

## Stretching Ties

### Social Capital in the Rebranding of Coös County, New Hampshire

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Place rebranding is gaining in popularity as cities and rural communities alike attempt to expand their revenue streams through innovative marketing strategies that seek to revitalize or create tourism destinations. These efforts tend to come about as part of an economic development strategy pursued by communities that have borne steep economic losses resulting from global economic restructuring and the decline in traditional manufacturing, agriculture, and natural-resource extraction. Given that rural America, in particular, faces diverse challenges in rebounding from the loss of manufacturing (for example, a less educated workforce, gaps in the accessibility of high speed Internet and digital communication networks, other infrastructural problems), place rebranding can be a relatively low-cost collective investment for communities whose natural amenities can be marketed to prospective tourists from adjacent metropolitan areas. Much of the research on place rebranding focuses on managerial decision-making and marketing strategies such as the content of promotional messages and the emotional pull of destination images to tourists.<sup>1</sup> This research brief takes a different tack. I explore the role of social capital (see Box 1 on page 2) in rural wealth generation by focusing on how it was used to advance place rebranding in Coös County in northern New Hampshire.

#### Method

This brief is informed by research findings from a case study of community change (2009-2011) that I am conducting in Coös County, New Hampshire. The data includes: in-depth personal interviews with fifty community leaders purposefully chosen from different geographical localities in the county and across different occupational sectors; participant observation data from my attendance at three Coös Symposia; observation data from branding, economic development, and other public meetings and events; newspaper accounts and documentary data pertaining to the Branding Project; survey data from a representative sample of Coös residents (N = 724) interviewed in 2010 as part of the Community and Environment in Rural America (CERA) survey; and post-Symposium surveys of participants.

#### Key Findings

- Place rebranding is a promising strategy for rural and urban communities undergoing economic transformation.
- Social capital—the volume of social ties in a community—can have a positive impact on community economic development.
- While rural communities tend to have a lot of social capital, most of it tends to be focused within the local community rather than used to develop regional ties across adjacent communities.
- Rural development today increasingly requires a regionalized perspective and thus demands inter-community cooperation.
- The creation of inter-community ties is facilitated by structured opportunities and venues that bring together geographically dispersed individuals and groups.

Although social capital is not a silver bullet, its strategic use is all the more necessary for individuals and communities whose economic capital is relatively low. Researchers, therefore, are increasingly paying attention to its relevance in economically strained and underdeveloped communities. Most of these studies focus on *intra*-community social capital—the ties within a local neighborhood or community—and document the mostly positive effects of personal and institutional relationships on economic development. Yet in rural America today, smallness of scale is often an obstacle to economic development. Rural policy makers increasingly emphasize the importance of regional thinking and regional projects that require *inter*-community cooperation. Indeed, as rural communities shift their economic strategies from a reliance on industrial development and

*Box 1: What Is Social Capital?*<sup>2</sup>

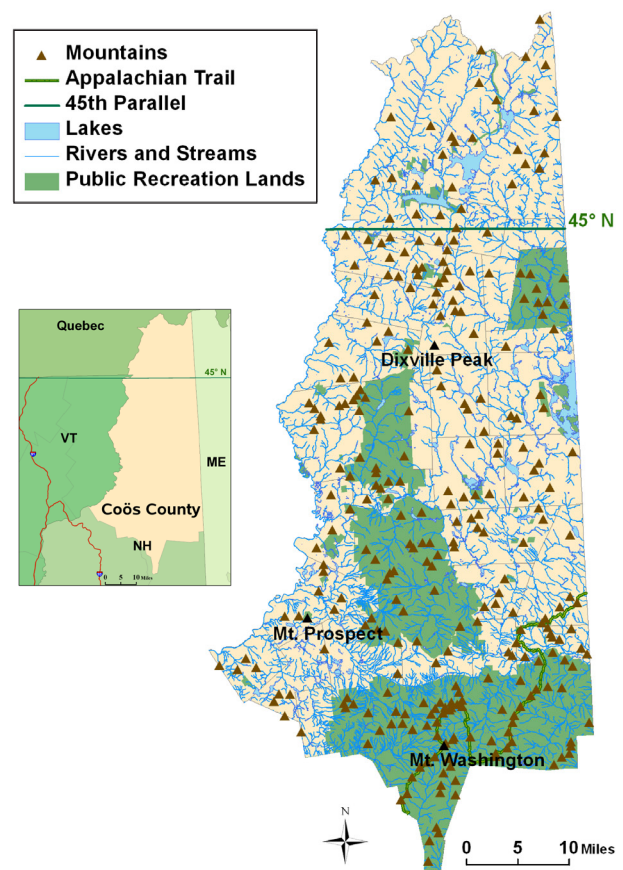
- Social capital essentially refers to the ties or connections between people. It does not matter whether the ties are strong (as in cliques) or weak; the crucial point is that there should be some ongoing context to maintaining the tie (such as annual family or alumni get-togethers, weekly church services, or monthly board meetings).
- Social capital is valuable because it is a resource that can yield productive results if it is used and converted into economic capital or into additional social capital.
- Researchers distinguish between two types of social capital: bonding capital that, as its name suggests, characterizes close, emotional within-group connections; and bridging capital, that is, the cross-cutting ties that exist between individuals across different (bonded) groups.
- Although social capital is most frequently presented as a positive resource, it can also have a negative impact. Whether social capital is positive or negative depends on the outcome at issue. For example, while social ties provide individuals with social and emotional support (a positive outcome) and foster community cohesion, the same social ties that link individuals tightly into their community may hinder those individuals' and the community's ability to make decisions that over time might have a beneficial economic effect. A case in point is the extent to which rural residents' ties to their community and their commitment to participating in community events may dampen their willingness to pursue jobs in sectors such as hospitality where anti-social hours (of nights and weekends) are the norm for employees.

more toward community-based development projects focused on tourism or organic/farm-fresh produce, for example, inter-community cooperation is critical.<sup>3</sup> There is some uncertainty, however, whether the high levels of intra-community social capital that typically characterize small rural communities can be mobilized in favor of this broader, inter-community, regional or county level cooperation. This brief reports on how inter-community social capital was created and used in the rebranding of Coös County.

## Coös County in Context

Coös County—New Hampshire's North Country—stands tall, bordered by Vermont to its west, Maine to its east, and Quebec to its north. It is home to the White Mountains National Forest and Presidential Range in the southern part of the county, which includes Mount Washington, the tallest mountain in the Northeastern United States, and other majestic peaks dominate across much of the rest of the county. Coös is heavily forested, with a rich stock of softwood (red spruce and balsam fir), hardwood (American beech, sugar maple, and yellow birch), and totally mixed species (red maple, red spruce, balsam fir, paper birch, aspen, some white pine).<sup>4</sup> The Appalachian Trail meanders through a broad swath of its ground. The powerful Androscoggin river, dotted intermittently with boom piers reminiscent of a timber-logging economy, pounds along through the eastern side of the county down from Lake Umbagog, and is matched on the county's western edge by the Connecticut and Ammonoosuc rivers (see Figure 1). Smaller rivers and lakes, and several covered bridges dating from the mid-nineteenth century, further enrich the county's spectacular landscape.

FIGURE 1. COÖS COUNTY: NATURAL AMENITIES



Economically, Coös is a county in transition. From the late nineteenth century until the latter decades of the twentieth, employment in the lumber, paper and pulp mills, and in the forests that supplied them, provided several generations of Coös residents with steady jobs and solid incomes. As occurred elsewhere in America, however, its manufacturing sector began to decline in the 1980s as a result of the United States' shift toward service and information industries and the displacement of core manufacturing jobs to lower-cost economies. The decline became especially significant in Coös in 2001 following the closing of the Berlin paper mill, and the subsequent closing of mills in Groveton and Gorham. Thus Coös experienced an 18 percent loss in manufacturing jobs between 2000 and 2006. It has the highest unemployment rate in the state (6.8 percent compared to 5.2 percent for the state), and a lower median household income (\$39,558 versus \$56,557), a much smaller proportion of college graduates (12 percent versus 29 percent), and a higher child poverty rate (18 percent versus 10 percent) compared to New Hampshire as a whole.<sup>5</sup> The demographic trends in Coös reflect its economic stagnation. While New Hampshire has seen significant population gains (an increase of 6.5 percent between 2000 and 2010), Coös had roughly the same population in 2010, 33,055 people, as it had in 1970 (34,291). As in other rural counties that have suffered a decline in manufacturing, and exacerbated by the impact of the current protracted recession, it is hard for Coös to attract large numbers of new residents. The out-migration of young adults and lower birth rates among current cohorts mean that Coös tends to have more deaths than births; it is thus an aging county with approximately one-fifth (19.4 percent) of its population over 65.<sup>6</sup>

Tourism development is one of several initiatives currently underway in Coös as the county explores new ways to draw on its natural amenities for economic revitalization. Regional efforts to expand tourism began in 2006, and in late Fall 2009, the county's new marketing brand, "New Hampshire Grand: Grand Resorts, Grand Adventures" was officially launched. It is publicized through its own website ([www.nhgrand.com](http://www.nhgrand.com)), glossy brochures, and a public marketing campaign.<sup>7</sup> The rebranding initiative did not have to start from scratch because Coös had historically been a tourist destination. Three grand hotels remain from a number that characterized the region in the late nineteenth century, serving as mountain retreats for middle- and upper-class Boston and New York families, while less costly hotels, campgrounds, and amenities have made the region attractive to generations of less affluent families who crave the outdoors. Indicative of the recreational appeal of its natural amenities, 21 percent of the housing in Coös is second homes.<sup>8</sup> Although a large majority of Coös residents (82 percent; Community and Environment in Rural America [CERA] 2010) say that tourism and recreation development is "very important" to the county's future, there is, nonetheless, ambivalence regarding the tourism sector that rebranding is intended to revitalize.

Accustomed to the high-paying manufacturing jobs provided by the paper and pulp mills, and highly respectful of the skills required by such jobs, there is some concern that hospitality service jobs tend to be lower-paying and of lower status.<sup>9</sup>

Further, the rebranding of rural areas typically requires a regionalized perspective that transcends attachment to a particular local community. Yet, rural America, and Coös County in particular, is characterized by several local communities (see Figure 2): distinct and relatively self-contained towns and unincorporated places whose separateness from each other is further defined by physical dividers (such as mountains and rivers) and institutional markers, including separate newspapers, schools, and hospitals. Indeed, the county is also divided by tourism boundaries so designated by the state of New Hampshire's Division of Travel and Tourism Development. The middle and northern portions of the county are called the Great North Woods, while the southern portion is called the White Mountains region. The launch of a rebranded county-wide identity, therefore, and any project that would benefit from regionalization, requires cooperation and collaboration across the county's geographically separated towns and community leaders. In the remainder of this brief, I discuss how community support

FIGURE 2. COÖS COUNTY: TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES

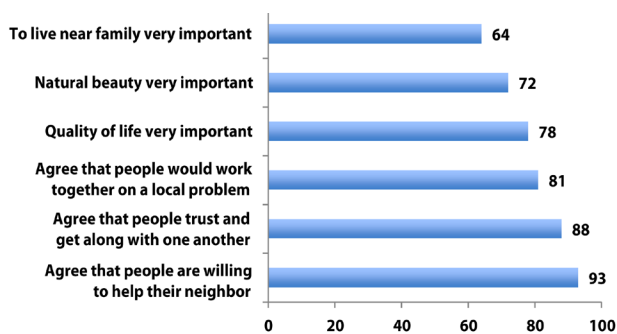


for, and cooperation with, rebranding was accomplished. I highlight: i) the volume and nature of social capital in Coös, ii) the important role played by the Coös Symposium in creating inter-community social ties across the county, and iii) how these ties were critical to the branding process and the successful launch of a new county-wide brand.

## Social Capital in Coös

Findings from the CERA 2010 survey indicate that there is a large stock of social capital in Coös as measured by residents' attitudes to their community. Like many rural Americans, Coös residents express remarkably high levels of neighborly trust and cooperativeness. Ninety three percent say that people are willing to help their neighbors, 88 percent say that people in the community trust and get along with one another, and 81 percent say that if the community were faced with a local problem such as a school closure, people in the community would work together to address the issue (see Figure 3). The high levels of community closeness in Coös are all the more noteworthy given that over half (57 percent) of the respondents were not born in the county but had moved there as adults. Family ties matter in keeping people attached to Coös. Despite widespread awareness of the lack of job opportunities (96 percent), two-thirds (64 percent) say that wanting to live near their family is a "very important" reason for staying. Coös residents' attachment to the community is further reinforced by their appreciation for the area's natural beauty (72 percent) and its quality of life (78 percent) (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. COÖS RESIDENTS' COMMUNITY ATTITUDES



Not only do Coös residents feel very positively toward their community, but equally important, the county has a rich civic infrastructure that provides opportunities for community interaction. There are several community institutions; non-profit economic, family services, and arts organizations; voluntary associations (e.g., Rotary Clubs); churches; and annual public festivals and fairs providing a range of volunteer outlets and a diverse array of social spaces and opportunities for formal and

informal interaction. The majority of residents (57 percent) do volunteer work, one in three (32 percent) attends church weekly, one in four (25 percent) belongs to a civic or fraternal organization, somewhat fewer (17 percent) are active in local government (for example, a land zoning committee), and one in ten (11 percent) belongs to a Chamber of Commerce. Overall, well over a third (39 percent) of Coös residents belong to some local organization (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. COÖS RESIDENTS' COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



Most of Coös' community infrastructure and attendant social ties, however, are local town- or community-based rather than county-wide. The county has, for example, three hospitals, five Chambers of Commerce, at least ten town-based economic development organizations, and six newspapers (see Figure 5). Although there is one county-wide economic development organization, a regional community college, and two economic development organizations whose remit includes Coös, for the most part, the venues and opportunities for social ties and community engagement are at the local community level. When Coös residents talk about neighborly trust, cooperativeness, and community involvement, therefore, they are most likely thinking of their own particular local community rather than the county as a region.<sup>10</sup> This local community perspective is reflected in the content of local newspapers. Most of the news reported focuses on what is happening within a relatively narrowly defined local boundary rather than encompassing events in different parts of the county, and the competitive attachment to particular towns is underscored by the strong emphasis on the inter-town, inter-school competition that revolves around school sports. In sum, although there is a large stock of social capital in Coös, most of this capital is of the bonding than of the bridging variety; it is grounded in intra-community ties and action rather than in inter-community connections and collaborations.

FIGURE 5. COÖS COUNTY: CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

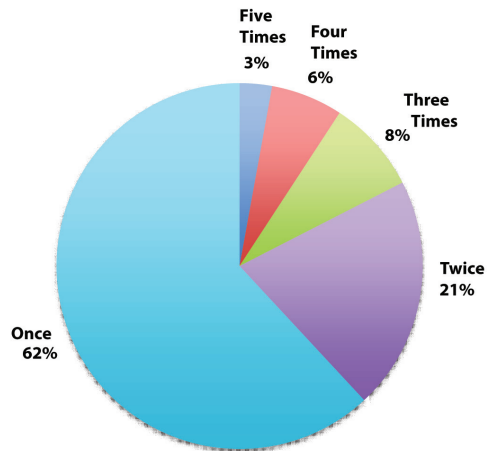


## The Coös Symposium: Forging Bridging Ties

There has, however, been a concerted effort in recent years to expand bridging capital in the region. The Coös Symposium, first held in 2007, is a region-wide, annual networking event for community leaders. It is partly sponsored by The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. The fund’s Advisory Committee is committed to enhancing the quality of life in Coös and does so through several grant-making initiatives.<sup>11</sup> The three-day symposium, held in May at one of the grand resort hotels in Coös amid beautiful surroundings, hosts about one-hundred invited participants. Invitees, chosen by the symposium Planning Committee (composed of Coös stakeholders, Foundation employees, and representatives from the symposium’s other sponsors), include community and organizational leaders from across the county and the broader region, as well as representatives from relevant government and non-profit

organizations. Each year, the committee actively seeks to include new participants; of the approximately 315 people who have attended the symposium, 62 percent have attended just once, 21 percent have attended twice, and 17 percent have attended at least three times (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. INVITEES’ FREQUENCY OF ATTENDANCE AT THE COÖS SYMPOSIUM



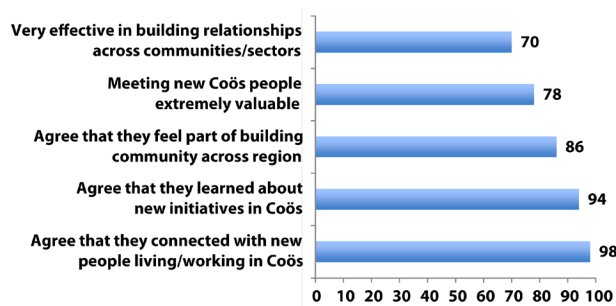
The symposium’s objective, as stated in each year’s program theme, is: “Advancing North Country Connections, Dialogue and Action.” Across the three days, participants have many varied opportunities to get to know each other, to hear short presentations about specific initiatives underway in the region, to participate in semi-structured small group discussions about various ongoing community projects, and to brainstorm in a focused manner about ways to improve the region. The symposium structure not only facilitates networking but requires people to connect with one another; the agenda includes scheduled times requiring people to introduce themselves, to “buddy-up” with individuals they do not already know, and to talk to others in small group discussions. Participants thus expand their volume of social connections and, by extension, expand their access to the resources of information and expertise embedded in those social ties. As participants are reminded time and again during this sociable and engaging event, the symposium is an intentional and explicit attempt to build social capital in and for the region.

Like economic capital, social capital can be brokered. Social capital brokerage is “the general process by which an organization connects an individual to another individual, to another organization, or to the resources they contain.”<sup>12</sup> In accord with this definition, The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund (that is, the fund’s Advisory Committee and staff) can be seen as a social capital broker. Through the

symposium, it bolsters the region's bridging social capital by bringing together and creating ties among individuals from different organizations, sectors, and geographical locales, and it bolsters the region's bonding social capital by providing structured opportunities for individuals who are already acquainted to renew and reaffirm their ties. Many of the community leaders I interviewed had attended the symposium at least once, and almost all of them spoke appreciatively of the opportunities for social interaction it provides. Even those interviewees who are already well-networked welcomed the symposium as an opportunity to further expand their social network and to hear about what other individuals and organizations in the county are doing to improve the region. Some noted, moreover, that the group conversations and discussions have improved their public conversational skills, itself an important resource in forging and maintaining social ties, as well as building leadership competence and interest in participating in other community groups and public discussions.

My interviewees' positive views of the symposium are shared as evidenced by the findings from post-symposium, anonymous internet surveys of attendees conducted by The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund. Most notably, even though a good proportion (38 percent) are return invitees and who, as community leaders, are already well-networked, 98 percent said that they connected with new people working and living in the Coös region, and 94 percent said they learned or learned more about new initiatives happening in Coös. Large majorities also agreed that meeting new people from Coös was an "extremely valuable" component of the symposium (78 percent), that they themselves feel a part of building community throughout the region (86 percent), and that the symposium was "very effective" in building relationships and trust across communities and disciplines" (70 percent) (see Figure 7).<sup>13</sup>

FIGURE 7. PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS OF THE COÖS SYMPOSIUM



The likely effectiveness of the Foundation's social capital brokerage is bolstered by the fact that the symposium is characterized by a cooperative rather than a competitive environment.<sup>14</sup> Most of the activity at the symposium is intentionally social; the task is to cooperate and get connected

and this is outlined and achieved under affirming and hospitable conditions. Further, the regularity of the event and the overlapping composition of the participants also contribute to the effectiveness of this brokerage because individuals are more likely to form social ties with one another if they have more structured opportunities to do so and if, in addition to their own personal agency and motivation, they are mobilized by a third party to do so.<sup>15</sup> In short, the symposium provides a structurally important, county-wide venue for the generation and regeneration of social ties across and beyond Coös. As such, the annual event helps to unify and regenerate the community as a county-wide region/community. The affirmation of a joint communal identity is critically important because, "No society [or community] can exist that does not feel the need at regular intervals to sustain and reaffirm the collective feelings and ideas that constitute its unity...this moral remaking can be achieved only by means of meetings [and] assemblies...in which individuals, brought into close contact, reaffirm in common their common feelings." The social interaction or "moral remaking" that occurs at the Coös Symposium focuses its participants on the county as a unit, and contributes to affirming and revitalizing participants' collectively shared feelings of commitment to ensuring the county's economic and social viability.<sup>16</sup>

## Rebranding Coös County

The successful launch of a county-wide marketing brand for Coös ("New Hampshire Grand: Grand Resorts, Grand Adventures") was in large part due to the strategic way in which bridging social capital was used and expanded by the Branding Project (BP). Managed by the Northern Community Investment Corporation (NCIC), a certified and well-regarded, not-for-profit, community development financial institution with a regional focus, the BP's strategies and activities were grounded in a "Community Assessment" report of the region. This was conducted by an external, tourism marketing consultant who was responsible for designing the brand marketing plan, and who also provided technical assistance to businesses in Coös chosen for their flagship tourism potential.

## Community Support

The process of building *community support* for the branding initiative was a key component in the BP's campaign and it was purposely pursued along several fronts including:

- The systematic incorporation of community stakeholders; for example, the external consultant met with seventy-five hospitality and retail business owners/executives and economic development leaders in making his initial assessment and devising the rebranding plan.

- The proactive use of important bridging social capital venues such as the Coös Symposium at which BP representatives explained the project and provided details concerning its evolution and implementation; this process included large- and small-group discussions and featured presentations and comments by well-regarded business and other community leaders from within the county who acted as “brand champions.”
- Dissemination of BP information through public workshops attended by geographically dispersed and well-known community leaders.

These strategies contributed significantly to establishing and reinforcing the credibility of the BP; importantly, the BP’s credibility was channeled through connections forged with diverse community leaders who themselves were socially connected to others across different occupational sectors and geographical communities in Coös. They also incorporated an understanding of community needs expressed by the on-the-ground stakeholders and leaders in specific communities rather than imposing an external vision of economic development or community change, thus further enhancing the BP’s legitimacy.

### Cooperative Relationships

A second major and interrelated component of the BP was an emphasis on the importance of building *cooperative relationships*. Regionalization is critical to rural rebranding projects because, for tourism development to be successful, tourists need to be drawn to an array of amenities located across several adjacent communities rather than to one or two attractions in one local community alone.<sup>17</sup> Regionalized cooperation, however, is especially challenging in Coös with its many geographically dispersed local communities, and the logistical and community attachment burdens this poses. Hence, BP representatives (and brand champions too) systematically emphasized the need for regional cooperative relationships at the various events (like the Coös Symposium), workshops, and public meetings at which the BP was discussed. BP personnel emphasized, for example, the importance of creating one brand—one destination experience—for the region/county. They argued that, with rebranding, each town would still maintain its own identity and logos and fully advertise its “home territory,” but it would also advertise other towns’ amenities.

Not surprisingly, the stakeholders most hesitant to embrace brand regionalization were the region’s five Chambers of Commerce, organizations whose purpose is to promote the unique competitive attractiveness of their respective town to tourists, businesses, and residents alike. Their concerns revolved around the perceived loss of the distinctiveness of their own localized identity, even as branding representatives emphasized that

regional branding was intended to incorporate rather than attenuate the “sub-brands,” the uniqueness of each town. Branding personnel worked over several months with individual Chambers to gain their cooperation with the BP, and additionally, they convened joint meetings of the Chambers. Indicative of the relative weakness of regional identity in Coös and of the paucity of social connections across geographically dispersed communities, there is relatively little social contact among the Chambers despite their common business interests. Thus, the joint meetings of the Chambers convened by the BP contributed to the building of bridging social capital in the region.

One joint meeting I observed was convened in mid-September of 2009, just a month or so before the “nhgrand” website was scheduled for launching. At that meeting, NCIC representatives introduced the proposed website to the Chamber representatives, discussed how it would operate, and its costs and benefits to the Chambers. Despite tensions regarding local identity logos and despite the larger context of inter-town/inter-Chamber competition, this meeting transformed into an important builder of bridging social capital. From informal introductions and conversations among the Chamber representatives before the meeting was called to order, the agenda issues’ discussion, and conversations at the end of the meeting, it was clear that Chamber representatives welcomed the opportunity to meet and talk with each other. Several of those present met each other for the first time, thus establishing an initial bridge among Chamber representatives, and, as the meeting progressed, they affirmed the social and informational value of these connections. Conversations spontaneously turned to comments about how valuable it was to get together and how good it would be for the Chambers to continue to meet. One representative stated, “It is good to know what each is doing apart from branding”—thus pointing to the value of social networks in facilitating information dissemination. Another Chamber representative, a longtime resident of the county, spontaneously commented, “I’m getting to know more about the county even though I have lived here all my life. I like the personal face-to-face interaction.”

Subsequently, each of the five Chambers agreed to cooperate with the BP, thus solidifying the launch of the “nhgrand” website (the major initial goal of the BP). Their cooperation, however temporary it may turn out to be, was secured, in part, by the BP’s convening of joint Chamber meetings. It was also abetted by the BP’s systematic efforts to build community support for the project. That process (as outlined earlier) established a favorable environment in Coös for the credibility of regional rebranding. It was further supported by positive coverage in the local newspapers, as well as by the fact that some Chamber members and leaders were also active participants in the Coös Symposium and in various community organizations that supported the idea of rebranding.

## Bridging Fissures

Further evidence that an investment in bridging capital is necessary to ensuring regionalized action outcomes comes from a disruption that sidelined one of the BP's related goals: new public signage in Coös. The BP failed to secure the required legal approval of the Coös County commissioners for a federal grant application that, if awarded, would have underwritten the costs of new signage. Although the commissioners, themselves a tightly bonded group, stated that they did not receive sufficient time to review the grant application and hold a public hearing, there was also a personal dimension to the episode, as the family-owned theme park business of one of the commissioners had recently failed to win certification as a BP "best of" tourist activity in the region.

The signage incident fits with the findings of other researchers that tensions between community development and elected officials are not uncommon in rural America.<sup>18</sup> It also indicates that rebranding efforts, whether in rural or urban environments, can become complicated, as the findings of researchers elsewhere show, by local politics.<sup>19</sup> From a social capital perspective, the controversy highlights the relevance of bridging capital and, specifically, how its paucity can influence the pace, if not the direction, of economic change. In Coös, as elsewhere in rural America, politicians tend to be kept at a distance by local community development groups ostensibly because such groups want to avoid "local politics." Although commissioners and economic development and non-profit leaders interact with one another and are socially connected through work, family, and neighborhood ties, the commissioners have been relatively marginal in recent region-wide community and economic development initiatives. None of the commissioners were part of the Coös Economic Action Steering Committee that was formed by community leaders in 2007, and as the county's efforts to transition from reliance on the paper mills to alternative employment opportunities evolved, they had only a minor role, in part because their remit does not include economic development per se. Similarly, the commissioners have not been active participants in the Coös Symposium. Moreover, despite its importance as a county-wide venue for fostering bridging ties, and despite the extensive outreach efforts of the BP (such as at the Coös Symposium, and to the Chambers of Commerce), comparatively little effort seems to have been made to include the commissioners and other elected officials as stakeholders in the branding process.

It is understandable that branding personnel and community development leaders would want to minimize the intrusion of local politics into branding or other economic projects. At the same time, however, it is strategically short-sighted to marginalize specific political or other community actors who not only have a legitimate cultural stake in, but who also have the legal authority to influence,

rural development outcomes. We cannot know whether the commissioners would have supported the signage grant application had they been incorporated into Coös branding discussions and networks such as those provided by the symposium. Nevertheless, had bridging ties been forged to the commissioners, this might have diluted any mistrust the commissioners had of the BP, and their unwillingness to cooperate with the grant application request.

## Conclusion

The findings in this brief are limited because they come from a study of a single rural county. Nevertheless, the case study indicates that local community social capital can be expanded and stretched to achieve inter-community, county-wide regional cooperation. In particular, the Coös Branding Project illustrates the productive value of bridging social capital in rural economic development. Although the BP benefited from local philanthropic funding and the expertise of a professional marketing specialist, its ability to launch a county-wide brand was also facilitated by the effective use of the county's social capital resources.

Rural communities are known for their high levels of social capital. There is nothing automatic, however, about the conversion of social capital into economic capital; it has to be invested and managed strategically in order to produce results. Yet, there are obstacles that hinder the translation of local town- or community-based social capital into regionalized, inter-community collaboration. In Coös, as is also likely the case in other rural counties, there is a far greater number of local than regional institutions and organizations, and culturally, leaders and residents alike are more prone to think locally than regionally. Nonetheless, these local community organizations can still play an important role in regionalization efforts; their infrastructural resources (including leaders and others with a history of working together on local issues) can be strategically incorporated as in Coös to forge and strengthen regionalized bridging connections.

Coös is very fortunate to have a locally based philanthropic organization that contributes to funding many significant ventures in the region (including the symposium and the Branding Project). Clearly, financial support makes a difference in bolstering existing projects and in encouraging community entrepreneurialism. But money in and of itself is not necessarily sufficient to accomplish economic or other goals. The successful launch of a county-wide brand for Coös would have been difficult, if not impossible, without the BP's ability to establish community-wide support for the project and to secure the collaboration of key, geographically dispersed stakeholders. The forging of cooperation results, by and large, when individuals experience the social rewards derived from connecting with others. In particular, the Coös Symposium functioned as an effective venue for the creation



and expansion of the bridging social capital necessary to the BP. The BP capitalized on the civic goodwill in Coös emphasizing neighborly ties and working together, and stretched the notion of neighbor to encompass neighbors across Coös as a whole, rather than just local neighbors.

Bridging ties can be forged, however, even in the absence of philanthropic funds. Convening joint meetings of representatives from geographically dispersed communities or occupationally diverse sectors can be accomplished without incurring a stiff economic cost. Connecting previously unacquainted individuals and organizational representatives in purposeful activities harnesses a community's existing social capital resources, facilitates the emergence and expansion of bridging ties, and can steer a community along particular economic paths. And when systematic efforts are not made to be inclusive, the result can be the stalling of important goals, as underscored by the impasse on signage in Coös. The larger point, nonetheless, is that the BP succeeded in accomplishing its primary goal—the launch of a new county-wide brand for Coös—and did so in no small part by forging broad community support for, and inter-community cooperation with, the project across a geographically dispersed region. As mentioned earlier, for social capital to be effective it must be used. As Coös moves forward and continues to develop its tourism sector, ongoing community support and inter-community cooperation will be crucial to translating its newly branded place identity into a place that will attract tourism and further investment.

## ENDNOTES

1. There is extensive research on rebranding. See, for example, Roger Bennett and Sharmila Savani, "The Rebranding of City Places: An International Comparative Investigation," *International Public Management Review* 4: 70-87, 2003; Liping Cai, "Cooperative Branding for Rural Destinations," *Annals of Tourism Research* 29: 720-742, 2002; and Laurie Murphy, Pierre Benckendorff, and Gianna Moscardo, "Using brand personality to differentiate regional tourism destinations," *Journal of Travel Research* 46: 5-14, 2007.
2. For important discussions of social capital, see Pierre Bourdieu, "The forms of capital," pp. 241-258 in J.G. Richardson, ed, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1986; James Coleman, "Social capital in the creation of human capital," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (Supplement): S95-S120, 1988; Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78: 1360-1380, 1973; Pamela Paxton, "Is Social Capital Declining in the United States?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 105: 88-127, 1999; and Mario Small, *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
3. See, for example, Jessica Crowe, "Community Economic Development Strategies in Rural Washington," *Rural Sociology* 71: 573-596, 2006; J. Sharp, K. Agnitsch, V. Ryan, and J. Flora, "Social Infrastructure and Community Economic Development Strategies," *Journal of Rural Studies* 18: 405-417, 2002; and J. Flora et al., "Self-development: A Viable Rural Development Option?" *Policy Studies Journal* 20: 276-288, 1992.
4. I thank Julie Renaud Evans for providing me with this information.
5. The unemployment rates are from New Hampshire Department of Employment Security, *New Hampshire Economic Trends Dashboard*, [www.nh.gov/nhes/elmi](http://www.nh.gov/nhes/elmi), retrieved September 12, 2011. The other economic data are from Anne Shattuck, *Navigating the Teen Years: Promise and Peril for Northern New Hampshire Youth*, New England Issue Brief, No. 12, University of New Hampshire: The Carsey Institute, 2009.
6. The demographic data are from Kenneth Johnson, *The Changing Faces of New Hampshire*, Reports on New England, University of New Hampshire: The Carsey Institute, 2007; Kenneth Johnson, *New Hampshire Demographic Trends Reflect Impact of the Economic Recession*, Fact Sheet, No. 4, University of New Hampshire: The Carsey Institute, 2010; and estimates from the 2010 Census from Kenneth Johnson, personal communication, September 11, 2011.
7. The "nhgrand" website went live in November 2009. Between November 2009 and September 2010, it received 11,624 site visits, and 50,533 page views. Between September 2010 and September 2011, it received 43,367 site visits, and 140,175 page views; 86 percent of web visitors were new visits. Complementing the website, the BP has also produced visually pleasing and informative tourist brochures on grand lodgings, restaurants, retail stores, and adventures (hiking, rafting, snowmobiling, dog sledding, rally-car driving). The BP's success is enhanced by its use of branding strategies that have worked elsewhere. Notably, locals and tourists are invited to submit photos or videos of their experiences of Coös for possible inclusion on the website, a nod to brand marketers' emphasis on the importance of visual identity and personal testimonies in creating emotional attachments to a destination place (see, for example, Simon Hudson and Brent Ritchie, "Branding a Memorable Destination Experience: The Case of Brand Canada," *International Journal of Tourism Research* 11: 217-228, 2009). Additionally, the BP sees the value of new interactive social media; the "nhgrand" is on facebook and twitter. The BP is supported by grants from many sources including The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, local businesses, the New Hampshire Department of Resource and Economic Development, the New Hampshire Division of Travel and Tourism Development, and the United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development division.

8. Johnson, *Changing Faces of New Hampshire*, p. 18.
9. Some community leaders I interviewed spontaneously expressed this view themselves and others made it as an observation about Coös.
10. Geographical distance is one factor that can hinder cross-community social connections; it is approximately a 45-minute drive from Lancaster to either Berlin or Colebrook; and an hour's drive from Berlin to Colebrook.
11. Among several other initiatives, The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation is currently underwriting two big, five-year initiatives: one aimed at enhancing entrepreneurship and business development (which includes the Branding Project), and the other investing in early childhood development. The fund's commitment to Coös stems from the Tillotson family's long-established family and business ties to the northern part of the county; members of the family continue to live in the community and are part of several local leadership and social networks. The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation is also sponsoring my study of community change through the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.
12. See Small, *Unanticipated Gains*, p. 19.
13. Coös 2010 post-symposium online survey, N =71 respondents; data made available to me by Racheal Stuart, Program Director of The Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. The responses in the previous surveys show a similar pattern.
14. Small, *Unanticipated Gains*, p. 21.
15. See Small, *Unanticipated Gains*, pp. 21, 14, 69.
16. This insight comes from the early sociologist Emile Durkheim. See Durkheim's, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912/2001, p. 322.
17. See Cai, "Cooperative Branding," p. 738.
18. See, for example, Gary Green, Anna Haines, Adam Dunn, and Daniel Sullivan, "The Role of Local Development Organizations in Rural America," *Rural Sociology* 67: 394-415, 2002.
19. See Bennett and Savani, "Rebranding of City Places," p. 81.

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