REFRAMING FOREST-BASED DEVELOPMENT AS FIRST NATION– MUNICIPAL COLLABORATION
Lessons from Lake Superior's North Shore

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ABSTRACT

Changes in Northern Ontario's planning and policy context (e.g., forest tenure reform, Far North Act) are creating opportunities and obligations for First Nations and towns that often are not matched by the local capacity, resources, and governance structures requisite for effective and equitable participation. This paper documents the early stages of a First Nation–municipal forest-based development initiative in the Northeast Superior Region and interprets evolving perspectives of 27 First Nation and non-First Nation interviewees concerning the establishment of counterpart regional governance forums — the Northeast Superior Forest Community and Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs' Forum. The analysis shows how contrasting framings of common problems, solutions, identities, and power relations contributed to conflict but also innovation for eventual collaboration. First Nations acted on their obligation to teach other groups how they wanted to be engaged and the importance of developing culturally appropriate protocols to initiate and structure working relationships. First Nations and municipal representatives realized the need and benefit of redistributing different sources of power to strengthen their network and the common voice of the region. The conclusion offers lessons about building trust and relationships, the role of teaching and learning, and avenues to empowerment for fostering First Nation–municipal collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal communities in Canada's provincial norths face growing and significant opportunities, but also responsibilities and challenges, associated with natural resource development and exploration in their traditional territories. In Northern Ontario for example, forest tenure reform, ongoing land claims, modernization of the Mining Act, and the introduction of the Far North Act and Ontario Green Energy Act have created community economic development, resource benefit sharing, mandatory Aboriginal consultation, and community-based land use planning processes (Clark et al., 2010; NSRCF, 2010; MNDMF & MEI, 2009; MNDMF, 2009; CCFM, 2008). Canadian Aboriginal groups are strongly committed to re-establishing their rightful roles as land stewards and resource decision makers, backed by constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights (Bombay, 2010; NSRCF, 2010).

The above-mentioned legislative and planning processes, and the economic development approaches they prescribe, remain contested among Aboriginal groups. An increasingly complex policy and planning context is not always matched by Aboriginal capacity and well-established governance structures requisite for effective and equitable participation[1]. There are growing resource development opportunities and obligations for Aboriginal groups, both with the Crown and third parties (i.e., municipalities, commercial interests, and land owners). However, conceptually sound and workable governance models and tools are required in order to make the most of such opportunities (Graham & Wilson, 2004). That the optimal protocols, processes and structures for Aboriginal governance are not widely understood remains a challenge for Aboriginal groups and their would-be collaborators (RCAP, 1996). With respect to First Nations, efforts to document and disseminate governance best practices are still in their infancy, though localised examples are surfacing (e.g., NCFG, 2009; Apolonio, 2008; CCCI, 2005; Graham & Wilson, 2004). Self-

organization of First Nation regional governance bodies such as the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs' Forum (NSRCF) in Northern Ontario shows that First Nation leaders recognize these pressing challenges and are already collaborating to develop and implement solutions.

This paper documents the initial stages of a collaborative forest-based economic development initiative involving several First Nations and municipalities in the Northeast Superior Region of Northern Ontario, Canada. Specifically, I interpret the evolving experiences and perspectives of First Nation and non-First Nation individuals concerning the establishment of counterpart regional collaborative governance forums — the Northeast Superior Forest Community Corporation and Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs' Forum. Both were initiated through bottom-up efforts to foster local development amidst a decade-long downturn in Ontario's forest economy. Analysis of interview transcripts and documents shows how different individuals framed and reframed First Nation–municipal collaboration over time, and bridges and barriers that were encountered. The final major section offers a synthesis of lessons shared by First Nations and non-First Nations to inform practice. The following section discusses concepts relevant to First Nation–municipal collaboration as an entry point for the case analysis.

FIRST NATION–MUNICIPAL COLLABORATION FOR FOREST DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

Collaboration involves sharing ideas and resources, and sharing power and decision making among different parties (Selin & Chavez, 1995). Depending on interpretation, collaboration can range from simply informing other parties of ongoing decisions and actions, to fully sharing decision making and formal inter-area coordination that engages different groups from the outset (Pomeroy & Berkes, 1997; Plummer & Fitzgibbon, 2004). Multiparty collaboration

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[1] For example, First Nations in northern Ontario have legitimate concerns for their ability to effectively participate in parallel government-sponsored processes addressing the Far North, energy, and mining simultaneously (G. Broad, personal communication, April 10, 2011).

on environmental resource matters is necessary given the increasing complexity and uncertainty inherent in societal challenges that by their very nature render unilateral actions by individual organizations ineffective (Gray, 1989; Mitchell, 2002). Collaboration is typically used to (a) mitigate conflict by engaging opponents through a joint search for information and solutions that satisfy different interests and/or (b) to advance shared visions for the collective good of the social groups involved (Gray, 1989; Conley & Moote, 2003).

But social groups must first commit to working together as a preliminary step in defining a shared vision. With respect to regional forms of environmental resource development and governance that involve First Nations and municipalities, a common vision can be discovered or refined through social learning processes supported by collaborative arrangements that have been specified to a common challenge and context [e.g., Wendaban Stewardship Authority process in Temagami, Ontario (see Dust, 1995; Laronde, 1993)]. Even with mutual commitment, however, building cross-cultural collaboration to promote forest-based development can be difficult (e.g., Bullock et al., 2009; Robinson, 2007; Laronde, 1993).

The fact that First Nations and municipalities recognize and value the need to work together is demonstrated by collaborative efforts that have developed despite ongoing policy limitations (FCM, 2000). Research on First Nation–municipal collaboration in Canada highlights three main, indeed overlapping, areas of involvement: (1) regional governance, (2) land and resource co-management, and (3) economic development (Apolonio, 2008; Tamera Services Ltd., 2002). First Nation and non-First Nation communities share a significant interest in improving their relationships, especially where close proximity of reserves and municipalities creates common land use and socio-economic issues as well as options for cost and benefit sharing. Practical examples include arrangements for improving service delivery, developing and maintaining infrastructure, community land use planning, economic development and environmental stewardship. Coordinating decisions and actions can also prevent conflict (Apolonio, 2008). Cassidy & Bish (1990) remind us, however, that band governments are distinct from local governments as the former have unique political status and interact with other governments on a much more forceful basis; band governments are more likely to be responsible for more diverse portfolios of functions (e.g., schools, social assistance programs), and; their interactions with other governments often occur in a legally ambiguous arena (unlike municipalities).

Regarding the potential for First Nation–municipal forms of forest-based development and governance, Parsons & Prest (2003) observe increasing and diverse Aboriginal participation in forestry decision making and practice as more Aboriginal people assert their traditional beliefs and values as "stakeholder, partner, manager, worker, and owner" (Parsons & Prest, 2003: 779). There is also growing acceptance of municipal, First Nation, and local civic involvement in forestry decision making and development exemplified by provincially enabled community forests (Bullock et al., 2009) and federal programs (i.e., First Nations Forestry Program; Forest Communities Program) designed to enhance local use, benefits, and control of forests.

In the Northeast Superior Region of Northern Ontario where this research was conducted, First Nations are working with municipalities and private parties to manage large scale forest licences and purchase and operate idle processing facilities for mutual local benefits. For example, in 2009 the Town of White River, Pic Mobert First Nation and a private investor purchased the former Domtar mill in White River, Ontario with plans to manage the surrounding forest (Ross, 2010). The Ojibway of the Pic River First Nation, and the towns of Manitouwadge and Marathon together have an active bid with the province to hold management rights to the forests surrounding their communities (Louiseize, 2010). Discussed below, several Northeast Superior Region chiefs and municipal leaders have joined in a regional forest-based development initiative intended to generate innovation and economic opportunities throughout the region based on Aboriginal, local, and scientific understanding of forest ecosystems and communities. The next section outlines the context for First Nations–municipal collaboration in the Northeast Superior Region and the research methods.

CASE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

Background

First Nations and municipalities of the Northeast Superior Region share a physically and culturally diverse landscape on Lake Superior's north eastern shore. This roughly 60,000 km^2 region extends across the Eastern Great Lakes–St Lawrence Forest and the northern boreal forest region transition. It is the traditional territory of the Brunswick House, Chapleau Cree, Chapleau Ojibwe, Hornepayne, Michipicoten, Missanabie Cree, Pic Mobert and Pic River First Nations, and several resource-dependent towns are located here including Chapleau, Dubreuilville, Hornepayne, Manitouwadge, Wawa, and White River.

Several Northeast Superior Region communities have recently faced collapse with the closure of 4 of 5 major forestry operations from 2003–2009. Over 1200 direct and well-paying forestry jobs were lost that provided core employment to a population of about 14,000 (AWIC, 2008). Notably, about 20 per cent of the population is Aboriginal (i.e., North American Indian and Métis). Between 2001 and 2006, municipal and First Nation reserve populations declined 16.4 and 17.5 per cent respectively (Statistics Canada, 2008) and communities have struggled to maintain basic services, infrastructure, and employment.

In response to the above challenges associated with small northern municipalities and the forestry crisis in general, the Northeastern Superior Mayors' Group emerged early in 2000. Sharing ideas, resources, and political support this informal regional network initially focused on improving communication, health care, and transportation services and infrastructure for the above mentioned six towns. By 2005 the Mayors' Group wanted more coordinated decision making and was working to build a regional economic strategy.

During the summer of 2006, the Mayors' Group responded to a Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN) call for proposals for the Forest Communities Program (FCP). The purpose of the program was to "foster collaborative community efforts to help communities take advantage of new economic opportunities from forest resources" (NRCAN, 2007). The Mayors' Group bid was successful and the Northeast Superior Forest Community Corporation (NSFC or simply Forest Community Corporation) was created to administer an annual federal contribution of up to $400,000 for 5 years to establish research and programs meant to generate economic opportunities, human capital, and sustainable forest management knowledge.

Unsatisfied with the level of First Nations engagement, First Nation leaders formed the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs' Forum (NSRCF) in 2007 to establish a more formal collaborative relationship with the Forest Community Corporation "inspired by Aboriginal values such as caring, sharing, mutual respect and trust (NSRCF, 2010: 3). The Chiefs' Forum also acts as a regional governance body to coordinate First Nations' efforts that address economic development, environmental stewardship, and socio-cultural priorities. The Chiefs' Forum has successfully obtained funding to complement and augment Forest Community revenues. First Nations–municipal relationship building is ongoing, though much has been accomplished in a short time as the communities self-organize and formalize their links. Below I discuss the methodology used to analyze the initial, and at times turbulent, stages of these counterpart organizations and present key perspectives and events involved in building First Nation–municipal collaboration. The analysis focuses on past events that occurred between 2006 and spring 2008; it is important to be clear on the period covered here, given that the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs' Forum and Northeast Superior Forest Community Corporation have since evolved and some mutual and respective negotiations are ongoing.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The study draws on 27 semi-structured interviews with representatives from area First Nations, towns, and senior levels of governments involved with the NSFC and The Chiefs' Forum. Following university research ethics approval, site visits and two rounds of confidential interviews were conducted between May 2008 and July 2009, which included 9 follow-up interviews with NSFC and The Chiefs' Forum representatives to examine evolving perspectives. In all, 5 First Nations and 12 NSFC representatives were interviewed, as well as 10 participants from municipal, provincial [e.g., Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry (MNDMF)] and federal governments

(NRCAN, FEDNOR) whose job description was to act as First Nations liaisons and/or to engage the broader public (including First Nations) on Northeast Superior Region economic development and forest resource management, planning, and development matters. Interview transcripts and documents were coded iteratively according to the main issues and perspectives shared by participants. Documents (reports, planning and policy statements, local newspaper archives) were also useful in confirming the occurrence and timing of events, and past views of certain participants concerning First Nations–municipal collaboration. To protect confidentiality, generic social group codes are used to identify participants below.

Frame analysis provides an approach for making sense of multi-party conflicts and understanding competing views that provide the basis for collective action and/or conflict in evolving collaborative processes (Gray, 2003; Dewulf et al., 2004). Central to this approach is the concept of *social framings* or the cognitive lenses held by individuals and groups that help them to interpret and give meaning to reality. Frames are shaped by past experience and culture; the meanings of experiences can vary depending on what frames individuals and groups use to interpret said experiences. This approach enables us to understand how different collaborative actors in a given context (a) view common problems, (b) identify themselves and others with respect to common problems, including responsibility for action, and (c) the forms and distribution of power (Gray, 2003; Dewulf et al., 2004) (Figure 1). Personal interaction, opportunity and willingness to co-learn, and trust are considered fundamental to collective reframing processes and can be a precondition and/or product of collaboration (Gray, 2003). The results below highlight several key perspectives and events instrumental in forming the Forest Community Corporation and Chiefs' Forum as the basis for First Nations–municipal collaboration.

(RE)FRAMING FIRST NATION–MUNICIPAL COLLABORATION FOR FOREST DEVELOPMENT

First Nations and municipalities had variable levels of collaborative involvement prior to the

FIGURE 1
Interplay of social framings in context-specific collaboration
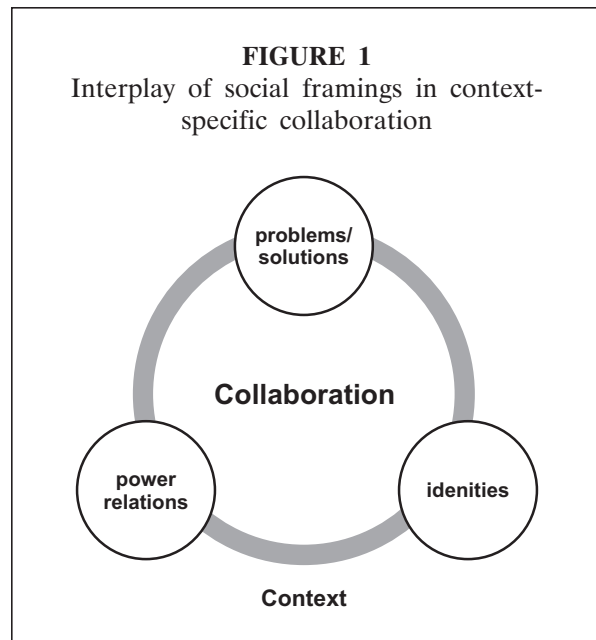
foundation of the Forest Community Corporation. For instance, First Nations representatives indicated that relations with municipal leaders needed to be developed during the NRCAN proposal process (FN1; FN2). Though three First Nations were listed as partners in the proposal, only one Chief (i.e., Chapleau Cree First Nation) provided a letter of support (see Albert et al., 2006). Two other First Nations (i.e., Pic Mobert and Missanabie Cree First Nations) had stated a "strong interest to participate in the project but more time [was] needed to explore their role in the project" (Albert et al., 2006: 41). The proposal stated that additional consultation with First Nations would occur immediately and that more letters of support would follow (Albert et al., 2006). However, the letter from Chapleau Cree First Nation was soon retracted. First Nations felt they were misled about the nature of their participation and the scale of NSFC funding (FN1, 2, 3). Galvanized by the perceived need for regional cooperation to address ongoing challenges and to bolster First Nations involvement with municipal leaders, the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs' Forum materialized in 2007.

The Chiefs' Forum factored prominently in common perceptions of First Nations influence. In general, while First Nations' authority regarding natural resources was widely recog-

nized, this was seen to be limited by capacity constraints. Many non-First Nation representatives encouraged First Nations' involvement in the Forest Community Corporation and confidently projected that First Nation capacity would increase in the future (NSFC, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9; MUN4, FED2). The Chiefs' Forum initiative was later partially funded by NRCAN through the Forest Community Corporation to help provide resources for capacity building. Organization of the Chiefs' Forum was seen by partnering First Nations to immediately boost their relational power with respect to negotiating change:

> We're going to be stronger number one as a voice. It's not just one person, one Chief, me [and] my Chief standing there saying 'this is wrong'. It's a group of First Nations saying 'no'. (FN2)

Subsequently, First Nations notified the Mayors' Group that Forest Community Corporation project plans would be suspended until First Nations were engaged appropriately. First Nations also informed municipal leaders of their duty to consult based on the receipt of federal funding and plans for resource development involving traditional Aboriginal territory (FN1). With support from a creative facilitator and strategic advisor, First Nations also made the case for more effective First Nation–municipal collaboration based on combining their traditional resource tenure with the capacity of non-First Nation communities. Notably, participants described First Nations as the third most powerful actor in the region with respect to forest governance (after the provincial government and forest industry). The power source most often associated with First Nations was legal authority, and there was growing awareness among municipalities that Aboriginal rights were being recognized by the courts. As one municipal representative summarized: "Their power is their legitimate Treaty Rights" (MUN4).

> Several NSFC and First Nations representatives (NSFC2, 3, 5, 8; FN1, 2), including other municipal (MUN1) and federal (FED1) representatives observing the collaboration building process throughout the region indicated that failing to approach First Nations early in the process was counterproductive, for example:

> I warned [the Mayors] very early. I said 'I think you need to go and talk to First Nations right away'. But that was ignored.... First Nations were [very concerned] ... they scheduled a meeting to talk to us and said: 'we have a role to play'. (NSFC5)

Some Forest Community Corporation representatives openly explained that the proposal to NRCAN was done quickly due to time constraints rather than malice and that elevating First Nations involvement was an important "part of the plan" (NSFC2, 7, 8). Still, before a meaningful collaboration could be built, conflict stalled the project temporarily and eroded First Nation–municipal trust — challenges that would only be overcome through ongoing mutual commitment to northern livelihoods and cross-cultural collaboration.

A step towards positive and meaningful First Nation–municipal collaboration was made in February 2008 when a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between Northeast Superior Forest Community Corporation and Chapleau Cree First Nation. Chapleau Cree First Nation agreed to provide constructive feedback on the Forest Community Corporation's Strategic Plan, circulate the critique to other area First Nations for comment, and host a regional First Nations meeting to assess common preferences for involvement among affected First Nations (CCFN, 2008: 1). Soon after this arrangement was made, on March 2, 2008 NRCAN and Mayors' Group representatives traveled to Chapleau for the Forest Community Program contribution agreement signing event. Shortly thereafter on April 5, 2008, *The Chapleau Express* featured the Chapleau Mayor and President of the NSFC signing the agreement (Staff, 2008). The front page article publically highlighted the history of collaboration among the six towns and federal funding as parts of the regional and federal response to economic crisis and communicated the president's message:

> All the communities of this region have been built because of our forest resource, and now our job is to come together as a collective to find sustainable new industries for our future economic wealth. The NSFC will be the catalyst to move these types of initiatives forward.

Though municipal collaboration was promoted, the article refrained from mentioning First Nations because of the ongoing background work to foster First Nation–municipal relations. First Nations were indeed represented at the launch to show mutual support prior to full collaboration (NSFC7).

Following a March 31, 2008 regional meeting involving Chapleau Cree, Missanabie Cree, Brunswick House and Michipicoten First Nations (Hornepayne and Pic Mobert sent regrets), First Nations offered their feedback on the Strategic Plan to the Forest Community Corporation, which outlined general and specific points of agreement as well as those requiring modification and clarification. For example, aspects of the Strategic Plan that supported youth development, education, forestry research, capacity building, and local control of resources were consistent with First Nations values and objectives. Major points needing clarification related to the undefined role of First Nations in the project, references that First Nations had participated in regional capacity-building strategies (unbeknown to the First Nations themselves), the need for greater recognition of Aboriginal rights and potential contributions, as well as the validity of First Nations claims to biomass resources and sacredness of medicinal forest plants (CCFN, 2008: 7–8). First Nations proposed recommendations to redraft the Strategic Plan; elevate the profile of First Nations; garner formal support from interested First Nations; secure funding to assist First Nations participation; and confirm First Nations representatives to sit on Forest Community Corporation committees (CCFN, 2008: 19). The Forest Community Corporation sought additional funding from NRCAN to assist the Chiefs' Forum with enhancing capacity for coordination and participation. This funding was combined with significant funds leveraged independently by First Nations (FN1; NSFC7, 8; FED2).

One month later on May 7, 2008, NSFC's general manager published an article entitled "Co-operation Key to New Initiative Success" on the front page of the *Algoma News Review* (Lauziere, 2008). In part, the article was intended to improve First Nation–municipal relations and acknowledge the need for community awareness promotion. The article introduced the Northeast Superior Forest Corporation as

a new initiative that although some may have heard of, has not been described in any great detail. There are questions in the community, in fact all the regional partner communities, surrounding who we are and what we are doing.

One third of the article was dedicated to discussing plans for First Nations relationship building and stressed that:

> one of the key priorities for the NSFC is to build strong relationships with the First Nations within our project boundaries. The Mayors of all six communities recognize that decisions involving lands and resources cannot be made without the direct involvement of area First Nations. Now that process funding has been secured, the NSFC is committed to advancing an aggressive relationship building initiative with the seven First Nations located within the geography of the Forest Community initiative.

Public recognition of First Nations rights and plans to foster partnerships through relationship building exercises indicates a reframing of a common organizational identity essential for strengthening First Nation–municipal collaboration.

First Nations collaborative efforts were also gaining support from senior government funders:

> We're kind of looking at [the Chiefs' Forum] as a role model for the rest of the province. They seem to have a pretty good idea. So we figured [what] if we could stimulate almost pilot projects? We've been saying for years that First Nations need to partner up here [in Northern Ontario] because, try as they might, they are not going to get an opportunity for each one individual. They have to form some kind of a cooperative. So in this case being six or seven should be a pretty good forest opportunity there and they seem like a pretty good role model. (FED2)

Interviews during the spring of 2008 and again in spring 2009 with First Nations representatives (2, 3, 4, 5) indicated that awareness for the Forest Community Corporation among First Nation partners was building slowing. And as First Nations became more organized through the collective Forum, their power was evident at the level of Forest Community Corporation negotia-

tions, for example: *Now that [First Nations] are starting to speak as a collective, they have a lot more impact on what happens* (NSFC7).

Forest Community Corporation directors and staff further acknowledged the authority of First Nations to steer organizational planning and development processes but of equal importance they came to recognize the positive opportunities of working with First Nations. The agreement to collaborate, however, did not create an automatic alliance. First Nations, Forest Community Corporation staff and resource people, the Mayors, and Ministry of Natural Resources representatives felt that collaboration was very important, acknowledging that some conflict persisted (FN1, 2; NSFC2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9; FED1, 2), which was to be expected given the mix of people and issues involved. But both First Nations and non-First Nations were optimistic that any outstanding issues would be resolved (FN1; NSFC3, 6, 7) — a sign of mutual commitment to collaboration.

Relationship building and improving cross-cultural understanding were identified as important objectives by the Chiefs' Forum and Forest Community Corporation in order to openly address any mutual concerns for open information sharing and financial disclosures, as well as committee cross-representation (FN1; NSFC1, 3, 5, 7, 9). First Nations acknowledged that reconciliation and trust between First Nations and non-First Nations would take time (CCFN 2008). Forest Community Corporation representatives identified that First Nations and municipal leaders shared similar practical organizational challenges.

However, First Nations stated they had the added challenge of working in parallel to regenerate their own culturally appropriate governance relationships at the local and regional level (FN1; 2).

As efforts to establish a fully collaborative process evolved, interviews during May 2009 indicated a strong desire to have all the Chiefs and Mayors meet to discuss how working relationships could advance. Forest Community Corporation and Chiefs' Forum representatives (FN1; NSFC1, 3, 5, 7, 9) believed a constructive meeting would help initiate personal relationships and develop understanding of similarities and differences as the basis for a working relationship.

Subsequently, First Nation–municipal collaboration continued through the bridging of the Chiefs' Forum and Forest Community Corporation. By May 2010 First Nations had hosted a cross-cultural sensitivity workshop that was attended by 35 municipal and First Nations representatives. The Chiefs and Mayors had also joined at the Forest Community Corporation fall annual general meeting to celebrate their partnership and joint accomplishments, as well as select new board members. The Chief of the Michipicoten First Nation was selected as vice president of the Forest Community Corporation. As shown above, building cross-cultural relations created a steep learning curve, though many forecasted strength would come through continuation of First Nation–municipal collaboration. As summarized by one Forest Community Corporation representative:

> The more [First Nations] educate themselves, the more they're being active in all the processes, which is a great thing. It's just that it's a new way for us too. It's a whole new kind of dynamic that we need to consider. I mean, it's a great thing. It's really good to see the mayors have been endorsing them one hundred percent. They're supportive of the First Nations in the region as well. I mean, I think we're on to something, with the First Nations and the municipalities working together. We're going to have something here that nobody has anywhere. It's going to be really interesting to see how it plays out. (NSFC7)

The next section discusses lessons learned from the early stages of First Nation–municipal collaboration building and highlights how participants navigated contentious interactions and issues to give collaboration a chance.

INSIGHTS FROM FIRST NATION–MUNICIPAL COLLABORATION

Teaching and Learning

At its root, collaboration involves sharing ideas and resources to solve common problems and advance a shared vision (Gray, 1989; Selin & Chavez 1995). Both First Nation and municipal representatives acknowledged that they had learned from and at times educated one another on similarities and differences in their perspectives and situational needs relative to the forestry

crisis. With a limited history of formal involvement and no pre-existing locally-lead forums for meaningful cooperation in forest-based development and governance, neither group initially had a clear understanding or plan for how First Nation–municipal collaboration and trust should or could be developed.

Through their shared experience with the Forest Community Corporation and Chiefs' Forum, and through active involvement of experienced facilitators, participants had come to better appreciate the complexity of forestry in Northern Ontario, and in their region specifically. Despite their differences, First Nation and municipal leaders learned that they had to work together, instead of competing against one another for development opportunities. This perspective was referred to as "regional thinking" indicating a need to think more holistically about neighbouring towns and First Nations as part of a system: *It's like a card house. You pull one card out and the rest come down. We may not always agree, but we recognize that each card is important. What's good for one is good for all of us* (NSFC1). Reframing supported the development of a common place — and interest-based identity built upon bonds to a shared landscape and common reliance on forest ecosystems, as well as "northern problems" more generally.

During the evolution of the Forest Community Corporation and Chiefs' Forum, First Nations persistently engaged municipal representatives and tried to help municipal leaders understand how collaboration could be achieved. First Nations saw that their own obligation in the relationship was to help inform their potential partners how meaningful collaboration could be built. Through facilitation and asserting their own vision of how to proceed (e.g., teaching municipalities about Aboriginal and treaty rights; critiquing the Strategic Plan and offering tangible alternatives, organizing workshops), First Nations were proactive in navigating a joint way forward.

Importantly, First Nations also clearly articulated their expectations and the need to develop protocols for engagement. They continually emphasized the importance of designing culturally-appropriate protocols for Aboriginal engagement to structure First Nation–municipal, but also First Nation–First Nation relationships. Given the colonial legacy of corporate and senior government control over forestry in the region

neither First Nations nor municipalities initially had a well-developed model for engagement to advance a coherent vision for collaborative forest-based development. First Nations did stress, however, the need to guard against the reproduction of challenges inherent in conventional top–down forestry processes in the region that had often created divisive barriers between municipalities and First Nations (e.g., Local Citizen Committees; Ontario's Crown Land Use Policy Atlas). Emerging opportunities for teaching and learning led to the production of options for engagement and the chance to formalize Mayors' Group-Chiefs' Forum relations as well as identify mutual responsibilities and contributions as steps towards collaboration.

Building Trust and Relationships

Trust is essential to fostering First Nation–municipal working relationships and can be both a precondition and/or a product of collaboration. Those involved in relationship building exercises learned that trust can be delicate and easily eroded. Uncertainty initially clouded communications as First Nations and municipal leaders made "baby steps" towards middle ground. But this challenge was gradually overcome.

The above case confirms that even if there is common willingness to pursue local involvement in forest governance, some measure of creative conflict among First Nations and municipalities can persist. However, it is important to recognize that conflict is not always negative as it can provide motivation and spur innovation (Bullock & Hanna, 2008). In the Northeast Superior Region case, First Nations self-organized to match the level of political organization among municipalities, and in the process created other benefits of having their own regional forum to address political, cultural and capacity gaps. Forming the Chiefs' Forum elevated the level of trust and rekindled relationships among First Nations themselves.

As noted by several participants, a forum for direct interaction and open dialogue between First Nation and non-First Nation leadership was seriously needed in the region to familiarize the long-separated communities. The Chiefs' Forum and Mayors' Group came together to represent such a forum after years of dialogic work and facilitation. Opportunities for periodic,

informal personal interaction led by First Nations and non-First Nations were important to fostering collaboration.

The reframing of the Forest Community Corporation organizational identity to include First Nations (i.e., the second Forest Community Corporation media release) marked a threshold in developing more meaningful working relations. Indeed, an early obstacle was that some First Nations were listed as partners in the initial proposal to NRCAN, but the organizational identity was framed in a manner that, ironically, totally excluded them (e.g., claims that the mayors legitimately represented the entire Northeast Superior Region and use of maps in the Strategic Plan that located municipalities but not First Nation communities) (see Albert et al., 2006). Results show that common identities (e.g., exuded by an organization of individuals such as the Forest Community Corporation) and trust can evolve and be reinforced over time through shared experience. Growing trust among First Nations and municipalities increased willingness to search for common solutions to problems and adopt a provisional group identity for specific purposes (e.g., agreement for the need to work together through the Chiefs' Forum and Forest Community Corporation to address "northern problems").

Empowerment through Sharing Authority and Resources

Cross-cultural collaboration within the Forest Community Corporation presented a new opportunity to reconcile past community divides. Both First Nations and non-First Nations stated that slow growing respect for First Nations rights and leadership encouraged a positive rapport based on common problem identification and benefits of working together. Forest Community Corporation representatives came to respect that First Nations could intervene with project plans based on their legal authority. The early withdrawal of First Nations' support for the Forest Community Corporation proposal demonstrated the strategic use of their political influence. Realization among municipal representatives that First Nation duty to consult was a powerful tool to combat senior government and industry control was a critical turning point in First Nation–municipal collaboration.

Lack of capacity on both sides was another barrier to collaboration that was overcome. However, creation of the Chiefs' Forum and resource support from federal government and other funding streams contributed greatly to enhance participatory capacity. Early municipal actions were exclusionary and initially challenged efforts to build a common identity on collective local empowerment as the basis for further reframing problems and solutions for the Northeast Superior Region. Solidifying a common place-based identity between First Nations and municipalities as the basis for ongoing action required the willing redistribution of power among involved parties (i.e., shared decision making and resources) and the meaningful recognition of Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, which was advanced through First Nations facilitation.

SUMMARY

In light of opportunities unfolding and limitations for First Nations (and towns) in various natural resource sectors, there is a growing interest and need for First Nations–municipal collaboration. This paper showed how some proactive First Nations are working to change their own relationship with the land as well as relationships with non-First Nations. First Nation–municipal collaborative forums such as the Chiefs' Forum-Mayors' Group in Northern Ontario, Canada can help reframe local forest-based development by rethinking regional forest governance arrangements. Restructuring the conventional processes that influence the use and control of forest ecosystems and economic development activities moves First Nations and partner municipalities more directly into the realm of forest governance where they can affect change in keeping with local values and visions.

Shared commitment to adapt to socio-economic crisis and periodic social conflict helped to spark deliberative processes for framing and reframing forest development and eventually led to collaboration. This study illustrated contrasting First Nation–municipal perspectives of the common problems and solutions, identities, and power relations that contributed to developing collaborative arrangements and provided related lessons about building trust and relationships, the role of teaching and learning, and avenues to empowerment. First Nations realized they

had an obligation to teach and inform municipal and other social groups how they wanted to be engaged; they recognized the importance of developing culturally appropriate protocols to initiate and structure relationships with non-First Nation groups. Each group gradually saw the need and benefit of combining and redistributing different sources of power among collaborators to strengthen their network and the common voice for the Northeast Superior Region.

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