Pits, Peripheralization and the Politics of Scale:
Struggles over Locating Extractive Industries in the
Town of Caledon, Ontario, Canada

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Pits, Peripheralization and the Politics of Scale: Struggles over Locating Extractive Industries in the Town of Caledon, Ontario, Canada

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CHAMBERS C. and SANDBERG L. A. (2007) Pits, peripheralization and the politics of scale: struggles over locating extractive industries in the town of Caledon, Ontario, Canada, Regional Studies 41, 327–338. Blowers and Leroy hypothesize that peripheralization, a condition that accommodates locally unwanted land uses, tends to reproduce itself in certain locations. Yet, they acknowledge that the terms of such a condition can be challenged by elite initiatives and coalitions. In the Town of Caledon in the Greater Toronto Area of southern Ontario, Canada, such a contest is being played out over the siting of sand and gravel pits and limestone quarries. The paper explores not only the terms, but also the frames that guide the struggles over peripheralization, and their implications for spatial configuration of the aggregate industry more generally. The various scale narratives that guide such struggles are not given, but socially constructed, historically contingent and subject to question and challenge.


CHAMBERS C. y SANDBERG L. A. (2007) Canteras, periferización y las políticas de escala: Los esfuerzos por ubicar industrias de extracción en la ciudad de Caledon, Ontario, Canadá, Regional Studies 41, 327–338. Blowers y Leroy teorizan que la periferización, una circunstancia que da cabida a usos no solicitados de tierra local, tiende a reproducirse en ciertos lugares. Sin embargo, reconocen que es posible desafiar los términos de esta circunstancia mediante iniciativas y coaliciones de élite. Y esto es lo que justamente se está haciendo en la ciudad canadiense de Caledon situada en el área metropolitana de Toronto al
sur de Ontario, con el emplazamiento de fosas de arena y gravilla y canteras de piedra caliza. En este artículo analizamos los términos y las estructuras que guían la lucha por la periferización y sus implicaciones de configuración espacial de la industria global en general. Observamos que los diferentes relatos de escala que guían estas luchas no se dan sino que se construyen socialmente, dependen de la historia y están sujetas a preguntas y desafíos.

Canada´ Industria global Regiones exurbanas Periferización

JEL classifications: R1, R11, R5, R52

INTRODUCTION

In 1990, journalist Michele Landsberg wrote that the Town of Caledon ‘is like a body riddled with cancer’ (LANDSBERG, 1990). She was referring to the vast Town of Caledon ‘is like a body riddled with cancer’ that is feeding the construction boom in Canada’s largest urban conurbation, the Greater Toronto Area, with a population of 5 million (Fig. 1). Her account represents the often uneasy relationship between the aggregate industry and its local hosts. Bones of contention include the sheer size of aggregate operations, the dust, pollution and noise resulting from blasting and truck traffic, the often meagre local revenues resulting from aggregate operations, and the alleged arbitrary nature of public designation of prime aggregate resource lands, thereby rendering such lands without potential for non-aggregate development or ecologically damaged. She also points to a taxation structure that encourages the aggregate companies to acquire extensive holdings that they extract and rehabilitate slowly. This contrasts with an alternative policy that could push the companies to maintain smaller holdings that are extracted quickly and then restored swiftly into some other use.

Landsberg’s description corresponds well with what Blowers and Leroy have called the peripheralization thesis, which refers to the tendency of places already economically and environmentally disadvantaged to reproduce this disadvantage over time (BLOWERS and LEROY, 1994). Peripheral regions are isolated, economically marginal, single-industry dependent, externally dominated, and culturally prone to acquiesce to polluting, low-wage and non-unionized industries. Though often exhibiting such characteristics in different degrees, the one quality they must exhibit is the willingness to accommodate ‘the condition of environmental hazard or risk’ (BLOWERS and LEROY, 1994, p. 203).

Caledon fits this condition, containing the largest series of gravel pits in North America. There are relatively few other industries, and those that exist are predominantly non-union, small-scale and/or cottage in nature.

But in spite of its peripheral status, the Town of Caledon is currently engaged in an intense struggle over the general pattern of aggregate extraction in the town and the prospective presence of new aggregate operations. Such a struggle exists in many other places. In south-east England, several communities have successfully fought to prevent the establishment of new extraction sites (MURDOCH and MARSDEN, 1994; COWELL and OWENS, 1998). Here, as in Caledon, the countryside is increasingly becoming a home to ‘ex-urban retired or commuting professionals’ who ‘generally have the cultural and economic resources to represent themselves effectively within political processes’ (MURDOCH and MARSDEN, 1994, p. 184). But the successful opposition to gravel pits and quarries typically extends beyond the political clout of elite groups. Such groups, along with environmental groups, First Nations, or long-term residents, can form networks that appeal to wider myths and histories, which connect the local issue to national concerns, ethnic histories, and natural heritage in battling the aggregate industry (ANDERSON, 2004; COWELL, 2000; COWELL and OWENS, 1998, p. 808; DALBY, 2002; HORNBOURG, 1994; BLOWERS and LEROY, 1994, p. 207; MACKENZIE, 1998; MACKENZIE and DALBY, 2003; MURDOCH and MARSDEN, 1994; PRESTON-WHYTE, 1995, 1996; STEVENSON, 2000).

In their study of peripheralization, BLOWERS and LEROY (1994, pp. 224–225) suggest that ‘at least some locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) are inherent in modern society’ and that their location ‘require due caution, including political checks and balances to ensure careful decision-making’. The present authors agree but insist that the number of LULUs, the volume of disamenities they produce, and the public goods they serve need also be questioned and probed in more detail. It is proposed that an exploration of the scalar narratives and political forces acting for and against the industry, and the broader extractive discourse that guides them, enhances one’s ability to comprehend both the local attempts at challenging aggregate operations as well as the wider implications of aggregate production per se. The present authors accept the notion that scale is not ontologically given but socially constructed and contingent (COX, 1998; MARSTON, 2000; HOWITT, 2003). It is suggested that there are powerful corporate, local community, and policy narratives that construct various locations as predestined producers of aggregate. The transnational corporations in control of aggregate operations put forth the scalar narrative that aggregates must be extracted close to major markets, markets that are in turn seen as naturally given rather than historically contingent. Other narratives may include, as in Caledon, an alleged connection between aggregate extraction and
Fig. 1. Location of the town of Caledon in southern Ontario, Canada.
local agricultural communities, and central policy directives that assign special status to the supply and demand of aggregate at a larger geographical scale.

It is also proposed that at the scale narratives and spaces of engagement articulated by the opponents to peripheralization deserve more detailed scrutiny. The authors especially examine Blowers and Leroy’s proposition that:

The success of resistance against a LULU depends on the capacity of local elites to forge a united front within the community, even though supporters may represent opposing positions and ideologies on other issues and differing views on the need for the activity itself.

(Blowers and Leroy, 1994, p. 207, original emphasis)

The present authors once again agree. Local agents construct scale narratives that matter, are contingent, and that jump scales and expand the spaces of engagement (Cox, 1998; McCarthy, 2005). Yet they do so selectively, focusing in particular on a rural aesthetic of viewscapes that serve a growing elite ex-urban community (and leaving communities with less political and economic clout vulnerable to aggregate extraction) (Duncan and Duncan, 2001). However, the paper proceeds by pointing to the opposing narratives’ firm position within a broader scaled extractive discourse, and its implications for the future of aggregate extraction in Caledon specifically and in other areas more generally.

The authors base their examination on the secondary and primary literature on the Town of Caledon, as well as the law and policy framework governing Southern Ontario aggregate development. Field notes and informal interviews obtained as participant observers and occasional actors within the local aggregate policy community over the past 5 years are drawn upon. The authors’ participation has included a public deputation during the hearings regarding an application to extend a local quarry, field trips to meet with aggregate activists in Caledon and surrounding jurisdictions, meetings with industrial aggregate operators, and attendance at the arbitration hearings on the proposal to establish one quarry, the James Dick Rockfort Quarry, which figures prominently in this study.

CONSTRUCTING AN AGGREGATE REGION

The Town of Caledon is indelibly shaped by the international business structures that control the aggregate sector. This includes primarily horizontally and vertically integrated transnational cement companies that, as a consequence of the competition to sell cement powder, own most aggregate firms. The cement industry is dominated by five large multinational firms: Holcim Ltd (Swiss), Lafarge (French), Cemex (Mexico), HeidelbergCement (Germany), and Italcimenti (Italy). Each operates in upwards of 30 countries and rose to prominence by acquiring formerly domestically owned plants throughout the world, from North America to Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia. In 2001, Lafarge operated a sand and gravel pit on the edge of Caledon Village. It ranked as the 16th largest operation in Canada. A local, private company, James Dick Construction, operated an even larger pit, ranking as the seventh largest nationally. Together, they accounted for 2.48 million tons of Caledon’s total production of 4.85 million tons of material from licensed aggregate operations (Ontario Aggregate Resources Corporation, 2002, p. 10). Although the largest aggregate operations in Caledon, these are just two of several operations in the immediate area of Caledon Village (Aggregate and Road Building Magazine, 2001).

The cement companies have been particularly capable of exerting their power in Canada. In 1992, Lafarge, Holderbank (now Holcim Ltd), Ciments Français (a subsidiary of Italcimenti) and CBR (a member of HeidelbergCement) held nearly 90% of Canada’s cement market. According to Ferguson (1992), Canada’s weak antitrust laws and government indifference allowed the industry to set the highest prices in the world and to buy most of its cement customers. The same cement consumed in Canada was sold in the USA for less than half the amount. In the Greater Toronto Area, the same source reported:

almost all ready-mix concrete makers, cement-block makers, cement-pipe makers and sand and gravel suppliers … are owned by Holderbank, Lafarge, Ciments Français subsidiaries and the one large independent cement maker in the area [James Dick Construction]. Almost total vertical integration makes price fixing and bid rigging an easy exercise in the Toronto-area market.

(Ferguson, 1992, p. 130)

At the same time as the cement companies exert their economic power, they have a powerful global and national network that promotes an environmental and social sustainability perspective from the industry’s point of view (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2002; Cement Association of Canada, 2004). In Ontario, aggregate firms also operate a powerful public relations apparatus that promotes their image as good community citizens and environmental stewards. An industry organization, the Aggregate Producers’ Association of Ontario (renamed the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association in 2006), serves this function centrally, while also operating as a powerful lobbyist for the industry and the administrator of pit and quarry rehabilitation schemes (Aggregate Producers’ Association of Ontario, 2004; Patano and Sandberg, 2005).

The aggregate industry has built several efficient-scale narratives in support of its operations. One such
narrative argues that the siting of an aggregate operation must be at a sufficiently close distance from the point of consumption to make extraction economically feasible and environmentally sustainable. This is allegedly because the low value and bulk nature of its products dictate that transportation costs are kept down (Cowell and Owens, 1998, p. 800). In Canada, for example, the industry claims that transporting aggregates over 30 km doubles their cost (Baker et al., 2001, p. 464). Lower transportation costs also mean lower cost cement, which keeps costs for government-funded infrastructure and private home building down. As a consequence, the aggregate companies typically fight opponents until proven reserves in the areas closest to the market are completely exhausted. Restored pits and quarries are also described as building biodiversity and parklands in areas that would otherwise have been built over. The industry also claims that extraction sites close to the market reduce the trucking distance, contributing to Canada meeting its reduction of carbon emissions under the Kyoto Agreement (Patano and Sandberg, 2005).

Community histories and provincial aggregate policies reinforce the scale imperative of location and economics associated with aggregate extraction. Local histories of Caledon typically describe the region as predestined for aggregate production, pointing to significant aggregate deposits that require little processing, and are close to the Greater Toronto Area market (Hymers, 2001). Caledon aggregates are depicted as the first to undergo mass extraction in the 1940s. This is when Toronto construction and aggregate operator, Conn Smythe, purchased the farms around Caledon Village that have come to constitute North America’s largest series of contiguous gravel pits (Smith, 1996; Chambers, 2002). Local farmers are portrayed as followers in Smythe’s footsteps. From using wayside pits for road upgrades to supplement their income in the past, farmers now seek to sell their land as aggregate reserves, while young men from farm backgrounds seek employment as heavy equipment operators or labourers at the local pits. Such local stories lend support to Blowers and Leroy’s suggestion that peripheralization persists where ‘traditional patterns of social integration’ are still predominant and/or the communities are dependent on the threatening activity (Blowers and Leroy, 1994, p. 201).

But there is more to this story. The industry has also helped to construct the region socially as an essential source of aggregates. It laments that much of the aggregate deposits closer to the market have been ‘sterilized’ or made inaccessible through built infrastructure. The industry often, for example, notes that the largest aggregate deposits in Ontario are located under the City of Toronto. The industry is persistent in its lament of a scarcity of local aggregates, and a call for new licenses in Caledon and neighbouring towns (Miller, 2005; Aggregates Manager, 2005). In the process of constructing such a dire situation with regards to aggregate supply, and Caledon’s central position therein, the industry’s story makes illegible a series of other considerations. These include redirecting the substantial volume of presently exported aggregate material to local uses; the use of other substances, such as nickel and copper slag, shingles, tires and glass, as substitutes for aggregate; and channelling more resources towards the recycling of aggregates (Winfield and Taylor, 2005). The industry is highly active in the extraction and exploration of deposits at large distances from the Greater Toronto Area. Huge extraction sites on Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron, and a superquarry now planned by Superior Aggregates on the eastern shore of Lake Superior, already supply or could supply more aggregate to the Greater Toronto Area market (Miller, 2005). There are also different modes of transportation than trucks, such as rail and water, that could be used to move aggregate, or substitutes (e.g. waste rock from northern metal mines), from distant and large regional quarries (Drake, 2002; Miller, 2005). Finally, the demand projections of aggregates can be challenged. This is because they are constructed by a clientilist consultancy industry whose interests are closely vested in the continued growth of a suburban, ex-urban, road, and automobile-dependent society and economy. It refuses to conceive of a different economy based on higher levels of urban intensification, substitution, and different means of transportation that consume less aggregate.

The provincial state is keenly keyed into and complicit in the aggregate industry’s scaled narrative with regards to resource protection and the distance/cost relationship discussed above. This situation is by no means predetermined. Before the 1970s, the aggregate policy regime in Ontario was relatively decentralized, providing municipalities with considerable control over the presence of pits and quarries. Municipalities could use bylaws, or their Official Plans, to exclude and regulate aggregate extraction within their boundaries (Baker et al., 2001, p. 467). The late 1960s and early 1970s, however, proved a watershed time for aggregate policy, as the province, at the behest of the producers, began to regulate aggregate extraction centrally. During this time the provincial government’s interests in satisfying increasing demand from growing urban centres coincided with those of the industry, the result being the marginalization of anti-aggregate municipalities and their loss of control over the siting of pits and quarries (Baker et al., 2001, p. 468).

In 1986, the Province of Ontario passed the Mineral Aggregate Resources Policy Statement (MARPS) by Order-in-Council under the Planning Act (Baker et al., 2001, pp. 470–471). The MARPS was based on a detailed inventory of aggregates in the province, projected demands for aggregates, and stipulated volumes mandated by the province to be produced by local jurisdictions. The MARPS also states that
mineral aggregate extraction on prime agricultural land is permitted as an interim use, and as long as prescribed rehabilitation occurs (MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES, 2002). The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources has prepared several research papers coordinating such uses over the past 30 years (MACKINTOSH, 1982, 1985).

Though the MARPS and more recent legislation have made aggregate producers more accountable for their social and environmental impacts, the MARPS still produces policy outcomes favouring industry interests and the province’s desire for access to low-cost aggregate (BAKER et al., 2001, pp. 481, 472). This is well reflected at the Ontario Municipal Board, an independent, quasi-judicial tribunal that rules on land-use conflicts in the province, and routinely favours the aggregate industry, whose board members have stated that ‘regrettably, gravel is where you can find it’ (ESTRIN and SWAIGEN, 1993, p. 753). There is, then, little doubt that municipalities and citizens opposed to aggregate development have lost control over pit sitings as a result of aggregate policy being scaled at the provincial level via the MARPS (BAKER et al., 2001, p. 478). This situation has been strengthened by the neoliberal policies pursued by the provincial government since 1995, when the industry basically obtained self-regulatory and self-monitoring powers with regards to legislative compliance and the disbursement of a fund for the rehabilitation of abandoned aggregate pits that is funded by a small fee on each tonne of aggregate produced (LINDGREN, 1996; AGGREGATE RESOURCES ACT, 2004; WINFIELD and JENISH, 1997, p. 101). The provincial government has also recently amended the MARPS to make it unequivocally state that any analysis of supply/demand of aggregate shall not to be a consideration in the siting of new aggregate operations (ONTARIO MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND HOUSING, 2005, p. 19). In other words, wherever aggregate exists in economically feasible quantities, regardless of whether there are other sources of licensed aggregate available nearby, the industry is entitled to mine aggregate when and where it chooses.

The prevalence of an international and aggregate industry business network, the construction of scale narratives by that network, and the provincial state in support of aggregate protection and extraction clearly has the effect of positioning Caledon as an essential and public source of aggregates. But these developments have by no means been unchallenged.

AGGREGATES AND ACTIVISM

The roots of activism against aggregates in Caledon are connected to the region’s relatively recent attraction to ex-urban residents. But this attraction is just as much a social construction as the town’s allure for aggregate extraction. In the past, the area’s rolling hills, hardwood forests, many creeks and natural ponds, limestone plains and rocks, moraines, as well as sparse sections of Class ‘A’ farmland, detracted farmers who preferred to settle on more level lands and fertile soils. Those who came were often poor and remained in that position (LANGMAN, 1975). But the area is now constructed as aesthetically attractive. The Niagara Escarpment that borders Caledon to the west received provincial protective status in the early 1970s, and in 1990 it became a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. Natural areas and protected areas offer some level of protection within the area (NIAGARA ESCARPMENT COMMISSION, 2004a, b). However, aggregate extraction is allowed within certain zones within the escarpment. There are also grandfather clauses for some quarries that allow them to operate in the most protective zones until their resources are exhausted (PATANO and SANDBERG, 2005). A similar story to the Niagara Escarpment can be told about the Oak Ridges Moraine, a 160-km-long and narrow landscape feature that skirts the northern boundary of the Greater Toronto Area and whose extreme western point is located in Caledon. The Moraine has a history as a failed agricultural frontier but has since been the target of various government-assisted reforestation and other conservation efforts. In 2001, the Moraine was given provincial protected status of a similar nature to the Escarpment because of its unique physiography, flora, fauna, and role as a water filter for the streams and rivers that flow through the Greater Toronto Area.

The physical landscape and rural scenery in Caledon has combined with easy accessibility to render the town attractive for ex-urbanites. The town is within easy commuting distance of major urban centres, such as Mississauga and Brampton. A 1-hour commute by car puts a resident in downtown Toronto. Consequently, over the past two decades ex-urbanites have sought out this area for reasons of natural aesthetics, real estate value, small town appeal, and small ‘c’ conservative values. Paradoxically, the very roads that the aggregate industry have supported have brought the area its most potent and vocal opponents. These shifts are reflected in the local demographics. Census data show that between 1985 and 1995, households with incomes under Can$50 000 per year declined, while households with incomes in excess of Can$100 000 increased significantly. At the same time, educational levels improved considerably. As the cost of real estate has increased under urban migration pressures, families at the lower end of the income scale have become priced out of the market. This implies a growing exclusivity (STATISTICS CANADA, 1986, 1996, 2001). Over recent decades the traditional agricultural base has given way to a wealthier, better educated, commuter population, increasingly composed of ex-urbanites (DAVIS et al., 1994, p. 45). As a consequence, the financial well-being of Caledon has disembodied from the traditional, local economy, as it is becomes increasingly economically dependent on the outlying urban centres.
To advance further the notion of advancing exclusivity, the increase in high-income families suggests that ex-urbanites are moving to the area by choice, not necessity, as their household incomes would allow them to live in a variety of urban centres and urban settings. In other words, for many ex-urbanites, moving to such rural settings is the product of lifestyle choice, not economic imperative. As Davis et al., among others, point out, this motivation in part stems from an attraction to the rural aesthetic, both in terms of landscape and community, as well as varying degrees of anti-urbanism (Davis et al., 1994, p. 47). It is certainly the case, then, that factors indigenous to Caledon are affecting efforts to drive expanding aggregate extraction farther afield. Yet note that the scale narratives built and the solicitation of support from other groups beyond the region face formidable constraints and limitations occasioned by the very actors and frames within which these resistances occur.

The town of Caledon takes on a provincial aggregate policy

In 1996, the Town of Caledon and the Region of Peel commissioned a study to develop:

- a sustainable community model for the management of the aggregate resource that will enable the Caledon ecosystem and community to be maintained and enhanced over the long term.

(TOWN OF CALEDON AND REGION OF PEEL: PLANNING AND ENGINEERING INITIATIVES, 1998a, b, 1999)

The report illustrates the scaled nature of aggregate policy in the province of Ontario and the favoured position of the industry within the policy regime. The Can$3 million study thus stipulated changes to the Town’s Official Plan, but only set a staged approach to aggregate development in the area based on ‘priority zones’. Principally, these zones designate when various aggregate-bearing areas of the town will be open for extraction. They provide residents with some certainty about where future aggregate development will be allowed but put no limits on extraction levels per se.

The fate of the report similarly displays the power of the aggregate industry in resisting reform. A consultancy firm well acquainted with the aggregate industry prepared the report and a proposed Official Plan Amendment on its basis, and the local aggregate companies took part in providing input into the process. Still, the province, the Aggregate Producers’ Association of Ontario, and the local aggregate operators appealed the Official Plan Amendment to the Ontario Municipal Board (Ross, 2001, p. 29). Eventually, a Board-negotiated settlement was reached on the premise that the:

role of the Town of Caledon in the hierarchy of Provincial, Regional, and local aggregate resource planning, is to establish comprehensive mineral aggregate resource policies in its Official Plan. These policies must have regard to provincial policies and take into account local considerations.

(Amendment 161, 2003, p. 5)

The language of scale employed in the statement is instructive. The term ‘must have regard’ establishes primacy for the provincial supply of aggregates while the expression ‘take into account’ renders less concern for local considerations, such as social and environmental impacts.

The background and context to the outcome of the appeal reveal both the opportunities and constraints in the fight against continued aggregate extraction. Given the policy context defined by the MARPS, the principal avenue open to the citizens of Caledon to displace the growing number of aggregate operations can only be premised on the cumulative social and environmental damages associated with long-term and intensive aggregate extraction. Citizens can only hope to impose increasingly costly conditions on development that may serve to make more distant sources economically attractive. The arbitrated settlement thus continues the pattern of past Ontario Municipal Board decisions where the province and aggregate-rich jurisdictions have gone head to head. By 2001, the Board had cited the MARPS in 94% of the cases approving aggregate license applications (Baker et al., 2001, p. 479). Clearly, the Board can place increasingly stringent conditions on aggregate operations, but is highly unlikely to discontinue favouring extraction in an absolute sense. A specific citizen-based fight against a specific quarry proposal in Caledon illustrates the formidable obstacles in making a dent in the aggregate-based network.

Coalition of concerned citizens and the Rockfort Quarry proposal

In 1997, the Coalition of Concerned Citizens was formed in response to an application by James Dick Construction Ltd, the only locally owned, non-union producer of concrete in the Greater Toronto Area, to establish a quarry on Winston Churchill Boulevard, also known in part as the Caledon-Erin townline. Although the proposed quarry is officially in the Town of Caledon, its ecological impact will also affect wetlands in the neighbouring Town of Erin. Consequently, the Coalition is composed of actors from both areas, but remains largely Caledon focused.

By way of background, in 1996, James Dick purchased a 200-acre farm in the Town of Caledon, known as the Rockfort farm, and applied to the Ministry of Natural Resources to operate a dolostone quarry on the site. The proposal called for the quarry to reach a depth of 150 feet, 100 feet below the local water table (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2005). One of the principal contentions of the
Coalition is that mining below the water table will have serious environmental effects on the surrounding area, especially with respect to wetlands and fish habitat. In order to maintain the water table, James Dick proposed to use an untested technology known as a ‘grout curtain’, which serves as a means of separating ground water from quarry run-off. The grout curtain will be constructed once mining has moved below the water table (Novakowski, 2002).

The Coalition was formed in response to James Dick’s proposal for quarry development and stopping this development remains its raison d’être: ‘The coalition’s focus from the beginning has been the James Dick Construction proposal at Rockfort Farm’ (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2002a). This said, over the past 7 years the Coalition has actively recruited new members and sought to create alliances with other communities also fighting aggregates. In 2003, the Coalition listed its membership at 5000, which includes members from outside the Towns of Caledon and Erin (Funston, 2003). Coalition representatives point to their members and support from beyond the borders of Caledon to highlight that the fight to stop James Dick’s Rockfort Quarry is not simple NIMBY-ism. Although the Coalition was formed to fight the James Dick quarry proposal, some of its members also work to diversify the approach to the conflict through a largely education-based sister organization known as the Caledon Countryside Alliance. Though much smaller in membership, the Alliance constitutes an important organization in defining the broader philosophy behind aggregate activism in Caledon. It is maintained here that the Alliance and Coalition pursue resistance narratives that are locally scaled and elitist in outlook, characteristics that compromise their effectiveness and leave them open to broader criticism.

The Caledon Countryside Alliance’s goals are particularly instructive in pointing to the elite basis and rural and environmental aesthetic subscribed to by Caledon residents. Its stated objective is ‘to ensure that Caledon and the Headwaters Region maintain their rural character’. The Alliance thinks ‘of our countryside as a permanent feature rather than land waiting to be developed’. It thus laments that over the next 10–20 years, Caledon’s population is expected to at least double, resulting in twice as many cars, twice as many area residents, not to mention the wealth within the area, is the fact that the Coalition has absorbed direct costs for technical and professional services totalling some Can$600 000 (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2002a). As it is engaged in an Ontario Municipal Board hearing associated with the James Dick proposal, this amount is certainly rising (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2002a).

Unlike the Coalition, with its focused, political objective of stopping the development of the Rockfort Quarry, the Alliance positions itself as an ‘apolitical’ forum through which those concerned about changes to ‘rural character’ brought about by development in general can discuss their views and what can be done to preserve ‘rural’ values. Besides Caledon, the Headwaters Region includes the Towns of Erin, Mono Township and Mulmur Township. Thus, the Alliance recognizes the need to bring in surrounding towns and townships also threatened by increasing aggregate extraction and development.

Yet the Alliance carries an important political message. In asking the question, ‘Will Caledon become Bramalea north?’ (Bramalea being a neighbouring suburban community with a large immigrant component), the Alliance positions itself as different and superior where its exclusivity is presented through a rural and ecological aesthetic (Duncan and Duncan, 2001):

We believe that we should live within the environmental carrying capacity of our local environment. Our population growth and aggregate activities should be influenced by local environmental concerns.

(Caledon Countryside Alliance, 2004)

The strategy of the Coalition of Concerned Citizens in resisting the James Dick quarry is similarly scaled as local. In Table 1, for example, the Coalition deconstructs statements and claims made by the company. All of the statements concern local issues, such as the damage to the local ecology, fauna, and environment, and the detrimental or minimal benefits accruing to the local economy.

The principal strategy the Coalition employs in fighting the quarry, however, is to bring the Rockfort Quarry proposal under professional scrutiny. This is done at multiple jurisdictional levels. The members actively engage legal, environmental, and engineering professionals on an ongoing basis to guide them through the myriad of policy, politics and technical information that accompanies a challenge of this magnitude (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2002a). Testament to the importance of the aggregate issue to many area residents, not to mention the wealth within the area, is the fact that the Coalition has absorbed direct costs for technical and professional services totalling some Can$600 000 (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2003a). As it is engaged in an Ontario Municipal Board hearing associated with the James Dick proposal, this amount is certainly rising (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2002a).

The Coalition’s financial resources, professional expertise, and knowledge of policy and political systems allow it to carry out its challenge at all three levels of government: municipal, provincial, and federal. At the time of writing, the Rockfort Quarry proposal is awaiting an Ontario Municipal Board
The one-third area is not due to James Dick’s generosity, but the fact that the site is small and that is the minimum amount required for setback under the Aggregate Resource Act regulations.

Deer do not take kindly to the noise from rock crushers and the blasting of dynamite.

The berms required will obstruct this wonderful view that will take 40–50 years to recreate. The crater left behind will be a dramatic sight covering an area of approximately 150 acres by 150 feet deep. It would be equivalent to the impact of a fair sized meteor or the detonation of a small nuclear device.

Current permits indicate there is approximately 15–20 years of production under license. The resource of limestone in Ontario is in the hundreds of billion of tons that would last for at least 1000 years.

The Coalition of Concerned Citizens’ position is: increased cost to the ratepayers for the upgrades and maintenance of roads; lost taxes due to declining property values; lost tourist dollars revenue; lost economic opportunities; destruction of a unique habitat, according to many consultants; and an increase in municipal insurance rates.

Where will the employees driving the fully loaded gravel trucks park their trucks? That is, there is no parking for gravel trucks in Belfountain, Cheltenham or Terra Cotta.

Pits, Peripheralization and the Politics of Scale

Table 1. Local contestations of the benefits and costs of the James Dick quarry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>James Dick said:</th>
<th>Coalition of Concerned Citizens said:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have set aside one-third of the property for areas of environmental protection and buffer zones. These areas will be reforested and will result in more forest cover than presently exists</td>
<td>The one-third area is not due to James Dick’s generosity, but the fact that the site is small and that is the minimum amount required for setback under the Aggregate Resource Act regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-tailed deer will continue to use the habitat right up to the very edge of the excavation area</td>
<td>Deer do not take kindly to the noise from rock crushers and the blasting of dynamite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A creative rehabilitation plan offers dramatic views across lakes lined with occasional limestone cliffs and dotted with flowerpot islands</td>
<td>The berms required will obstruct this wonderful view that will take 40–50 years to recreate. The crater left behind will be a dramatic sight covering an area of approximately 150 acres by 150 feet deep. It would be equivalent to the impact of a fair sized meteor or the detonation of a small nuclear device.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our company has anticipated the critical shortage that will occur within a decade and has responded by selecting a site where the transportation savings to the market will be significant</td>
<td>Current permits indicate there is approximately 15–20 years of production under license. The resource of limestone in Ontario is in the hundreds of billion of tons that would last for at least 1000 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In closing, this site will be an economic benefit to the area; will not result in increased cost to taxpayers; will greatly increase local employment; will benefit existing tourist business; and will not result in the destruction of unique habitat</td>
<td>The Coalition of Concerned Citizens’ position is: increased cost to the ratepayers for the upgrades and maintenance of roads; lost taxes due to declining property values; lost tourist dollars revenue; lost economic opportunities; destruction of a unique habitat, according to many consultants; and an increase in municipal insurance rates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creation of 65 jobs on site along with associated spin-offs will be a substantial economic benefit to this area. These employees will frequent local business establishments, such as restaurants and coffee shops</td>
<td>Where will the employees driving the fully loaded gravel trucks park their trucks? That is, there is no parking for gravel trucks in Belfountain, Cheltenham or Terra Cotta.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Coalition of Concerned Citizens’ website (http://www.coalitioncaledon.com).

In making the decision, the Board went against the so-called ‘Clergy’ principle that states that applicants are entitled to have their cases heard on the basis of the policies that existed at the time of the original application (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2003b).

Although responsibility for permitting aggregate extraction is an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, the Coalition is also working to invoke a federal environmental assessment of the project. This is because there is no provincial environmental assessment requirement under the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act for private projects. Only specific designation by Cabinet can force assessment on private-sector projects in the province (Chambers and Winfield, 2000, p. 33). In pursuing the federal assessment, the odds are against the Coalition. The Canadian provinces, dependent on the revenues and economic development acquired through leasing their resources to private companies, generally view federally imposed environmental conditions on development as threats and infringements on provincial jurisdiction (Harrison, 2002, p. 124).

The federal government’s track record also shows a reluctance to trigger environmental assessments of provincial resource extraction projects (Chambers and Winfield, 2000, p. 30).

Yet, any project that may fall under Section 35(2) of the Federal Fisheries Act, which prohibits the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat, is required to undergo a federal environmental assessment under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (Chambers and Winfield, 2000). In addition, the Federal Assessment Act’s Comprehensive Study Regulation stipulates that a quarry with a production capacity of 1 million tons/annum or more requires a comprehensive study be prepared (Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 1992). Such a study would take into consideration the environmental effects of the project, allow public comment on the assessment, and the need for the project and alternatives to the project (Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 1992).

The findings of Coalition-sponsored hydrogeological studies regarding the effect of the quarry on surrounding wetlands and fish-bearing waters suggest that a federal environmental assessment is required (Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 2002b). According to the Coalition, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is in agreement with their hydrogeological consultants in that ‘offsite water levels will likely be affected sufficiently to result in harmful
alteration, disruption or destruction’ of fish habitat (COALITION OF CONCERNED CITIZENS, 2002b). The Coalition thus maintains that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is the ‘responsible authority’ for carrying out the assessment. From the perspective of the Coalition, a federal environmental assessment would provide a forum to show the environmental problems in the James Dick proposal and, again, potentially increase the development costs of the quarry, as well as providing a means to try and force alternative sites.

The Coalition’s attempt to gain a federal environmental assessment has also linked them to national environmental groups, and helped increase the profile of their issue. In 1999, they joined forces with Environmental Defense Canada, a Toronto-based organization that provides legal, scientific, and communications assistance to qualified groups and individuals, with an emphasis on involvement in ‘significant legal proceedings’ (ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE CANADA, 2004). Environmental Defense Canada also hopes that success in securing an environmental assessment in the James Dick case could set a precedent for the federal scrutiny of permits of new aggregate operations across all the aggregate regions of southern Ontario.

Besides their linking with national environmental groups, the Coalition has also had extensive media coverage in major Greater Toronto Area publications. As a consequence, one might expect that the federal assessment process may provide a potential means to leapfrog the MARPS and Ontario Municipal Board at the provincial level and bring prohibitive costs to bear on the Rockfort Quarry project via a higher-level jurisdiction. Again, this strategy requires political sophistication, resources and connections. The strategy of the Coalition to this point in time has been consistent and clear: utilize expert knowledge, both local and external, to challenge the James Dick quarry proposal at every stage of the permitting and approval process, and at every level of government.

CONCLUSIONS

The peripheralization thesis as coined by Blowers and Leroy fits many of the resource-extractive regions that surround the Greater Toronto Area. The Town of Caledon has historically supplied Toronto with sand, gravel, and limestone, for construction purposes, and has, as a result, suffered and reproduced the conditions of peripheralization, such as an undiversified economy and a scarred non-human environment. However, shifting demographics, the presence of an ex-urban community, and the emergence of the town as attractive for rural living, has led to the growth of an anti-aggregate activism in the Town of Caledon that parallels the situation in many other ex-urban areas (BLOWERS and LEROY, 1994; COWELL and OWENS, 1998).

The Caledon case suggests that the conditions for a successful challenge of the aggregate industry are in place. Yet the outcome is uncertain, and dependent on two agendas, both seeking to reframe the scalar significance of environmental resources, one focusing on the provision of aggregates, the other seeking to elevate irreplaceable qualities of the environment. The extractive agenda is clearly dominant. Its interests are represented at different scales, and the provision of aggregates is scaled as an essential service at the provincial level. The amenity agenda, by contrast, is represented by local enclaves of ex-urbanites who construct narratives that typically consist of a ‘rural and ecological aesthetic’ that is portrayed as incompatible with aggregate extraction. Though essentially local, the amenity agenda jumps scale in promoting its position. So far it has received some support from the provincial board that reviews planning decisions. The rise of the Coalition of Concerned Citizens, an elite group, fighting an 8-year battle over the siting of one aggregate operation, and its solicitation and collaboration with province-wide environmental organizations, holds some potential for success. The Coalition’s tenaciousness and resourcefulness in raising funds, and soliciting professional expertise, have also been instrumental in seeking a federal environmental impact assessment. But such challenges are constrained by the broader provincial goal of producing sufficient aggregate for the provincial demand. Even if successful, the town will have to accommodate extraction somewhere else, or, if this is not possible, extraction will effect a more distant community with less means to resist a quarry operation. Caledon can thus only challenge the provincial directives guiding the timing of aggregate production and its cumulative environmental impact.

On balance, then, the challenge to the aggregate industry in Caledon holds little prospect for realization at the present. In spite of the political and economic strength of an emerging professional ex-urban community with access to legal and scientific assistance, the forces in support of aggregate extraction remain strong. Local linkages to the industry, a strong corporate presence, a federal reluctance to interfere, and provincial policies increasingly favouring extraction close to market are likely to continue to impose directives on towns to supply specified amounts of aggregates in the name of the ‘public good’. In addition, the focus on the impact of aggregate extraction on a growing local elite community, the fight against the organization of extraction itself, rather than extraction per se, and, in the case of the James Dick quarry, fighting an isolated quarry, lends itself to the criticism of NIMBY-ism and the charge that if the quarry is not established there, it will have to go somewhere else. The wider lesson is that local fights against the aggregate industry be acknowledged as broader fights against the quality and extent of urban growth, and that coalitions be built
that challenge not only the industry per se, but also the form of urban development it promotes.

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