‘WE’RE COASTERS, WHY SHOULD WE MOVE?’: COMMUNITY IDENTITY, PLACE ATTACHMENT AND FORESTRY CLOSURE IN RURAL NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

The Social Impact Assessment literature covering the assessment of actual effects of projects, programmes and polices is now sufficiently large to allow the drawing of quite specific conclusions on many general problems. In endeavoring to understand the counter-intuitive nature of the findings of a study on industry closure in south Westland, New Zealand, this paper engages the concepts of ‘sense of place’ and ‘attachment to place’ to argue why two small West Coast communities did not suffer major population loss and subsequent community decline in response to the loss of their core (and iconic) timber industry. We ask, ‘what was it about these two communities that enabled them to avoid predictable community decline, when the generalized SIA literature would have indicated otherwise?’ Drawing on local narratives accessed through extensive fieldwork interviews we argue that the resilience of these communities lies in the embedding of identity in place rather than in occupation. It is this recognition that gives the findings an integrity and robustness they would otherwise lack.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2002, the era of logging in Westland’s Crown-owned indigenous forests came to an end. When the communities who were largely dependent on these forests were asked about their future following the loss of the iconic and core forestry industry, locals were quick to respond. It was not toward other forestry jobs and opportunities elsewhere that the local people suggested they would turn to sustain themselves and their livelihoods. For the people of these two communities the response was straightforward:

> We are not prepared to sit here and take these things lying down…

> we have been denied the opportunity to utilize our resources, to exist here. But we can be multifaceted, pick up jobs milking, and truck driving, work in the sphagnum moss factory. After all we are Coasters… why should we move?

Responses such as this lead us to ask what was different about the people in these communities that produced an atypical response in light of the generalized SIA literature. What was it about this place that meant people stayed?

CONTEXT

The indigenous timber industry in the Westland district of New Zealand's South Island had contributed to the local economy through most of the last century. In April 2002, the era of logging in Westland's Crown-owned indigenous forests came to an end, as the two largest indigenous timber production forests, North Okarito and Saltwater, were shifted to conservation management. For the rural resource communities of Whataroa and Harihari, situated adjacent to these two forests, the departure of this industry constituted a significant shift in the core economic and social activity which had previously revolved around timber felling, milling and processing. The manner in which these communities negotiated this industry loss was atypical of responses observed in other rural resource communities faced with similar core industry loss. A predicted rapid decline in population was not observed. This paper argues that the absence of rapid out-migration can be attributed to attachment to place, over attachment to occupation.

While we support the thesis that rural New Zealand identities, irrespective of locale, are generally informed by 'sense of place',[1] we identify that the particular style of 'place-making' in these two Westland communities at once overlaps *and* departs significantly from those reported on in the wider literature on rural New Zealand Pakeha communities. The way the Westland landscape is socially constructed and informed by a distinct set of historical and contemporary practices and narratives provides the key to understanding the atypical response observed to the loss of the forestry industry in the Westland region. Understanding of this local phenomenon is facilitated by the inclusion of attachment to place.

METHODS

This paper is based on earlier thesis research which focussed on the effects of the implementation of a set of policy changes that brought an end to indig-

enous logging (Sampson, 2003). The initial research focussed on the consequences of the government changing the status of Crown-owned forest from production to conservation in April 2002. In brief, the research asked the question 'how have the communities of Harihari and Whataroa been affected by the cessation of indigenous logging that has occurred as a result of the change in status of North Okarito and Saltwater forests from production to conservation?' Methods employed involved a preliminary investigation of the issues relevant to the project, in order to establish the focus of the assessment. Sampson (2003) reviewed regional government reports, comparative cases studies and newspaper articles, and undertook extensive discussions with key institutional players from local and regional agencies, who have maintained a relationship with the forestry industry and/or the two affected communities. Community profiles, requiring an initial overview of the current and historical context of the communities of interest, were established as the 'point of departure for estimating effects of change' (Taylor *et al.* 2004: 67). These two steps were instrumental in providing the conceptual framework for subsequent unstructured interviews. Field interviews were conducted between November 2002 and January 2003. Snowball sampling was used to make contacts within both communities and in-depth interviews (ranging from 50 mins to 2+ hours) were conducted with 26 residents to determine key issues and gather their perceptions of the impacts that have arisen for their communities. Extensive field observations were made. While interviews and field observations formed a significant part of the earlier research they also provided the data that underpins the current work.

WESTLAND FOREST INDUSTRY DECLINE

The West Coast region of the South Island of New Zealand is a narrow strip of land extending from Karamea in the north to just south of Jackson's Bay in the south, spanning a distance of around 550 kms (Fig 1). Bounded by the ocean to the west and rugged mountain terrain to the east, it is rich in gold deposits, coal and indigenous forests (Weaver 1998: 26). The townships of Whataroa (population 324 in 2001) and Harihari (population 396 in 2001) are situated in the central part of Westland district, just north of the tourist destination of Franz Josef Glacier (Narayan 2002). Both areas have a history largely built upon timber felling and processing. Prior to restructuring in 1987 the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) district office had been located in Harihari and much of the town's livelihood revolved around it. The restructuring of the NZFS and the relocation of the office management staff, 120 km further north, resulted in the loss of approximately 45 forestry jobs (Pawson and Scott 1992: 378–379)

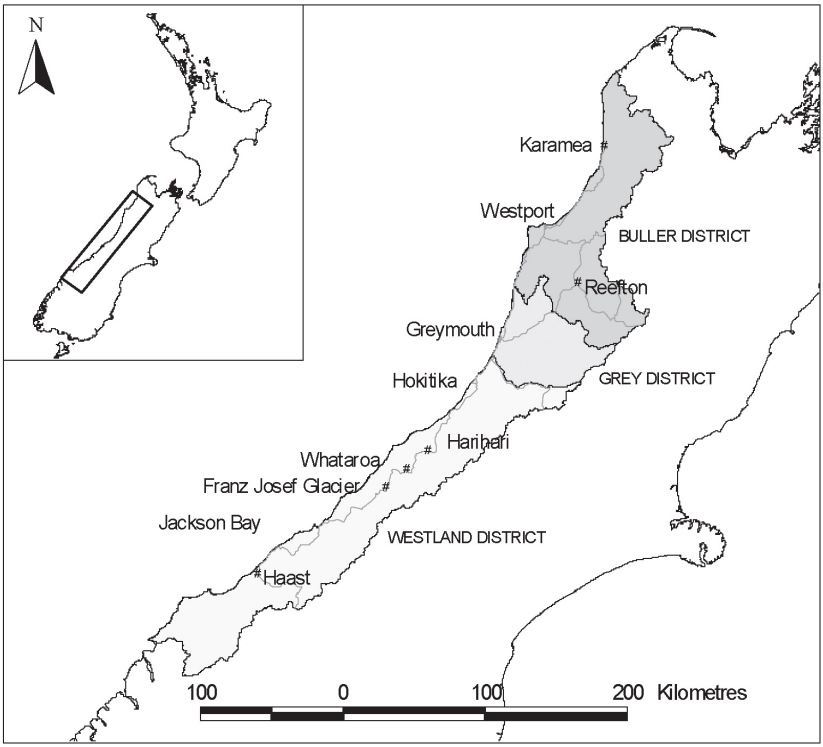


Figure 1. The West Coast Region.

The relocation of the NZFS office was just the first in a trilogy of events marking the beginning of the decline of this industry that would eventually lead to the complete end to large-scale indigenous logging in the Westland district. The second event was the loss of the timber processing mills in both townships following their relocation (in 1991 for Harihari, in 1994 for Whataroa). At this time, mill workers were laid off and local communities were forced to find ways of absorbing the ongoing effects of timber industry decline. A small proportion of timber workers moved on but most stayed, mainly taking up less well paid opportunities in the growing tourism and farming sectors. It is this lack of out migration that marks these communities as different from other rural resource communities experiencing similar industry closure. The final event was the complete cessation of logging from Crown-owned land as the status of North Okarito and Saltwater Forests shifted from production to conservation management. By the time the decision was implemented, in April 2002, fewer than 20 people were directly employed in a timber felling, hauling

or processing capacity (Sampson 2003: 92), a far cry from the vibrant timber industry operating in Westland in the 1980s. While these three events are not the only ones that have contributed to the indigenous timber industry decline, they mark significant turning points for many people whose social and economic lives have been intrinsically linked to the local forestry industry.

IMPACTS OF INDUSTRY DECLINE ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Social impact assessors in New Zealand have explored the effects on communities from the closure of core industries, in a range of single industry townships. For example, the closure of the Patea freezing works in south Taranaki in the early 1980s resulted in considerable outward migration and decline in the vitality of this single industry town (Melser *et al.* 1982: 15). Somewhat closer to Westland, in both proximity and industry, is the forestry township of Tuatapere, in rural Southland. In response to state sector restructuring and dwindling timber supplies, the downturn in the timber industry in Tuatapere resulted in a rapid decline in the number of timber mill operators, loss of jobs, outward migration and an overall general diminishing of the local economy and community (McClintock and Fitzgerald 1998: 18; Houghton and Watt 1987).

The nature of work in communities dependent on natural resources lends itself to the formation of strong links between occupational identity and community identity. This is particularly significant for resource communities where the nature of work is closely connected to the physical environment. For example, the identity of islanders of Grand Manan, off the Canadian Coast is maintained with perpetual seasonal rhythm, as they undertake the various tasks associated with the local fisheries that have come to dictate the social life and behaviour of local people (Marshall and Foster 2002: 71). Stranglemann (2001: 257) showed how strong dependency on coal extraction in British industrial mining communities has contributed to the shaping of aspects of individual and community identities. Similarly, in New Zealand, in an examination of the longer term effects of industry loss in natural resource-based communities, Fitzgerald *et al.* (2002) argue that industry decline and restructuring weaken occupational and community identity. This occurs, they argue, as a result of increased occupational and physical mobility, leading to a weakening of occupational identity of families and the communities they form. As resource based communities experience decline, long-standing familial associations with particular occupational identities disappear. Additionally, as rural economies become more diversified (in response to downturn), social change processes that accompany these shifts weaken 'local social function,

community cohesion, and community identity' (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2002: 9). The findings of Fitzgerald *et al.*(2002) echo a range of work that discusses the consequences of population loss (and/or changes in community structure and composition) leading to community decline. See for example; Bowles (1982), Taylor and McClintock (1984); Freudenburg, (1986); Weeks, (1990); Barrow (2000); Haney, *et al* (2003); Taylor, Bryan and Goodrich, (2004); Lorch *et al* (2004) and Leadbetter (2004).

Based on these examples from other parts of New Zealand and elsewhere, one might have held similar expectations regarding the fate of the communities of Whataroa and Harihari subsequent to the closure of the forestry industry. However, community responses to the cessation of indigenous logging in this district did not replicate the experiences of other single industry towns facing similar industry decline. According to Sampson (2003: 97–100) while some outward migration did occur (most notably around the time of the loss of the NZFS in 1986 involving forest service salaried staff), most forestry workers who were directly affected by the end to logging chose to remain in the area despite experiencing income loss. Although there are no official statistics available to verify exact outward migration figures, respondents constantly referred to the fact that 'local boys' stayed.

> Of the foresters who lost their jobs roughly two thirds were local people who went on to do other things around here. About a third moved on, some went down to Tuatapere and others went to the North Island.

Many of those who lost their jobs supplemented income loss with *ad hoc* employment opportunities in the growing farming and tourism industries. Many locals reported an increasing reliance on trading of goods and labour to further support themselves and their families. There was some evidence of the existence of an informal economy where items such as venison, poultry and eggs were traded for other goods and services.[2] Additionally there was no evidence of increased reliance on welfare benefits.[3] Very few locals suggested that they would be 'forced' to leave.

The general response to the loss of the indigenous timber industry was a *community specific* one, in which, 'predictable' patterns of outward migration have been only slight (Sampson 2003: 92–93). Contrary to the arguments of Fitzgerald *et al.* (2002), place attachment has had primacy over occupational identity. The Westland community response was to draw on attachment to place.

> We have chosen to build our family home here. I'm not going to chase a career around. To feed my family and pay the bills I would be happy milking cows. Being a sawmiller was central to me but it is getting less and less. I chose to stay in Harihari, I could go elsewhere but I don't want to shift. This is where I live.

Sampson (2003: 134) suggests that local identity has provided a buffer against industry change, arguing that locals maintain identity by drawing upon aspects of landscape. This paper goes beyond the basic identification of the contribution of identity, to more deeply explore what constitutes 'attachment to place' in a Westland community context. We argue that those locals who remained after the forestry industry closure responded by affirming their sense of community through the maintenance of a particular sense of place. We detail how the construction of identity is based on the local narrative emerging from historical accounts, reinforced by the nature of the social and physical 'scapes' these communities are immersed in; at once sharing similarities, and departing from, the wider narratives of other rural New Zealand communities. We suggest that the particularities of the local discourse of place and community hold the clues for understanding how these two communities have responded, somewhat atypically, to industry closure.

In a Foucauldian sense, discourse goes beyond linguistics to describe a system of representation governed by a set of rules and practices that produce meaningful statements (Hall 2001). Discourse provides 'a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language' (Hall 2001: 72). However it also entails social practices observed in conduct, which are equally shaped by meaning (Hall 2001: 72). Discourse expands the basic linguistic definition, to become a conduit for understanding the meanings behind local narrative (as language and stories) *as well as* practice.

In order to understand the particularities of the local discourse on place and community in the Westland context we do three things. First, we describe how 'sense of place' and community identity is constructed in *wider rural New Zealand*. Narratives built around ruggedness, resourcefulness and resilience, drawing on the historical texts and the embedding of identity within the landscape will contribute to this explanation. Secondly, we illustrate how these narratives overlap with definitions of the Westland identity. However these only make a partial contribution to the sense of place in the Westland context. West Coasters (in general) continue to appropriate characteristics of

the physical environment to interpretations of their own lives, while changes to the practices involving those landscapes reinforces notions of *what it means* to be local. In combination, these provide the point of departure from which we embark on the third objective of this paper; an exploration of the particular aspects of the Westland identity that differ from wider definitions of what it means to be a rural Pakeha New Zealander. Aspects of being 'local' have allowed the people of Whataroa and Harihari to adjust to industry change rather differently than might have been predicted. The nature of the responses from these communities to such widespread and pivotal industry change lay in their attachment to place; the shaping of their identity from within the landscape, over and above drawing upon occupational identity discourses.

PLACES AND LANDSCAPES – THE REPOSITORY AND CATALYST FOR IDENTITY FORMATION

'Place', embedded with its array of cultural, social and personal meanings, is central to identity construction. While allowing for the construction and maintenance of identity through the social world, embedding identity in the environment demands that place or locale plays a pivotal role (Cuba and Hummon 1993: 112). The specific biographical experiences that people have with 'place' imbue the landscape with personal meaning thereby creating a repository for the complex array of culturally constructed symbols (Hummon 1992: 258). Consumed this way, cultural 'place-making' becomes a simile for identity construction: 'place' a metaphor for 'the self'.

In a review of the contributions of place to sociological theory, Gieryn (2000: 464–465) identifies three concepts that underpin the sociological application of place. The first is the geographical fixity of place. Geographical location has finitude. Places may be anything from a favourite chair, to a neighbourhood, a landscape, a region or a country. It provides distinction between here and there, and is bounded in both physical and phenomenological ways. The second way Gieryn describes place is in its material form. Whether constructed (as in cities) or natural (as in forests or beaches), place can be defined as a collection of things or objects through which social processes are able to occur; through the designing of, building, and using of material form. The third definition of place, is as a receptacle of meanings and values, namely the semiotic. Irrespective of material form, natural or constructed, places are also imbued with meanings. Gieryn argues that places are material environments imbued with representations, meanings and interpretations. Ensconced in history, memory, collective and individual narrative, places become both the repository and catalyst of culture. The physical and semiotic interplay that defines

places remain mutually dependent (Gieryn 2000).

Gieryn's (2000: 464–465) three-fold definition of place (incorporating the geography, material form and the semiotic) is useful to understanding the Westlander's sense of place. While this research makes reference to aspects of both geography and the shifting nature of engagement with the material form (be it forestry, farming or tourism) we most heavily draw upon the third definition of place as outlined by Gieryn (2000). This dimension regards the symbolic meaning ascribed to place; where 'landscape' becomes integral to cultural production. We argue that landscape is at once *socially constructed* and *socially constructing* of the local attachment to place for Westlanders. This interpretation has been equally drawn for us as it is for the local community: from collective and individual narratives, embedded in local and shared history and via the making and remaking of discourse in response to industry loss.

The Westland communities in this study did not produce typical community responses to the loss of the indigenous forestry industry, and we argue this is a result of community specific characteristics. But what do we mean when we say 'community specific' characteristics? As a metaphor for collections of ideas, characteristics, beliefs, behaviours and so on, the word *community* implies shared commonalties that distinguish members from one community with those from other groups. They are a way for individuals to express some kind of attachment to their own locale (Cohen 1982). Community is a relational idea; constructed in opposition and occasioned by the need to express such distinction (Cohen 1985: 12). 'Community' is operationalised in the face of threat or challenges, and comprises in part, expressions of solidarity and identity as a mechanism with which local challenges can be negotiated (Wilkinson 1986: 5). Both Cohen (1985) and Wilkinson (1986) argue for the need for this opposition. Moreover, it is at the figurative boundaries of community that notions become expressed through collective rhetoric and 'via those [*meanings*] imputed to the collectivity by individuals through the medium of their idiosyncratic experience' (Cohen 1987: 14). Determining what constitutes communities' idiosyncrasies will invariably lead to understanding not only the boundaries of community, but also those aspects that maintain community, namely, community identity.

Before exploring identity *per se*, it is first important to illuminate the role played by the community boundary in identity formation and maintenance, for it is there that community maintenance occurs. Symbolic boundaries are constructed in the socio-cultural spaces that surround communities (Mewett 1986). They encapsulate the identity of individuals as well as the collective.

They are in a constant state of flux and are continually being renegotiated through a collective semiotic. Identity, sense of belonging, and attachment to 'place' all form part of the metaphorical structures that encapsulate groups of people.

In this way boundaries work to shape, maintain and strengthen community. One way this is done is through dominant community discourses. In particular, in rural communities, shared local narrative is central to the collective identity formation that may contribute to place attachment. These narratives contribute in all three ways identified by Gieryn (2000: 464–465); that is, they are at once embedded in the geographical locale; they evoke the material form of the landscape and are imbued with symbols and meanings for the communities that engage them. But how do local discourse and narrative specifically inform the sense of place in a wider New Zealand context, and more specifically in a Westland context?

EUROPEAN BASED IDENTITY FORMATION IN RURAL NEW ZEALAND

Early European pioneer settlement in New Zealand began in earnest in around 1840 with the settlement of hardworking rural laborers and their families. The country's rural provinces sought out and built themselves on the backbone of farm laborers, carpenters, miners, gold prospectors and timber fellers, who possessed qualities of hard work, stoicism, perseverance and resilience (Phillips 1996: 47).

> The New Zealand pioneer was …a strong sun browned man, axe in hand, chopping down the forest to make a farm. His battles against the frontier environment were now shared by his noble wife, coping cheerfully in a one-room hut of pit sawn timber, washing in the river and cooking on an open fire as they worked together to build a future in a new land for their bare foot children (Moodie 2000: 55).

By the early 20th century, the image of the New Zealand pioneer was established in strong historical narratives of 'man against bush' (Moodie 2000: 55; Belich 1996: 383); the triumph of man against the odds (Morris 2002: 56–57). This early pioneering relationship with the land has constructed and shaped rural identity (Bell 1996: 5). In the absences of ready kinship ties and family networks inherent in the lives of new colonial settlers, connection to and identification with the environment became a predominant influence on the 'national character' (Bell 1996: 5). Pioneering myths and imagery emerging from the early days of European settlement of New Zealand, have been strong and

enduring and have provided the narrative framework upon which contemporary definitions of iconic (and predominantly male) identity comfortably rest. This continuity of pioneering narratives continues to shape the identities of contemporary rural 'New Zealanders'. From high country farmers (Morris 2002) to West Coast foresters (Sampson 2003) the salience of the pioneering ethos continues to provide the underpinnings of identity construction and maintenance. Bellich (1996 p. 385) writes, 'at the core of the *Pakeha* prospectus, of the folk history of New Zealand settlement and of colonial arcadianism in general was the yeoman – the sturdy settler of small means who hewed his own farm from the wilderness'. We suggest that the contemporary Pakeha West Coast identity derives from this enduring pioneering legacy, rather than being formed and articulated in opposition to Maori identity. In this context, the term Pakeha is perhaps a 'gloss' for 'European', rather than an explicit contrast to Maori. While being informed by these pioneering myths and imagery, it is toward current definitions of the Pakeha New Zealander rural identity that this paper now turns.

Moodie (2000) identifies the importance of the relationship between place and the narrative construction of contemporary identity in a rural New Zealand farming community. Drawing on post-war (WWII) recollections, Moodie argues that identity has been constructed on the historical accounts of a pioneering legacy; one which is built upon the shaping or taming of the rugged wilderness of the New Zealand landscape. The men in Moodie's (2000) research perpetuate the historical masculinity myth by 'bringing order and productivity to the wilderness…transforming [*it*] for future generations' (Moodie, 2000: 55). Historically, transforming the wilderness required not only the hard work virtues of the pioneering settler, but also the power to dominate, to manipulate the environment, to bring order to the wilderness, in essence, to tame the landscape. In times of economic hardship farmers turned to less intensive farming practices, to meet the shifting exogenous demands such as price fluctuations and seasonal effects. Morris (2002: 52) reports that among well established high country farmers, individuals were able to expand and contract operations in response to changing economic and social conditions. This is not only indicative of a dominant and proactive relationship with the environment in which these individuals were situated but indicates the relationship of ownership over means of production present in farming communities.

Where Moodie (2000) engaged women's recollections, similar narratives built around taming and control emerged, albeit closer to the domesticated domains of post-war rural women's lives. Moodie's female participants identified

control not only of the domestic sphere, but as something that was achieved through transgressing the prevalent stereotypic social relationships. Where opportunities to transgress gendered roles and assert independence occurred, this served to strengthen and reinforce the narrative identity of these women (Moodie 2000: 60–63).

Of particular interest to this paper, however, is the support Moodie's (2000) research gives to the thesis that it is place, or more accurately *the nature of the relationship with place*, that is central in the shaping of identities. Consistent in these collective memories, irrespective of gender, is the way in which the taming and control over the physical and social 'landscapes' is woven into stories that shape contemporary identities. For Moodie's farming communities, relationship to place is one of taming, of control, of proactive management, to bring order to both their own lives, and the landscapes in which they are situated.

In their study of pastoral farmers and forestry in Northland, New Zealand, Park and Scott (2002) describe the predominance of the long-held belief by predominantly Pakeha farmers that 'breaking in' farming land was imbued with a kind of virtue or morality. Consistent with the thesis of taming and control depicted by Moodie (2000), these authors suggest that this morality is built on the notion that land capable of being farmed, should be. As forestry in this region grows so does the belief that forestry constitutes the loss of good farmland to pines (Park and Scott 2002: 528). Park and Scott (2002) illustrate the tension between differing notions of appropriate landscape consumption and their contribution to identity formation. It becomes a place where predominantly Pakeha men can draw upon a particular set of histories (and virtues) to reaffirm, construct and maintain their personal and collective identities. Dominy (2001) likewise examines the meanings embedded in the language of New Zealand's high country farmers, who appropriate aspects of controlling the landscape to the social construction of high country rural farm life. Dominy (2001: 267) suggests the extreme physical harshness of the high country defies direct control through management, yet local narratives still indicate proactive resistance and the desire to 'move forward':

> 'You can't look behind, only forward'. In a vast environment, people move forward by controlling their domestic environs and their stock absolutely; they do not expect to make a lasting or visible dent far from the homestead, rather they survive in spite of the conditions with the expectations of moving forward or holding ground, but never of moving backwards….In this sense their pioneering

> legacy of achievement is unbroken (Dominy, 2001: 267–268).

The work of Park and Scott (2002), Moodie (2000) and Dominy (2001) affirm the role of the taming and bringing to order within the commonly held views of the Pakeha rural New Zealand identity. We accept their analysis but argue there are limits to its applicability in relation to understanding the notion of identity formation of rural Westlanders.

THE WEST COAST IDENTITY AND ATTACHMENT TO PLACE

A useful place to commence exploring the Westland identity is to examine the literature pertaining to the wider West Coast region. The enduring relationship between place and identity formation is also expressed in the West Coast persona. Characteristics of the physical environment, such as isolation and physical ruggedness, have been applied to descriptions of the West Coast identity (Houghton and Vaile 1979; Scott 1989; Pawson and Scott 1992; Scott 1995; Phillips 1996; Narayan 2002; Grubb 2005). The embedding of identity in the environment, as portrayed in historical accounts, constructs imagery of frontier origins dominated by Irish Catholic migrants, hospitality and friendliness, independence and resourcefulness played out in a remote location marked by harsh and rugged topography plagued with incessant rain (Houghton and Vaile 1979). Historically, reliance upon resource extraction involved the working of harsh and often difficult terrain, as the basic means of resource acquisition and individual survival. Consistent with other historical narratives, the frontier (and predominantly) male experience demanded strength, manual dexterity, versatility and a 'jack of all trades' approach to survival (Phillips 1996: 18). Houghton and Vaile (1979) explore the extent to which these are readily identifiable characteristics in the West Coast persona versus constructed myth. Irrespective of reality or myth, contemporary narratives built on the nostalgic past equally contribute to the West Coast identity as they do for other rural New Zealanders. Features of both landscape and social circumstance have shaped the West Coast identity and have forged a kind of strength and independence that 'Coasters' are known for.

More recently in his study of the changing patterns of work and local development on the Coast, Scott (1995: 138–139) depicts the image of the 'last frontier' coaster as being hardworking, trustworthy, somewhat anti-bureaucratic. Scott makes mention of the marginality of the region, and the harshness of the landscape in contributing to the attitudes and beliefs of West Coast people (Scott 1995: 138). We extend this to suggest that hardworking, trustworthy and resourceful notions describe specific *behaviours* that encapsulate local iden-

tity.

> Well my mum and dad are from here, you've kinda gotta be born here, but… a West Coaster is someone that helps anyone, laid back, lives a simple life, likes their booze, and will give you the shirt off their back.[4]

In association with behaviours are characteristics such as birthright, 'to be born here', which also hold substantial weight in terms of belonging in a West Coast context.

> I say I'm a fourth generation but really I'm third. My great grandmother was born in Ireland, lived in Westland for 73 years, had 13 children, without a doctor, but she's not really a West Coaster, Still she possessed all the survival characteristics that would make her local, but…. She cannot really be called local.

> We use the number eight wire philosophy, we are resourceful and resilient, we just gotta survive… 'cause we're Coasters. We were born here, we have a blood tie to the area, an umbilical cord attachment, and it gets into your blood.

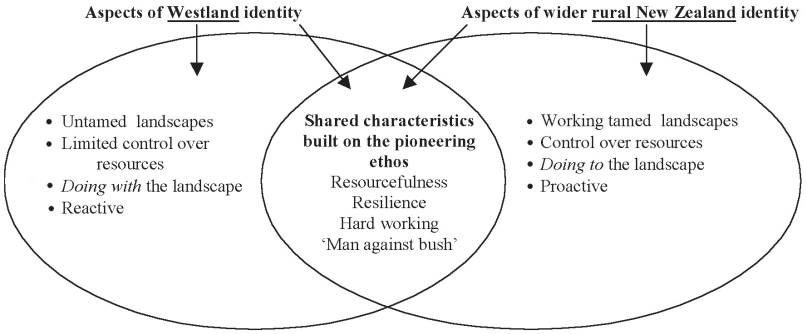
This general overview of Pakeha identity in a West Coast regional context does not differ significantly from the wider New Zealand definition detailed above. Both aspects of landscape (the physical harshness of the terrain, the isolation and ruggedness of the topography) and narratives contribute to the community discourse in constructing an understanding of rural identity and sense of place. But how do these descriptions fit with the contemporary interpretation of what it means to 'be local' presented by a smaller community of Westlanders? And how does 'being local' provide for, what we suggest is, a unique and interesting response to the loss of a central industry within the Westland region?

IDENTITY FORMATION AND MAINTENANCE IN A WESTLAND CONTEXT

The discussion now elaborates on the specific Westland identity and its departure from wider definitions of what it means to be a rural New Zealander. Discussion will review, in the first instance, those characteristics that are considered 'characteristics in common', prior to detailing where the Westland identity and the wider rural New Zealand identity depart from one another. Figure Two depicts the concepts engaged in this discussion.

Embedded in the narratives of rural New Zealanders in general are the central notions of resourcefulness and resilience; characteristics that are deemed 'in common' (depicted in the overlapped region of the figure). Irrespective of historical emergence or geographic locale, the pioneering ethos has shaped emergent discourses of rural New Zealanders. Evidenced by the specific findings of Sampson (2003), Morris (2002), Park and Scott (2002), Moodie (2000) and Dominy (2001), and more generally in the work of Phillips (1996) and Bell (1996), rural New Zealanders have shaped their present and made their places (constructed their sense of place) upon the legacies of the past. The pioneering ethos embodied in the hardworking 'man against bush' has provided the historical text informing rural identities. Historically informed conceptions of belonging to place (and more specifically, landscape) repeatedly emerge in discourse and narrative, irrespective of rural locale.

Figure 2. Aspects of Westland and NZ rural identity



While these characteristics contribute to discourses that build belonging, there are equally aspects that separate the Westland identity from the wider New Zealand rural one. We argue that these characteristics are precisely the ones that have enabled Westlanders to maintain their communities following the loss of the forestry industry. Central to our argument is the *particular nature of engagement with that landscape* which differentiates West Coasters and Westlanders from many other New Zealand rural communities.

Both Moodie (2000) and Park and Scott (2002) draw attention to the function of 'control' or taming of landscapes in constructing belonging. Moodie asserts that the historical imagery that evokes contemporary narratives '… is a story of progress, of bringing order and productivity to the wilderness and

of building a new community… these texts tend to emphasise the difficulties that have been overcome in transforming the wilderness for future generations…' (Moodie 2000: 55). As described earlier, Dominy (2001: 267) highlights the determination of high country farmers to 'move forward' through a proactive resistance to the physical harshness that defines high country life. Park and Scott (2002) likewise argue for the centrality of control by Pakeha New Zealander farmers over the physical landscape, in shaping their local identity. Built upon a moral economy of land use, Pakeha farmers assert that pastoral farming constitutes the proper use of 'good land' in contrast to the 'loss evoked by good pastures going into pines' (Park and Scott 2002). As forestry in the Northland region expands, local farmers experience a contestation of their legitimacy as they endure a sense of loss of control that is considered central to the national way of life (Park and Scott 2002: 527–529). It is worth noting that authors elsewhere have asserted that 'rural New Zealand' is homologous with pastoral farming, an activity which does not yet dominate the Westland regional economy (Scott *et al.* 2000).

Much of rural contemporary Pakeha New Zealand discourse reproduces the 'singular' and popular imagery of the farming pioneer embracing dominance over the wilderness through such practices of the widespread clearing of the landscapes for farms (Fig 2). Yet West Coasters construct a competing history of engagement embedded in untamed landscapes and most notably dominated by resource extraction activity. First gold in the early 1860s, followed by coal mining later the same decade, formed the backbone of the region's economy. Gold miners and coal miners alike were subject to poor working conditions, providing impetus for the 1908 miner's striker and a growing unionism which preceded the first Labour Party in New Zealand's history (for a full discussion of the origins of the Labour party and the growth of unionism on the West Coast see Gustafson 1980). Large scale forestry did not join these industries until the mid 1900s. Its growth occurred most notably in response to the post WWII housing boom. Farming has contributed to economic production, however the tenacity of the regenerating bush, encouraged by a wet climate, has hindered the large-scale development of farming in the region (May 1967) despite direct attempts to intensify dairy farming toward the latter part of last century (Taylor *et al.* 1985: 16).

Although the West Coast region has been continuously described as resource rich, much of the ownership over the resources and the value adding that has occurred in relation to them has been in other regions of New Zealand, making the issue of ownership over resources significant. Described as a marginal economy (Scott 1995: 138), the West Coast region has historically relied on in-

vestment capital from elsewhere. In an extractive economy, blue-collar workers traditionally have little control over decisions regarding resources (such as the 'right of access' that was revoked when the decision to end logging was enforced), a fact of which many West Coasters are acutely aware. Ownership of labour remains the only resource most workers have. This contrasts markedly with much of the remainder of rural New Zealand economy where resource extraction does not dominate. Resource extraction, by definition, evokes a relationship with the landscape, where 'control over' and 'ownership of' the resource as 'means of production' are not central[5].

The relationship with control over regional resources further differentiates rural West Coasters from much of the remainder of rural New Zealand. In the forestry context, the decision to cease logging Crown-owned forests and their management transfer to Department of Conservation further exacerbated the level at which outside 'ownership and control' impinged on the region. At the time that decision was implemented around 90% of the region was, as locals suggest, 'locked up' in conservation management, falling under the governance of the State. As a consequence, most townships in the region are surrounded by a landscape that remains untouchable and outside of their control.

This structural difference between the nature of engagement West Coasters have with the landscape compared with wider rural New Zealand contributes to the different kind of 'place-making' that occurs. With respect to the loss of indigenous forestry, the local response was clear. Westlanders acknowledge that indigenous forests constituted a national resource, yet 'right of access' is of considerable importance to them.[6]

> Being here is about who you are. The bush is not theirs, it is not ours, it is the people of New Zealand's. But I was caretaking it and I have a right to access it.

For the resource-dependent communities of Whataroa and Harihari right of access to the Crown-owned forests was crucial for the economic viability of the local timber industry. The loss of access to sustainable harvesting,[7] was inflammatory, further spawning the growing local narrative of 'locking up' and lack of control. The disparity over definitions of forestry conservation and the concept of 'locking up' are indicative of the broader differences between Westlanders' perceptions[8] and those belonging to 'the remainder of New Zealand'. Deemed a 'preservationist agenda' many Westlanders indicated that most of the country was ignorant to sound conservation practice, or indeed

what 'true conservation' means. In echoing a commonly held perception, one local suggested:

> We are the best conservationists in New Zealand. Look around you. We must be good conservationists because it [the forest] is still there. Conservation is conserving what you have got so it can go on forever. I wouldn't call them conservationists, I'd call them preservationists…

Another local commented:

> West Coasters have become conservation minded. It comes from a rural sense… …one of familiarity with the environment. We see it everyday, we live in it…

The underlying principle in operation here is one of utility and provision (on the part of the landscape) and a mode of *working with* the constraints of the forests (on the part of the local communities). 'Proper use' of a Westland forest by locals is about sustainable provision for community:

> Rural minded people and urban minded people see the forests very differently. For example, when the children were little, I built them a tree house. I used tree fern… I walked straight out into the bush and just cut a whole heap of them down. That's because they are there to use …And those things grow on the West Coast so fast there'll be another there in five to 10 years…But urbanites say, 'don't cut them down, leave them there'. They have a sense that the forests need to be kept in their pristine state, untouched. We see the forests as a resource, I think that's natural.

The moral economy of land use for these locals involved a clear practice of extracting or taking enough, while conserving what is there for future use. As one local suggested 'what you do to the forests you do to us' or as another suggested 'conserving the forests is about conserving our communities' – clear embodiments of a sense of continuity with landscape, a *doing with*. In contrast, for Northland farmers, personal meaning emerging from narrative would suggest that the moral economy of land use dictated a 'dominion over' the landscape built around practices of 'proper use' (Park and Scott 2002: 528). Moodie's (2000: 55) rural communities emphasized a transforming and a bringing of order to the wilderness. These particular biographical experiences build a sense of place contingent on the capacity of *doing to*.

We would suggest that while these specific forests provided the economic basis for the Whataroa and Harihari communities, access to them has only formed part of the wider landscape, as repository and catalyst for building a sense of place and attachment to it. This relationship can be defined not only in terms of the historical narratives of resource extraction that defined the kind of work done in the bush,[9] but also the bush itself. The tenacity of 'the bush', the ruggedness and harshness of the environs and severe climatic conditions, becomes socially constructing in ways that differentiate from the tamed and ordered pastoral-farming landscapes of elsewhere. Aspects of locale contained within wider regional discourses portray the West Coast bush as omnipresent and ubiquitous, a perspective we would suggest that counters any potential for taming or bringing to order, and further fosters a *doing with* approach:

> The environment rules, when the rain comes down, I mean really comes down… everything stops, except the trucks travelling up and down, carrying rocks… reinforcing the riverbeds.

Working within the untamed and wider landscape provides the medium to construct a particular sense of attachment, in contrast to the proactive (taming) relationship identified elsewhere. 'Living and working in the bush, without clearing large tracts of it away contributes to the ongoing notion of 'working with the bush' and what it means to be a West Coaster' (Grubb 2005: 68). In contrast, Park and Scott's (2002) accounts of the moral economy of landscape would suggest that *clearing the bush* was a means to an end for Northland farmers – it was what needed to be done before the 'real work' could proceed. In a West Coast context, working *within the bush* (and within the constraints of the environment) is an end in itself.

ATTACHMENT TO PLACE AND THE LOSS OF FORESTRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING IMPACTS

This notion of working within the broader (metaphorical) 'bush', or landscape, is apposite for understanding the manner in which Westlanders negotiated the effects that arose from the loss of the forestry industry. Drawing upon shared rural characteristics of resourcefulness, ruggedness and resilience facilitated the communities of Whataroa and Harihari to simply 'get on with it'. The ubiquity of the bush deems all manner of employment acceptable while attachment to the wider landscape (as place) leads to the supposition that it is toward it that individuals will turn to sustain themselves. Many Westland locals suggested that there was simply no other option for them but to find other

local ways of sustaining their livelihoods following the loss of forestry jobs:

> It would be good to think I had a job. There's a wee bit of private timber milling, but then the word is to get into tourism now. I would do anything, carpentry, fencing, farmhand work to stay rather than to move, We're local, you know. But then, at least we're self sufficient in lambs…

Westlanders construct ideas about themselves and their identities, by engaging a kind of place-making that is independent from the occupational discourses as discussed by Fitzgerald *et al.* (2002). Those who lost their jobs following the forestry industry closure have invoked attachment to place to reaffirm who *they are* in opposition to *what they do*. Westlanders have simply sought new kinds of engagement with the material forms of physical and social landscapes around them. Attachment to place, and maintenance of community identity is performed through shared community discourse centering first and foremost on belonging or 'localness' to the area:

> Being a sawmiller was central to me but it is getting less and less. I chose to stay in Harihari, I could go elsewhere, but I don't want to shift. This is where I live. I am from here, I'm a local.

In this paper we have argued that the response to the loss of the forestry industry from the people of Whataroa and Harihari was atypical of those observed in resource communities facing similar industry closure elsewhere. While some outward migration did occur, the majority of affected locals stayed in the area and found alternate ways to sustain themselves. We argue that particular aspects of place attachment and characteristics and behaviours of 'localness' have served to maintain community following the loss of the forestry industry. Attachment to place, not attachment to occupation, provides a key to understanding what happened (and didn't happen) to these communities. The interplay between people and specific social and historical geographies is central to making our case for the role of attachment to place in community resilience. Historical narratives of resource extraction underpin the structural relationships that inform contemporary discourse and shape the way in which locals interact with the physical and social environment. Working *within* the constraints of the wider environment is part of the place-making that has allowed locals to negotiate change, while providing continuity to identity making through reinforcing notions of localness and belonging. As both catalyst and repository, places are, as we suggested earlier, at once *socially constructed* and *socially constructing*. The success of responses of these

communities to such pivotal industry loss lay in the shaping of their identity from within the landscape, over and above drawing upon occupational identity discourses.

Place traversed the physical environs, the material form and the semiotic representations of social, cultural and physical landscapes. The characterization of 'place' depicted in this assessment research moves beyond a passive background of locale, to understanding how people have formed attachments to place, through *working within* rather than *doing to* their place. Analysis along these lines has much to contribute to the discipline of Impact Assessment and its application. A thorough understanding of how community engages with place is likely to produce community-specific responses critical for examining, estimating or assessing effects of any kind of environmental or social change.

NOTES

1 We follow Hummon's (1992) definition of sense of place. Hummon states sense of place is '…inevitably dual in nature, involving both an interpretive perspective *on* the environment and an emotional reaction *to* the environment… sense of place involves a personal *orientation* toward place, in which one's understandings of place and one's feeling about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning' (Hummon 1992: 262). We argue that attachment to place is a component of sense of place as identified by Hummon (1992).

2 It is possible that there was some illicit production and trade in marijuana in the area although this was not explored during the field work. One respondent observed that criminal behaviour was a non-local thing.

3 It is worth noting that in 2001 unemployment rates for New Zealand were 7.5%, for the Westland district as a whole 4.6%, for Harihari 4% and Whataroa 2.9%.

4 This respondent, personifies the 'why should we move?' mentality. In responses to changes and general decline in the forestry industry in the region he was made redundant four times over a twenty year period, each time from a forestry position. Despite this he has remained in the area and at the time of interview was employed in casual labouring and truck driving.

5 An analysis of this sort would normally expect to encounter different explanations arising from class differences amongst respondents. These differences did not emerge in this study and the respondents themselves did not evoke it as an issue. In short they offered a remarkably homogenous narrative of lack of

control devoid of and irrespective of social location.

6 This response was common to both those who owned land (farmers) and those who didn't.

7 From the late 1970s onwards, notions of sustainability and forestry management were coming together in the trialling of what were considered to be less destructive methods of forestry silviculture and harvesting (James & Norton 2002: 338). In the most recent decades the forestry management practices embraced sustainable management principles. For a full discussion of the forest management plan of North Okarito and Saltwater forests refer James and Norton (2002).

8 Early sociological theory has addressed the issue of perception. Both George H. Mead and W.I. Thomas shared similar thoughts in formulating what was to become known as the Thomas Theorum. The theorum, as ascribed to Thomas states that, 'If men define situations as real they are real in their consequences', and Mead 'If a thing is not recognised as true, then it does not function as true in the community' (Merton 1967: 19). It is upon this premise that perceptual effects are considered valid.

9 The bush is used here to describe the breadth of the West Coast environs. West coasters in general talk about the bush as a unitary concept. When we refer to 'the bush' in this paper we engage this notion by using the local 'text' to describe the variety of non-cultivated landscapes that comprise the West Coast evirons.

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