argument will carry the day depends upon the audience, and as rural elected officials with long-standing community ties are being replaced with exurbanites, power struggles are challenging the longstanding status quo (Vidich and Bensman 1958; Mitchell 2010).

Lifestyle conflicts arise between farmers with grazing cattle and exurbanites whose landscaping suffers at the hooves of a neighbour's animal. These rural conflicts are a superficial representation of the deeper issue: perception of insurmountable social and ideological differences among residents in the hybrid zone. There is a sense of "impermanence" amongst the exurbanites who reside in the country but maintain strong ties to the city, creating a sense of solidarity among the rural "survivors" (Walker 2010, 7). This ideological divide is critical to understanding social relations that are based on numerous diverse and complex interests and conflicts in the urban-rural nexus. It is simplistic and erroneous to view contemporary urban fringe municipalities as a single rural unit.

Alongside the conflicts that take place between residents in the urban-rural hybrid zone, there are conflicts between jurisdictions. The heightened competition for development and revenues increases fragmentation of city regions (Weiher 1991; Ghitter and Smart 2009; Johnson and Schmidt 2009) and perpetuates the inefficiencies of the decentralized approach to governance (Savitch and Vogel 2004; Ghitter and Smart 2009; Lindstrom 2010). Whether the opportunity is through federal funding, tax base revenue, tourism or development, there is stiff competition between cities and their hinterlands.

#### CONFLICT BETWEEN RESIDENTS IN ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

In summer 2010, Rocky View County Council struck a Reeve's Task Force on Growth Management to gain an understanding of stakeholder perspectives on growth in the region. This commissioned group was comprised of a variety of experts with roots and vested interests in Rocky View County. The Reeve's Task Force facilitated six public engagement hearings throughout the county in September 2010 to seek out feedback from residents and other

stakeholders, and consolidate it into a master document that could guide council in building a growth management strategy for the next fifty years.

The public hearing process encouraged the voicing of a variety of perspectives from numerous stakeholder groups, including long-time residents, recently migrated residents, developers and business owners. During the hearings, residents raised their concerns about environmental impacts of development, rising costs of infrastructure maintenance and incompatibility of higher density living in rural areas. Documenting these claims is critical as “the definition of rural becomes a struggle between interested parties wishing to champion their vision for particular outcomes and a focus for examination of the political and social processes supporting these visions,” (Reimer 2010, 63). Through discourse and narrative analysis methods, the claims and stories of Rocky View County residents can be evaluated for their effectiveness and ultimate power in affecting decision-makers.

During the course of the Reeve’s Task Force public hearings, a common thread emerged as presenters gave their positions on growth management in Rocky View County. The collective group agreed that current approaches to development in their rural region were unsustainable, regardless of their individual views on how future growth should be managed. If we understand social problems as “constituted by claims-making activities” (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 26), unsustainable rural growth emerged as the social problem that all stakeholders readily accepted in the county. Having agreed upon the social problem, however, the perspectives of stakeholders differed dramatically in terms of how future growth should unfold in the county.

Farmers and ranchers with long-time agricultural operations asserted the claim that they held the right to sell their lands for financial viability, while environmental conservation was the main counter-claim issued by the anti-growth coalition. Rhetorical themes emerged around who

had greater rights based on longevity, the need to protect precious resources and the desire to not become “another Calgary”. As prescribed by Miller (1993), we must read all talk as making a claim, for it is only then that we can accept the “existence of communities whose typical ways of knowing and talking about the world have been discredited, or marginalized,” (153). In the case of Rocky View County, presentations at the public hearing process inferred that long-time agricultural residents viewed themselves as marginalized in the face of the anti-growth citizens’ coalitions that had formed around the passionate appeals to preserve natural resources.

Without being a formal or identifiable group, those residents who identified themselves as farm operators in their presentations managed to convey a united position that: 1) farmers view their land as an investment and retirement plan, 2) farmers should have the right to sell their land at their discretion, and 3) zoning land solely for agricultural use is unconscionable in present conditions of decreasing viability of farming operations. While these statements from various residents were not quite a story, they had an effect that technical accounts of environmentalism and arguments of economics did not. In the language of narrative analysis, the farmers were able to combine enough elements of storytelling to build a sympathetic character and engage an audience.

Solidifying the effect of the farmers’ accounts were two presentations at two separate hearings. At one of the hearings, several speakers argued against development and there was much discussion over the county’s financial situation. After two hours of presentations, the mood in the room began to wane as a result of the constant accounting rhetoric employed by speakers. Then, one resident delivered a presentation that came closer to storytelling than any previous speaker and advocated for the type of higher-density communities that were being

proposed in the region. The greatest impact of his presentation, however, was his parting comment to small acreage owners:

You're complaining about how new development will ruin the rural landscape. Well, we've already got 30 to 40 acre acreages in the county that are overgrown with hay because people don't do anything on the land.

Given the audience, the implied message to small acreage owners was clearly understood: your view on what is unsightly is ironic. Farmers had started to fight back against small acreage owners.

The second such presentation came at the next session. After initial introductions and thirty minutes of presentations defiling the development industry and municipal council as co-conspirators in the demise of Rocky View County, a resident went to the microphone for a turn to tell her own story. In the space of three minutes, she managed to explain that: 1) she is a longtime resident, 2) she is the last of a dying breed (farmers), 3) she feels betrayed by the small acreage owners who now turn their backs on farmers, 4) she is nearing retirement and longs for sustained social support (her children, her community), and 5) she is going to stand tall in the face of adversity targeting the farmer. This emergence of the character of strong farmer created unexpected momentum that saw other farmers continue to tell their stories and form a group opposing the previously dominant citizens' coalitions who argued for government accountability, conservation and land preservation. In Frances Polletta's (2006) words, this resident's story was the "BOOM – It Happened" moment (45) when the collective action began for farmers.

In the presentations that followed, farmers and ranchers took up the story according the informally established template ("My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I've lived here for \_\_\_ generations.") and added to it in the spirit of the farming collective. During subsequent meetings, any attacks against farmers ("they are only interested in making money") were refuted ("I don't think self-

interest is something to apologize for in a democratic society with free enterprise roots”) and rebuked (“small acreage owners wouldn’t be here if a farmer hadn’t paved a little bit of paradise for them”, “I am offended by your comments that we are here to make money”, “I hope that you will support and respect the people who have been here all these years”).

Yet, even with such impassioned presentations from the farming residents attending the hearings, the facts about water shortages were impossible to ignore and the conservationists made convincing technical presentations about watersheds, wastewater disposal and servicing. One resident raised concerns about “putting babies and others at risk” without full studies on surface and ground water. Another resident cited experience with local watershed partnerships that demonstrated a three hundred percent increase in unlicensed, unregulated domestic household usage of limited quantities of water in recent years. The fact that both presenters also had agricultural ties to the community gave more credibility to their claims, and demonstrated that the fracture points were not black and white between farmers and small acreage owners. Bigger issues of depleting natural resources seemed to transcend interest groups and may provide the core around which mutually beneficial solutions are constructed in the future. Historically, the scarcity of groundwater reserves and methods of sewage treatment seem to be the rallying points for community cohesion (Momsen 1984; Cryderman 2010; Ferguson 2010; Cryderman 2011). It remains to be seen if this issue or others like it resonate with enough residents to bring the opposing sides together.

Ultimately, resident groups pointed the finger at developers, political leaders and each other to enhance their respective claims. Agricultural residents claimed that newcomers were selfishly keeping their piece of the pie while wanting to close the door on others pursuing the same small acreage lifestyle. Small acreage owners attacked the greed of farmers who valued



profit over preservation of farmland. At the same time, developers launched counter-claims against residents and politicians, citing those stakeholders' demands for acreage-style housing and increased taxation revenues as reasons for development. The spectre of Calgary as the greedy development-driving force was also periodically invoked by presenters to remind residents that ultimately the battle was between urban and rural interests, creating a sense that a common ground was required within Rocky View County to maintain its best interests against urban threats.

Which claims carried the day and influenced the Reeve's Task Force in its recommendations for future growth in Rocky View County? The recommendations reflect strength of both the conservationist and agriculturalist claims, demonstrating that the scientific facts of the technical accounts provided by conservationists did not trump the emotional appeal of the agricultural claims. Development of a water management strategy and public engagement in water servicing for future developments were two major water-related recommendations (Reeve's Task Force 2011, 24-25). Additionally, the six recommendations regarding agriculture in the county reflect the need to respect agricultural operators' rights of ownership, as well as removing the expectation that the burden for open spaces be borne by farmers and ranchers (Reeve's Task Force 2011, 27). It is also significant to note that a "Code of the West" has been developed and posted on the Rocky View County web site to familiarize newcomers to the agricultural way of life, another recommendation generated by the Reeve's Task Force. These recommendations show that this county is attempting to preserve its rural roots while recognizing that it must also steward protection of its resources.

## CONFLICT BETWEEN ROCKY VIEW COUNTY AND CALGARY

In addition to the urbanization of traditional rural lands, a greater interdependency has developed between the city and the urban-rural nexus (Reimer 2010; Fullerton and Brander 2010). This relationship is unstable and often antagonistic, with minimal changes in a city's operations having grave impacts on rural areas (Vidich and Bensman 1958), forcing rural governments to be not only reactive but proactive in their future plans. It is a forced interdependency at best, leading to many contests between the urban-rural nexus and the city over land use, taxation, servicing and location of lucrative development projects. Thus, the segregation of spaces in both the urban and rural contexts is further complicated by the conflicts that occur between the city and its hinterlands.

From the early history of regional organization based on the Rural Municipality Act to annexation of county lands by the city of Calgary, Rocky View County has undergone tremendous change in the past century. The physical landscape changed dramatically with advances in agricultural technology, transportation infrastructure and perpetuation of a leisure-consumption lifestyle. Increased demands for servicing, diversification of the economy and incorporation of towns within the county also created a changing political landscape that required fostering intermunicipal relations with multiple partners.

In 1955, the provincial government aligned municipal districts with school districts and established the Municipal District of Calgary No.44, which quickly changed its name to the Municipal District of Rocky View No.44 by the following year. At the same time, regional planning continued to evolve as the discovery of oil sparked land interest feuds between municipalities in the mid-1900s. As a result, Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) were legislated in Alberta (Ghitter and Smart 2009). In 1995, RPCs were disbanded in favour of

greater municipal control over planning, a move which resulted in rural municipalities competing directly with large urban centres for commercial development, residential development and resulting taxation revenue. The Calgary Regional Partnership was formed in 1999 in an effort to bring back the collaborative focus to planning, but Rocky View County and the three other rural municipalities pulled out of the partnership in 2009.

Since 1995, the Calgary region has moved away from a regional approach to planning and operated as a series of independent municipalities with common borders. Review of the literature indicates that similar issues exist in the United States (Lindstrom 2010; Johnson and Schmidt 2009; Savitch and Vogel 2004; ) and Sweden (Lidstrom 2010). Locally, the City of Calgary found itself losing the opportunity to benefit from a slaughterhouse operation in 2004 when community opposition within the city influenced Rancher's Beef to relocate in Rocky View County (Ghitter and Smart 2009). Although the county lacked the infrastructure to provide adequate water service, it refused to collaborate with Calgary on service provision, opting instead to utilize provincial funding in an effort to prevent city leaders from controlling rural interests. Historic perceptions of the city as a breeding ground of vice and the countryside as the nurturer of virtue lead to suspicion of city officials' intentions in collaborative ventures (Vidich and Bensman 1958).

More recently in the Calgary region, the reluctance of rural politicians to work with the neighbouring city has resulted in Rocky View County removing itself from the Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP) in 2009. It was felt by rural municipalities that the structure of the CRP provided unfair veto power to Calgary as the larger urban partner. As a result, both the City of Calgary and the surrounding counties are drafting independent growth management strategies, although it is the projected population growth in the city that influences population growth of the

Rocky View County as a spillover effect (ISL et al. 2009). In 2010, the Rocky View County Reeve's Task Force on Growth Management heard from Rocky View residents that rejoining the CRP would not be in the best interest of the county (Reeve's Task Force 2011). Despite differences of opinion on how to manage future growth, both exurbanites and longtime residents presented a united front that the county needs to operate independently of city plans.

It is ironically the urban influence that manages to unite the opposing forces within the urban-rural nexus against a common enemy - the city. To borrow from Neil Smith (1996), the urban-rural nexus has launched a revanchist charge to reclaim the countryside. Urbanization effects have been deeply felt in rural areas across North America and globally. Urban place entrepreneurs (Logan and Molotch 2007) capitalized on the opportunity for greenfield development on the city's borders. Land was cheaper and there were no constraints from existing structures. While rural residents watched and tolerated the development of early residential exurban areas, increasing development is touching too close to home for many. In Rocky View County, proposed residential and commercial nodes for growth management have been rejected and residents are seeking solutions that better reflect the density to which they have traditionally been accustomed (Reeve's Task Force 2011).

By taking a strong public stand against proposed growth plans, residents of Rocky View County are joining in a global chorus that is rejecting growth in favour of maintaining traditional ways of life, preserving the environment and promoting well-being. Such strong public movements have been made possible by a common vision to preserve autonomy in the urban-rural nexus, in spite of differences between group members (Castells 1983; Lowes 2002; Polletta 2006; Eberts 2010). The strength of these citizens' coalitions has been their combination of grassroots passion, elite influence and political power (Gans 1962; Castells 1983; Anderson

1991). They have been able to take the message, retool it in the terminology of decision-makers, and deliver it with political clout. This is a radical departure from the colloquial perception of country rubes who could not fight urbanization.

With the push back from rural areas, it stands to reason that cities will have to re-evaluate their own strategies for managing growth. If population growth cannot be funneled to outlying areas, it will have to be contained within the city. Increasing densities or reducing population growth are the two available options. Given the investment cities like Calgary have made to achieving world class status and attracting top talent, it seems unlikely growth-based economic development will be slowed down. That leaves the option of increasing densities and triggering a new round of conflict over where such densification will be located.

As a final solution, the city may forge new alliances with other levels of government to influence specific growth strategies in the urban-rural nexus. Reimer (2010) takes the position that there needs to be increased engagement and development of positive interdependence between the city and its outlying rural areas for both sides to reap economic and social benefits. For the Calgary region, there are strong implications in the findings from research that supports the benefits of regional partnerships, like the Urban-Rural Interdependencies Project (City-Region Studies Centre 2010). It is possible that the City of Calgary will either request, or not oppose, provincial intervention in the Calgary Regional Partnership to mandate the rejoining of Rocky View County. Whether a regional approach will result in a mutually agreeable growth plan remains to be seen. The constant in any scenario is the reality of the urban-rural nexus as a contested space.

## CONCLUSION

At present, the concentration of urban analysts is mainly on the impacts of urban growth on residents within urban areas. What is lacking is a focus on the pressures of urban growth on bordering rural municipalities, particularly in western Canada. Research on rural areas is also abundant, as evidenced by programs at Brandon University and University of Saskatchewan, as well as research projects like the New Rural Economy Project (Reimer 2006). However, these research programs tend to look specifically at the rural setting and not the complexities of the intermunicipal relationship between rural areas and neighbouring urban centres.

This paper is one step towards contributing to the existing urban studies literature by analyzing the tensions in the urban-rural nexus, both between neighbouring municipalities and the resident groups within those areas. Contemporary urban sociology must look at how the city is only one part of the greater metropolitan region, and analyze how growth within the city places pressures on outlying areas. Bordering municipalities like Rocky View County struggle to find their identity as urban growth pressures change land uses and community profiles over time.

Using Rocky View County as a case study offers an important contribution to the literature by demonstrating that contemporary rural areas are complex, contested spaces. There is no simple definition of “rural”. The degree to which an area can be considered rural is tied to the *image* one holds of what is rural. We must go beyond traditional definitions and investigate the subcategories that exist within rural areas, all of which come together to form complex and dynamic municipalities like Rocky View County.

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