The Case of Cooperstown, New York: The Makings of a Perfect Village in an Urbanising World

by Gregory Fulkerson and Elizabeth Seale
State University of New York

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Abstract

In this paper we examine the question of how rural communities adapt to global processes of urbanisation and economic restructuring. We do this through a visual and historical case study analysis of Cooperstown, New York. This location is selected because it is a self-proclaimed 'perfect village' and by many counts a successful tourist destination. The impact on this community is examined using theoretical concepts that include urban normativity, rural representations, rural simulacra, and the community capitals framework. We conclude that rural communities may risk sacrificing local qualities in order to appeal to externally imposed urban expectations for a rural experience.

Keywords: *Rural, Simulacra, Representations, Community Capital, Cooperstown, New York, Urbanisation*

Introduction

1.1 Until recently, human history could be characterized as rural, since the majority of people on earth lived and worked in a rural place. In 2008, the world urban population edged past the rural by a margin that will continue to widen for the foreseeable future (Wimberley, Morris, and Fulkerson 2007). By 2050, the world urban population is expected to reach 70 per cent (Population Reference Bureau 2002). This is significant as it is accompanied by a series of major social changes sweeping across the planet, transforming the economic, political, cultural, social, and demographic organisation of communities the world over (Portes 1976; Tilly 1974, 1978). Modes of production that once defined rural life?predominantly in the primary and secondary sectors? have been supplanted by tertiary or service sector jobs. Farming and other extractive occupations have been altered through technological innovation and vertical integration (Hendrickson et al. 2001), while restructuring, outsourcing, offshoring, and automation have transformed the secondary sector. These conditions are embedded in a highly competitive global economy that favours large corporate organisations over small locally owned businesses and farms that have traditionally formed the foundation of rural communities. In response many rural residents have abandoned the countryside seeking opportunity in or near urban areas. Others have been striving to find a new ways to support their communities. To a large extent, this has translated into embracing the service sector economy as a means for attracting money through tourism and residential settlement. Thomas (2003:6) notes these different strategies:

Communities near metropolitan areas have been found to try to attract urban corporations by marketing both their rural character and urban proximity (Aronoff 1997). Others have responded by attempting to attract urban tourists, often with varying degrees of success (Matsouka and Benson 1996).

1.2 The results of these efforts have been mixed. While some rural communities have been able to successfully transition in the face of significant obstacles, others have languished. Even where the transition is successful it may come with high costs. The process exacerbates the level of symbolic domination that urbanites exercise over rural communities. In essence, real places are transformed into virtual theme parks.

1.3 We attempt to inductively understand these processes by starting at the ground level through a case study of Cooperstown, New York?a community that has succeeded in attracting tourists, thus giving new life to its local economy. We offer an historical and visual analysis of Cooperstown, known widely as home to the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and also as the location of Glimmerglass (Otsego) lake, made famous by early American novelist, James Fenimore Cooper. Because Cooperstown has the slogan and reputation of being 'America's Most Perfect Village,' we view it as a prime case to explore the experience of a community responding to global restructuring through the framework of the 'community capitals' (Flora and Flora 2008) and the use of critical theoretical concepts introduced by Thomas, Fulkerson, Smith, and Lowe (2011) dealing with the symbolic domination of rural communities.

1.4 We claim that Cooperstown succeeded at least partly by capitalizing on popular notions of idyllic rural towns as they are found in rural representations. We attempt to support this with visual rather than conventional textual or numerical data. Our goal is to provide the reader access to rural representations as they manifest in Cooperstown's built environment? a phenomenon that Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, and Smith (2011) term 'rural simulacra.' We interpret the presence of rural simulacra as a form of urban domination supported by an undercurrent of urban normativity (Thomas et al. 2011). This is a symbolic form of subjugation that rural areas experience as they align themselves with the expectations and tastes of urban visitors. Before considering this special case further, we explore in more depth our general theoretical concepts.

Community Capitals and Rural Competitive Advantage

2.1 To understand the challenges and promises different rural communities experience as they attempt to transition into a service economy we consider the 'community capitals' framework (Flora and Flora 2008). Flora and Flora contend that the strengths of communities may be measured by taking stock of its social capital, cultural capital, built capital, financial capital, political capital, and natural capital. The term capital is used to refer to the value embedded in these different dimensions of community. Social capital provides individuals with value by giving them access to resources embedded in their social networks. Private banks and foundations provide important financial capital needed to invest in the local economy. Built capital refers to all aspects of physical community infrastructure that support life in the community, including roads and phone lines. Political capital refers to the level of political pluralism that exists, or how widely political power is shared. Natural capital refers to the value gained from natural resources and amenities. Cultural capital refers to the beliefs, values, and norms that underpin and support the functioning of the community. Overall, Flora and Flora suggest that successful communities will identify and make use of those 'capitals' with which they are most advantaged, while overcoming deficits in other areas.

2.2 Perhaps the greatest competitive advantage rural communities enjoy is natural capital in the form of amenities such as pristine lakes and beautiful landscapes that appeal to urbanites seeking retreat. Natural capital in rural areas also includes resources such as timber, minerals, and agricultural goods that can be converted to financial capital. Another advantage that many rural communities enjoy derives from the cultural preferences many urbanites have for rural life. Urbanites tend to romanticise and idealise rurality based on their own representations of what it entails, even as representations may have little basis in reality. Nonetheless rural representations create an attraction and desire to visit or move to rural communities. In so far as rural communities can obtain value from these cultural preferences for rural community life, they are a form of capital.

2.3 As communities plan ways to develop, they may wish to invest in the various community capitals. Policies may be enacted that preserve and maintain the natural beauty of the community, for instance. Rural communities may capitalise on urban cultural desires for rural life by marketing and selling different goods and services. This requires an understanding of rural representations (more discussion on this later) as well as an ability and desire to enhance and highlight those qualities that are most appealing. This staging and simulation of idealised rural life in a real rural community can create tension and problems. If successful, the community becomes wholly or partly appropriated by urban tastes. In other words, the line between authentic and simulated-hyperreal (Baudrillard 1983; 1994) community is blurred.

Popular Culture and Rural Representations

3.1 What is it exactly that makes rural areas so alluring to urbanites? In order to grasp the ideals and images that inform what many might consider to be qualities of the perfect village, we begin by surveying past studies of popular culture and rural life, and the way these take shape as social representations. Moscovici (1984) offers the theoretical basis for social representations, arguing that they provide a way for people to construct meaning out of a complex reality. A representation is an imperfect model of the way things 'really are' because the true reality is too complex to fully grasp. The representation results from a combination of personal experience as well as exposure to different forms of media. In turn, analysis of popular media is crucial to understanding any kind of social representations. For our purposes, we are interested in how people come to construct their social representations of rural life.

3.2 Raymond Williams (1973) pioneered the effort to explore cultural themes of the rural through an impressive review of literary works that date back to ancient Greece, continue through the period of feudalism, and on through the rapid transformation of the countryside under modern capitalism. Among his many rich observations, Williams notes that the view of rural as a place of settlement was replaced by a view of the rural as a place of retreat. He also notes that the general view of nature transformed under capitalist development from the 'green language' of unspoilt nature to the 'morality of improvement' and admiration for the pastoral cultivated countryside.

3.3 Other features of the 'rural idyll' (Short 1991) have been noted by various scholars, albeit with some contestation. Short (1991) identifies the themes of rural being 'less hurried,' where social relations are part of an 'organic community,' and where people can find 'refuge' from modernity. Halfacree (1995) distinguishes between academic and popular rural representations, and attempts to identify popular themes through interviews with residents of six rural parishes of England. Among the emergent themes he identifies are relaxation, tradition, health, safety, natural, community, simplicity, and high status. Of course, agreement with these qualities varies substantially, with a significant percentage of residents identifying rural areas as low in status, complex, lacking community, and being unsafe. Halfacree (1995: 19) cautions: 'we must not overestimate the extent to which residents of rural England are naïve advocates of a mythical rural world.' In other words, while elements of the 'rural idyll' emerged from the interview and questionnaire based research, residents were mostly aware of the limits to these ideals and their basis in reality.

3.4 In a study conducted in the Netherlands, Haartsen, Groote, and Huigen (2003) note the practical importance of understanding rural representations as relevant to the competition for rural space and the development of rural policies. They suggest that it is important to pay attention to how representations vary for different segments of society, and to note who has the most power in defining the way we think about rural. Their study focuses specifically on age differences, noting for instance that younger people are more likely to think of rural areas in recreational terms and to believe that rural areas are

homogeneously agricultural. However, younger individuals have less power, and in turn, it is less likely that rural policy will reflect recreational themes. Rural representations are used to market a tourist town by highlighting desirable themes and ignoring existing problems like rural poverty:

In some areas, tourism entrepreneurs deliberately create nostalgic and traditional representations of the rural for commercial purposes. As a result, tourists expect these areas to correspond to the images from the leaflets. In this way such commercialized representations are imposed on the local population (Brouwer 1997 and Kneafsey 1998; both cited in Haartsen et al. 2003:247).

3.5 Generally, the dominant representations will exert the most influence on local politics and community development, while ignoring alternative representation held by the rural 'other' in the process (Milbourne 1997). Milbourne's (1997) edited work squarely addresses the issue of traditional powerful rural interests dominating rural representations and narratives, thereby directing rural policy.

3.6 In a related discussion of rural representations, Willits and Luloff (1995) offer a study based on survey research to conclude that urbanites support traditional rural economic development strategies because they have positive feelings about pastoral agriculture and therefore wish to preserve it. This may be a reflection of the power of agricultural interest groups in shaping rural representation in the United States.

3.7 A recent study by Thomas et al. (2011) offers an analysis of mainstream television and films that identifies three overarching themes: rural as wild, rural as escape, and rural as simple. The notion of rural as wild refers to the belief that rural areas are untamed, unpredictable, and close to nature. The idea of rural as escape refers to the qualities of having no rules or schedules to follow, and of generally living an unstructured and unmonitored existence. Finally, rural as simple refers to the notion that rural people live simple lives based on simple occupations (i.e., requiring little education or training) and hold simple values related to being active and engaging in hard work. The themes identified in this study have some obvious connections to those discussed earlier in the European context, suggesting that rural representations may be part of a broader 'western' cultural world rather than of a particular national culture, though it is likely there are important national, regional, and even local nuances.

3.8 The implied urban cultural themes that can be inferred from this research include sets of polar opposites reminiscent of the typologies provided by Tönnies (1957 [1887]). Overall, urban is imagined as a combination of control, complexity, order, integration, structure, and regulation; rural is imagined to be unpredictable, simplistic, disorganised, wild, and spontaneous. Each of these terms has both positive and negative connotations. We should note that while it is useful to analytically separate urban and urban cultural themes and representations into diametrically opposed categories, in reality we are likely to find elements of each at the same time and in the same place. This was also argued by Tönnies (1957 [1887]), when he proposed that *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* were qualities that coexisted simultaneously in different proportions, and rarely in pure form. It is therefore important to avoid thinking about urban and rural reality in either-or terms, and thus falling into the trap of the rural-urban continuum that has been heavily critiqued (Miner 1952; Dewey 1960). Instead, it may be more fruitful to examine the unique combinations of rural and urban qualities that develop under specific historical conditions. In this case, we note how urban elements are paradoxically incorporated *in the name of the rural* to create a more desirable environment for urbanites which does not reflect the lived experiences of town and rural residents.

Urbanormativity and Rural Simulacra

4.1 Aside from western urbanites holding generally positive rural representations and widespread admiration for features of rural life, there is also an accompanying undercurrent of urbanormativity (Thomas et al. 2011). This refers to the idea that while rural areas may have desirable qualities, it is urban life that is normal, desirable, and inevitable. Retreat to the rural may even be viewed as an 'escape from reality', implying that urban life is reality and rural life is hyperreal. Viewing the rural as a form of escape or refuge reinforces beliefs about the permanence and centrality of urbanism, since rural life is relegated to something only to be temporarily experienced as a reprieve. In fact the very themes that make rural life desirable also make it scary and foreboding. The theme of rural as wild has the pleasant connotation of green fields and natural beauty, but it also has a negative element of danger and vulnerability that comes with harsh weather conditions or dangerous wildlife. Similarly, rural as simple has elements of charm, as is the case with admiration for hardworking farmers, but is also the foundation for the belief that rural people are 'backwards' or generally uneducated.

4.2 We theorise that rural representations combine with urbanormativity to create the phenomena of rural simulacra. Baudrillard (1994:1) defines a simulacrum in the following way: 'The simulacra are effectively copies without an original, which may appear in multiple venues while remaining irreducible to one location.' A rural simulacrum is any simulation of rural life informed by rural representations?thus they are not based on a true rural reality, but on ideas about that reality. The uniqueness of the history, culture, and social organisation of specific rural communities is hidden under a generic and familiar surface. Entire rural communities can act as simulations of rural community life, highlighting desirable features and hiding others (e.g., low income housing) in order to make the community a better match to rural representations held by urban visitors.

4.3 To illustrate this point, consider what many North American urbanites feel is the ideal country home? the traditional log cabin. Authentic log cabins, like the one in which Abraham Lincoln was raised, offer little in the way of protection from the elements. They typically have some form of thatch roof that leaks, giant gaps that allow insects and cold air to penetrate through the walls, and a floor made of dirt or rough wood. While the log cabin is iconic of rustic charm, the reality of staying in them may not actually be desirable to most urbanites. As a result, there is now a large market for modern homes that have the exterior appearance of a log cabin with all of its idyllic charm, but appointed with all the amenities of the most luxurious homes on the market (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Modern Log Cabin
Source: <http://www.salelathome.com/log-cabin-homes/>

4.4 This well-built, expensive, and impressive structure has little to do with logs and is much more than a cabin. It is in fact a simulation of a log cabin, with a familiar and charming exterior placed on top of an interior that more closely approximates a modern urban home. Thus, the modern log cabin is a prime example of a rural simulacrum.

4.5 In turn, while it is the case that urbanites wish to experience rural simplicity and wilderness as a form of escape, they wish to do so in a heavily mediated way?through rural simulacra. The most desirable rural experience for urbanites will contain elements of rural representation, but only on a superficial level. They must also contain urban elements and comforts. Therefore, in return to our question about what makes the perfect village, it would evidently involve draping a charming rural exterior over an orderly urban interior, expressing the latent sense of urban normativity. The outer appearance of simplicity, wilderness, and escape would be, in fact, a mere simulation; underlying this façade would be an extensive foundation of rules and regulations that adhere to urban normative standards.

Method of Investigation: A visual and historical analysis

5.1 Empirical approaches to the study of rural simulacra can take different forms. We believe that a visual analysis of a rural community's central business district (CBD) and other important locations can yield insights into the extent to which these phenomena are present. Qualitative approaches in sociology are typically based on textual description, but we believe that even the best textual description will fail to capture the visible meaning and symbolism of objectified rural representations or rural simulacra. In many respects, our approach draws from classic studies in the Chicago school tradition (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925) that examined through visual methods the spatial layout of the city and its central business district. Our central concern is with the visual rural façade of urban objects, institutions, and people in small town central business districts. We are therefore interested in visual culture, which Chris Jenks (1996:16, quoted in Rusted 1997) defines as 'all those items of culture whose visual appearance is an important feature of their being or their purpose.' Referring to our earlier example of the modern log cabin, the visual appearances convey information that supersedes textual description. In many respects, sociology is unique in that it has not adopted visual methods to the degree of natural science or other social sciences such as anthropology (Harper 1998; Jenks 1995; Prosser 1998).

5.2 Generally, our focus will be on specific objects and activities that might be considered rural simulacra. Stereotypical rural images of the General Store, horse drawn carriages, and swinging bar doors in the American western style, for instance, often come to mind for many Americans as indicated by the proliferation of these images in rural representations of the mass media. Any attempt to include such items in a controlled and purposive manner will be considered a rural simulacrum. Of primary importance will be objects related to the themes identified earlier of rural as wild, as simple, and as escape.

5.3 We of course realise that identifying rural simulacra will require a high level of subjective judgment, and that listing objective criteria would be difficult. In many respects, we will have to argue that we cannot know what it is until we see it. Because we are taking a visual approach of photographing objects, buildings, and other activities, at least the data can be scrutinised and our interpretations are thus open to critique. We also realise that it is highly selective methodology in terms of what we choose to capture

visually and what we choose to ignore. This, however, is no different from the majority of research. We are able to make rigorous connections between what we see and the historical circumstances of the town. Our efforts are less a matter of pitching 'authentic' examples against nonauthentic examples, and more about examining the presence of nonauthentic examples and linking them to historical developments in Cooperstown's history.

5.4 Emmison and Smith (2000:55) suggest that we need to move 'beyond the image in general, and the photograph in particular ? [so that] visual research can become a powerful and theoretically driven domain of social and cultural inquiry.' We believe with the concepts we have introduced and the method we employ at least attempt to approach this ideal. In fact Emmison and Smith (2000) are among the only scholars to explicitly discuss an empirical visual approach to the built environment. They suggest that the key is to decode places by finding out what 'cultural systems are encoded into built fabric' (2000:153). For instance, they point to the literature on the study of suburban shopping malls, and the way that these simulate the Main Streets they have come to replace. Our research will likely have some commonalities with this Mall based body of literature.

Selection of Case Study

5.5 The case of Cooperstown is in many respects atypical. It is a rural and somewhat isolated community ?it's about ten miles off the nearest interstate highway?and yet has a very large stream of visitors? exceeding 400,000 annually?that come mainly in the summer months. It has a history of tourism that dates back well over a century although the model of tourism has changed remarkably over the years from attracting the affluent to luxurious resorts to attracting the middle class to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. In efforts to maintain a tourist economy that has threatened to falter since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the community has striven to be as desirable as possible, living up to its self-proclaimed status as the 'Perfect Village.' In many respects the level of mediation that goes into maintaining this image is so great that we felt it would lend itself well to an application of the concepts discussed earlier using visual methods to identify instances of rural simulacra and symbolic domination.

5.6 Cooperstown was historically like many rural communities where the vast majority of residents lived rather banal lives working in the primary sector, mainly in agriculture and especially dairy farming. Tourism was a niche business, and the beneficiaries and spearheads of it were the town's elite residents who invested a great deal of financial capital into tourism throughout the town's history. Tourism investment continues through the present via such sources as the Clark Foundation?created by the Clark family who owned the Singer Sewing Company that was extremely successful and made the family independently wealthy. The town is also home to one of the Busch family vacation homes (of the Anheuser ?Busch Company). Thus, while on many counts Cooperstown was typical in terms of being home to rather average rural families it was atypical in the size and influence of its economic elite and thus availability of local financial capital. The presence of these economic elites has likewise entailed control of the town's politics, creating conditions of low political capital. With power concentrated so heavily in the hands of elites, the town is able to exercise a level of control and mediation that surpasses the level found in most rural towns.

5.7 Initially, tourism in Cooperstown was based around Otsego Lake, poetically referred to as Glimmerglass, and took advantage of the area's rich natural capital. The resorts of the community all overlook the lake and offer outdoor recreational activities such as golf and boating. The cultural capital of the town has also been advantaged by the literary publicity of James Fenimore Cooper. Built capital advantages have always been present in the form of transportation routes. Initially, the Susquehanna River (for which Otsego Lake is the source) provided water access by boat. Later, the town became accessible via rail and trolley car. Now, most visitors arrive by private vehicle or bus on roads following the same lanes once taken by the now defunct trolley system that travels alongside the Susquehanna River.

5.8 In summary, the unique configuration of community capitals, resulting from a particular set of historical circumstances?that are detailed more deeply below?makes it the ideal setting to explore ideas of rural representations and simulacra.

Case Study: Cooperstown, New York

6.1 Thomas (2003) provides one of the only detailed historical narratives of the village of Cooperstown, NY and we take this as our primary source. He states Cooperstown was founded by William Cooper, who was a businessman with the ambition of driving up property values and building up a city greater in size than Utica, New York by attracting urban elites. This was ambitious because at the time Utica enjoyed a superior geographic advantage due to its location along the Erie Canal, which it used to build up an industrial base around textile mills. By 1920, Utica was able to lay claim to two of America's largest mills and was one of the largest metro areas in the country.

6.2 William Cooper believed that by attracting wealthy urban elites to Cooperstown it would receive the investment it needed to develop into a major city. In many respects, his strategy succeeded as urban elites were attracted to the area, and drove up property values as planned. However, the village never developed into the large city that Cooper envisioned, and certainly never surpassed Utica in size. Cooperstown did create a mill, became the county seat, and developed a commercial district that served the local population. Geographically, it gained centrality in the 1870s when a rail line was extended from the Albany and Susquehanna railroads. By 1905 a trolley connected Cooperstown to neighbouring communities of Oneonta, Hartwick, and Mohawk, and ran until the 1940s.

6.3 Though Cooperstown never evolved into a large city, it did succeed in becoming a bellwether for rural community development strategies. James Fenimore Cooper wrote extensively about Glimmerglass (Otsego Lake) in his classic *Leatherstocking Tales*. Due to the publicity Cooperstown received from this, it became a popular destination for urban elites as tourists and seasonal residents seeking refuge from New York City. In fact, because of the slow nature of rail transportation, early tourists would often stay in Cooperstown for months at a time, making them more like seasonal residents than contemporary tourists. In many respects the tradition of seasonal residency has been maintained through the present.

6.4 By the early 1900s there were successful resorts in operation, such as the Otesaga and Cooper Inn

that both continue to operate to this day. Resorts successfully brought in elite urban tourists, but the impact on the central business district was minimal. The resorts insulated the urban elite from the rest of the town, and so the business district existed primarily for the local residents, and had the character of typical rural communities of the time, such as neighbouring Hartwick. After World War I, tourism began to wane in Cooperstown, as downstate residents began to vacation closer to home. In the 1930s, following a difficult period in the Great Depression, the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA) made Cooperstown its home, opening the Farmer's Museum, the Fenimore House Art Museum, and, most importantly, the Baseball Hall of Fame.

6.5 Thomas (2003) notes that at this juncture, Cooperstown began to develop around two identities, one that would maintain the flow of urban elites seeking escape and enjoyment around Glimmerglass resorts and a new one that sought to attract middle class urban tourists seeking to pay homage to America's favourite pastime. During the 1950s the business district of Cooperstown supplied most of the needs of the community, even attracting shoppers from other villages. In a few decades, the character of the downtown was radically transformed from a fairly typical rural business district serving the needs of local residents into a specialty district of baseball stores and restaurants.

6.6 As the satellite imagery in Figure 2 shows, the community of Cooperstown is literally built around Glimmerglass (Otsego Lake) to the Northeast, and baseball as the diamond from Doubleday Field?the alleged birthplace of baseball (not actually accurate)?appears in the centre of the village. The main roads, Chestnut and Main Street, cut directly between these icons of the Cooperstown community, symbolically pulled between two pillars of the community's twin identities.

Figure 2. Satellite Image of Cooperstown, NY
Source: Google Earth

6.7 Examination of Census statistics (Table 1) reveals that while the average income is slightly higher than the national averages, the individual poverty rate increased to from 12.4 in 2000, to 19.3 percent in 2010, outpacing the national average by a significant margin. This suggests that while there are affluent residents, there are also a number of people in the village struggling to make it, particularly in the recent period economic recession in the United States. These contradictory statistics indicate a fair amount of economic inequality in the village of Cooperstown. This is partly the outcome of elites making Cooperstown their seasonal home, living alongside residents trying to make a living on seasonal tourist trade wages. It also indicates the presence of a larger economically depressed elderly population.

Characteristic	Cooperstown 2000	United States 2000	Cooperstown 2005-9	United States 2010
Median Age	44.7	35.3	42.3	36.5
% 65 and Older	26.9	12.4	18	12.6
% White	96.2	75.1	94.5	74.5
% Female	55.1	50.9	55.4	50.7
% in Labour Force	65.9	63.9	60.6	65
% <u>Indiv</u> Poverty	10.2	12.4	19.3	13.5
Median <u>Fam</u> Income	50,250	50,046	67,768	62,363
Avg. <u>Fam</u> Size	2.83	3.14	2.64	3.19
% Owner- <u>Occ</u> Housing	53.5	66.2	47.9	66.9

Table 1. U.S. Census Statistics for Cooperstown, New York, 2000 and 2005-9

6.8 The notion of Cooperstown's twin identities is reinforced by the impression that one receives upon entering the village and seeing the welcome sign (Figure 3), which reads, 'Home of Baseball & Village of Museums' on the top and on the bottom, 'The Glimmerglass Historic District.' In fact, as discussed earlier, the history of Cooperstown is based on its being a tourist destination for wealthy urbanites from down state seeking refuge from city life. As mentioned, the community received visibility from the novels written by James Fenimore Cooper. One could not ask for a better travel brochure in an era that predates the modern service economy by nearly two centuries. In fact its early history positioned Cooperstown in a strategic way for future success in a rather competitive tourism economy. If it did not already have a history of attracting tourism, it may not have been as successful.

Figure 3. Welcome Sign
Source: Author

6.9 The historic appeal of Cooperstown to elite urban tastes explains the unlikely presence of an Opera House (Figure 4) situated in this rather remote rural community of less than 2,500 residents (Thomas 2003). Moreover, it explains why there are resorts that date back over a century, as shown in Figures 5 and 6, which show the Otesaga and Cooper's Inn respectively. What is more difficult to surmise from the photos is the location of these facilities. They are both set apart from the village central business district. The opera house is miles away and located along the western shore of the lake, while the resorts are on the outskirts of the village and difficult to reach by foot. This pattern is consistent with the historical insulation of the elite from the local residents.

Figure 4. The Glimmerglass Opera House
Source: <http://www.fgo.org/artists/yas-glimmerglass.shtml>

6.10 When the Great Depression hit the Cooperstown community in the 1930s, the influx of downstate urban elites, who had previously stayed for lengthy periods of time, began to slow dramatically. This was exacerbated by the opening of new and competing tourist destinations elsewhere, such as 'The Hamptons' on Long Island and the competing tourist-based community of Saratoga Springs that enjoyed a closer proximity to the New York City metro area (Thomas 2003). It was this economic downturn that led to the introduction of three new museums as a way to revitalise Cooperstown's sagging tourist economy (Thomas 2003). In the 1930s, the Fenimore Art museum, Farmer's museum, and Baseball Hall of Fame opened their doors.

Figure 5 The Otesaga Resort
Source: Author

Figure 6. The Cooper Inn
Source: Author

6.11 The art museum (Figure 7), like the opera house, is a clear symbol of eclectic urban tastes, features rotating exhibits that include well-known artists. The appeal to elites is reinforced by the grand appearance of the museum that owes much of its existence to the wealthy Clark family whose foundation contributes greatly to all three museums. Being named after James Fenimore Cooper underscores its link to the Glimmerglass identity of Cooperstown.

Figure 7. The Fenimore Art Museum
Source: <http://www.travelpod.com>

6.12 The Farmer's Museum (Figure 8 and 9) is a full scale re-creation of an 18-19th century agricultural village, with authentic buildings brought in from around the state of New York. The individuals working at the Farmer's Museum are always in character, clothed in 19th century garb. Unlike the art museum, it does not have an obvious appeal to elites, but on closer investigation this is exactly who it was meant to serve. Located in close proximity to the resorts, across the street from the art museum and golf course, the Farmer's museum presents itself as a rural simulacrum on a grand scale offering elite tourists the chance to experience all the charm of an authentic rural village without having to enter an actual rural village business district and encounter local residents. The experience of this neat and tidy simulated rural village, as one might suspect, is somewhat authentic but in a heavily controlled way.

Figure 8. Farmer's Museum Sign
Source: Author

Figure 9. Inside the Farmer's Museum
Source: Author

6.13 Clearly the most successful of the three museums introduced in the Depression era was the Baseball Hall of Fame (Figure 10). The national attention that it garnered played a major role in transforming the identity of Cooperstown and salvaging the tourism industry. However, it attracted a new kind of tourist? typically of a middle or working class background, though also primarily urban. Since the location of the Hall was downtown, it shifted the centre of the tourist economy from the resorts on the fringe to the heart of the community. The unassuming façade of the Hall of Fame blends seamlessly into the streetscape, symbolising the humble stature of those it serves as opposed to the more formidable Opera House and resort buildings. The spatial distance between of the museums allows for a neat separation of tourists by social class standing, though the line has been growing increasingly obscure over time.

Figure 10. National Baseball Hall of Fame
Source: Author

6.14 The opening of the Hall of Fame had the effect of redefining the downtown area as a tourist space. In turn, it altered the composition of storefronts in order to appeal to the new (mainly baseball) tourists rather than to the general needs of the local residents or to the elite resort tourists residing in the distance (Thomas 2003). Instead of finding functional downtown stores (e.g., hardware, grocery), visitors will observe streets lined with baseball themed specialty stores (Figures 11 and 12), attractions such as a wax museum (Figure 13), and baseball themed restaurants (Figure 14). Their presence makes it plain to see that baseball has become the primary 'brand' of downtown Cooperstown.

Figure 11. Mickey's Place, Baseball Store
Source: Author

Figure 12. Shoeless Joes, Baseball Store
Source: Author

Figure 13. Heroes of Baseball Wax Museum Source:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/33209017@N00/3656056926>

Figure 14. Triple Play Café, Baseball Themed Restaurant

Figure 14. Triple Play Café, Baseball Themed Restaurant Source: Author

6.15 As the central business district has been redefined as tourist space, it has in some respects been taken away from the local residents, who must now travel several miles to buy groceries or other household products. The herds of tourists clogging the roads and sidewalks make the town difficult to navigate for local residents engaging in such mundane activities as going to the post office or bank. Informal discussions with many of the permanent residents in Cooperstown reveal a fair amount of resentment over these inconveniences. Every summer the business district is literally overtaken by tourists.

6.16 Apart from the frustrations of negotiating the mass of tourists, locals admit benefits as well since these visitors present economic opportunities in retail that support small businesses, such as the specialty shops shown above. The transformation of the business district into a tourist zone has been accompanied by attempts to draw in the elite Glimmerglass tourists, who offer more potential financial capital on average. Businesses such as the Sten Haven Art Gallery (Figure 15) reflect an attempt to appeal to the artistic tastes of elites. However, the humble exterior of this store makes it more appealing to the Baseball tourist. Indeed, one can find Baseball art in stores such as these. Other attempts to appeal to elite tastes have been more successful, as is the case with the Studio 52 Gallery, with its chic exterior (Figure 16).

Figure 15. Sten Haven Art Gallery (Downtown)
Source: Author

Figure 16. Studio 52 Art Gallery (Downtown)
Source: Author

6.17 Perhaps most interesting is the growing use of rural simulacra to appeal to the desire for rural charm held by urban visitors?middle and upper class. As a result, one can find a 'General Store' (Figure 17) downtown that is a symbolic icon of rural villages. In fact, it is a specialty shop full of goods such as post cards that appeal to tourists, rather than a general store with wares appealing to the general needs of local residents. Other rural simulacra can be found in stores that more obviously commercialise rural charm, as is the case in the Country Crafts store (Figure 18). Ironically, as rural simulacra come to dominate the business district of Cooperstown, the village itself comes to resemble the purposeful simulation of rural life that is the Farmer's Museum. As this trajectory unfolds observers bear witness to the transformation of a real rural village into one big simulation that is spun by the expectation created by rural representations.

Figure 17. The General Store
Source: Author

Figure 18. Country Crafts Store
Source: Author

Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 When William Cooper founded Cooperstown his ambition was to attract elite urbanites that he envisioned would build the community into a great city. What Cooper did not foresee was the desire on the part of those urbanites to preserve the perceived rural charm of the community. Though many urban elites relocated or visited for long periods of time, they wished to escape into the retreat of Glimmerglass. The natural capital drew them in, and the cultural capital secured the community's future as a destination that would maintain rural qualities—a factor that would prevent rapid growth of Cooperstown into a commercial city.

7.2 The presence of economically advantaged families always provided Cooperstown with a foundation of local financial capital that could be invested into the town's development. The resorts and the opera house required significant investment. Later, the three museums—the Fenimore Art Museum, the Farmer's Museum, and the Baseball Hall of Fame—would require substantial investment. Through the ups and downs of the larger economy, Cooperstown's resiliency is due in large measure to the initiatives of the economic elite.

7.3 Meanwhile, the community is populated by families of rather humble means, if we consider Census data for the village. Thomas (2003) suggests that this has always been the case, and people living in this community would have resembled any upstate New York village dominated by farming and small business ownership. For much of its history, the elite-driven tourist economy existed on the fringe of town and had little impact on the average family. It was only when the Hall of Fame came to the central business district that tourism was integrated with the economic survival of the community. Small businesses and related employment emerged that were contingent on tourist dollars and this has become the dominant economy for the village.

7.4 The history of elite dominance in Cooperstown created a rather lopsided political structure, leaving the majority of the community with little political capital. Though not explored in great depth here, the ordinances and regulations in Cooperstown are generally known to be quite restrictive. Chain stores and restaurants are not allowed to exist in the village limits, with the exception of a retail chain drug store that managed a spot on Main Street. The condition of homes in the community must be maintained at a very high level or else homeowners face penalties. The result preserves a very clean and neat appearance of residential areas in the community, adding to the charm of the community. It is this level of control that makes Cooperstown feel more like a theme park than a real village. It also maintains the high property values that were sought from the founding of the community, making it restrictive to those with less income. The majority of the retail workers therefore do not reside near their workplace as it is too expensive.

7.5 This visual and historical overview of Cooperstown sheds light on what it takes to become a successful tourist destination, what the impacts of this can be, and what additional implications we might expect from various forms of global urbanisation. Unfortunately in terms of transplanting the findings to inform community development practice in other settings, the story of success we see in Cooperstown is filled with historically unique events and factors that would be difficult to recreate. Few communities of this size can claim such a long and prosperous record of tourism, or a long tradition of attracting wealthy families. The Catskill Mountain region south of Cooperstown was home to some rather vibrant tourist destinations, such as Fleischmanns, New York. However, these communities were not able to sustain themselves through the economic ebbs and flows of the 20th century and most went out of business.

during the Great Depression. In these places one can find the ruins and remnants of a dead tourism economy. The reason Cooperstown survived was the introduction of the Baseball Hall of Fame that grew to be a Mecca for devout baseball fans all around the United States. It's hard to imagine that the success of the Hall of Fame did not far surpass the expectations of its creators in the New York State Historical Association. Other attempts have been made to emulate this but with far less success, including the Long Distance Runner Hall of Fame in Utica, the defunct Soccer Hall of Fame in Oneonta, New York, or the National Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York.

7.6 Though paling in comparison, the Fenimore Art Museum and Farmer's Museum are also quite successful, and benefit from the tourists already coming for the lake or the Hall of Fame. In other words, they are not the reason for going to Cooperstown for distant travellers but make for nice distractions whilst in town. Similarly the shops and restaurants in Cooperstown benefit from the stream of travellers flowing through town. Their success is linked to the pleasure and enjoyment of the predominantly urban visitors to the community. In turn, they evolve to match what these visitors expect from a small quaint rural community. This means that the general character of Cooperstown is being shaped by the images and ideas of rural representations that find form as rural simulacra. In some sense, baseball is itself a symbol of rural Americana and the existence of this identity and the way it is expressed can therefore be viewed as one instance. The visual account of the community provides several similar examples.

7.7 If we step back and think about what these changes mean for Cooperstown, we can note that it is essentially appropriating the town to imposing outside interests. It is also allowing urban normative standards to dictate local development and politics. The heavy volume of visitors, while an economic boon, is also a daily disruption for local residents. The increased traffic and the general treatment of the community as a theme park by tourists have led to resentment among locals. These resentments are further enhanced as community members watch their town lose its historical character in place of baseball themed establishments and a range of other rural simulacra.

7.8 We conclude by asking the question: in what ways are other small communities following this path of offering rural simulacra to be consumed by urban tourists, allowing the character of the town to be transformed and externally appropriated? Is this a phenomenon that is unique to rural communities or can we find parallel processes in urban settings? Since we are exploring the possibility of a visual approach to supplement other analyses, future research could follow up on this approach by examining other rural cases, combining various types of data, and even developing studies of urban simulations. Although the nature and ostensible purpose of the built environments are different, urban communities or subcommunities may vie for tourists by capitalising on various representations. We have shown through visual data how Cooperstown is using these elements organised around two identities, and suggest that this signifies implications for rural tourist-based development, including natural amenity-development and the changing of public places to appeal to urban tastes rather than local needs. It may be wise to heed the cautions offered by Krannich and Petrzalka (2003), who claim that amenity-based development can lead to the erosion or alteration of community identities and traditions, the imposition of a phony folk culture, and contribute a host of negative impacts due to the influx of visitors on the local space and environment. To a large extent these outcomes are visible in Cooperstown, though the town continues to be a robust tourist destination. This poses a concern if the livelihood strategies for communities under globalisation entail the creation of a built environment that caters to outsiders (who contribute mostly sales tax and have little incentive to invest in the town's social development) rather than those who live there full time.

Notes

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