Discursive Framing & Community Mobilization:
Stopping the Melancthon Mega Quarry

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The Melancthon Story: 2004-2012

- Melancthon is a small township located northwest of Toronto
- Population of 2,800
- Potato farming, tourism are economic drivers
- Many Torontonians have purchased weekend homes
Beginning the Contention

- 2004 The Highland Companies begin purchasing farmland and aggregating lots under numbered companies but with the stated purpose to be a large potato producer.
- In 2008, local landowners, farmers and concerned citizens began meeting in small groups to discuss the rising suspicions that The Highland Companies had plans for the land beyond farming it.
- Unconventional activities had been seen taking place on the property such as well testing and drilling, archaeological studies, and the demolition of farm buildings.
NDACT

• in January 2009 the first local meeting takes place to discuss the intentions of this new landowner.
• At this meeting the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) was formed.

This group would become the most prominent opponent of the mega quarry.
The Application

• By 2011 The Highland Companies had accumulated approximately 3,400 hectares of prime agricultural land and were still farming potatoes.
• April 2011 the company applied to the Ministry of Natural Resources for an aggregate license.
• The application proposed the development of a 2,316 acre (937 hectare) open-pit quarry for mining amabel dolostone bedrock.
• Proposed quarry would cover of Class 1 farmland
• One third the size of downtown Toronto
• Second largest quarry on the continent
The Quarry

• The quarry would have a rock reserve was 1 billion tonnes.
• The quarry was to reach a depth of 200 feet below the water table.
• The development would impact two of the major watersheds and require that 600 million litres of water be pumped each day in perpetuity to prevent the quarry from flooding.
• In Ontario aggregate mining does not require an environmental assessment.
MEGA QUARRY MAYHEM

THE HIGHLAND COMPANIES THREATEN MELANCTHON WITH 2,316 ACRE MEGA-QUARRY

A limestone quarry the size of 2000 football fields and deeper than Niagara Falls has been proposed for Melancthon Ontario, an area considered prime agricultural land. If the proposal goes forward, this Quarry will be aggressively mined for aggregate—leaving a potential trail of destruction in its path. Even though the Quarry might have devastating consequences for the health, environment and food supply of Ontario’s, The Highland Companies have not been required to conduct an environmental assessment to measure potential impact. Here’s what’s at stake:

BYE BYE POTATOES & FORESTRY
50% of the potatoes eaten in the U.S. come from land where the Quarry is slated to be dug, highland will no longer get the land, but it will be out of all of the trees and homes in its way.

WAVE BYE TO CLASS 1 SOIL
Melancthon’s soil is rated Class 1, placing it as some of the best soil in the world & prized by the farming community. One of the qualities that makes it so special is the limestone based till, which is the mineral being mined by the Quarry.

POLLUTING TRUCKS TAKE OVER
It is estimated that 7200 trucks would travel to and from the Quarry every day along Dufton Road 24. In addition to being the rural route leaving town heading to Simcoe, the road is home to homes, schools, churches and farmers’ fields.

WATER CONSUMPTION SOARS
The area where the Quarry is planned is referred to as “hills of the headwaters” because it sits at the source of four major watersheds. One million people downstream rely on this water. The Quarry deeper than Niagara Falls will need to be filled with 600 million liters of water every day all day, forever. That’s as much water used by 2.7 million Ontarians daily.

SOURCES AND GREAT READS
Read more at http://agbyhelene.ruraldevelopment.ca for great information about the fight against the quarry along with the latest Twitter & Facebook posts, news & information on the battle.

HYPNOTIC
Research & Illustration by Sabrina Sinewezki
Shortly after the application for a license was submitted, farmers, ranchers, and First Nations leaders organized a 120 kilometre protest march from Queens Park in downtown Toronto to the quarry site in Melancthon Township. Over the course of the next five days, over one thousand people were involved in the march and the story was picked up by CBC, CTV, 680 NEWS, APTN, The Toronto Star, and Hamilton Press.
The Call for an EA

• Between April and September 2011, the Minister of the Environment received more than seven hundred letters requesting that the proposed mega-quarry be subject to an environmental assessment.

• September 2011 Provincial government announces that an Environmental Assessment will be required.

• But this of course was not a decision to stop development, it was only a requirement to conduct an EA.

• Hence public mobilization continued.
Foodstock

- In October of 2011 NDACT, the Canadian Chefs’ Congress, and a number of other partners in the quarry opposition effort hosted ‘Foodstock’.
- The event gathered local chefs, famous musicians, and over 28,000 people on the fields surrounding the proposed quarry footprint.
But Highland Companies Continued development activities

- March 2012 - NDACT reported that company employees were clearing grasslands and brush from lands not suited for potato farming, clearing lands on road allowances, mulching areas known to be too wet for farming, cutting swales and ditches, altering the watercourse and demolishing heritage buildings
Soupstock

• Six months later
  October 2012
  Soupstock is held
  in Toronto

• One year after
  Foodstock
SOUPSTOCK - October 2012
Finally the application is withdrawn

About one month after Soupstock November 21, 2012, the application for license was withdrawn.

A spokesperson stated that the company realized that “the application does not have sufficient support from the community and government to justify proceeding with the approval process”
WE STOPPED THE MEGA QUARRY!
www.ndact.com
Some Analysis

• In any contentious situation, there are different stakeholders involved holding different values and perspectives.
• Meaning is constructed as these different events, experiences, facts, and values are emphasized or downplayed.
• Both project proponents and opponents present interpretations of the project that make claims to facts, principles, and values.
• There may be multiple interpretations... not a simple dichotomy.
What is “Framing”

• “Framing” is the process of identifying, interpreting, and expressing a selection of facts, principles, and values.
• Framing is crucial for a movement to develop
  – Internal support, volunteers, donations
  – Public support
• Framing encompasses both the internal processes of how issues are understood and the overt strategy for the presentation of an issue to other stakeholders.
• All sides in a project development process engage in framing...it is not simply an oppositional strategy
Oppositional Framing and Strategy

• It is not enough to protest. Most protests lose.

• It is necessary to engage in “discursive contention”

• This means to challenge the frames of project proponents, and

• To offer counter frames.

• To do this effectively it is necessary to mobilize technical expertise.
Technical Expertise Mobilized in the Melancthon Case

• Materials and analysis were provided to NDACT by:
  • Law students and lawyers
  • Engineers
  • Hydrological modelling experts
  • Land-use planners
  • GIS technicians
  • Business professors
  • Conservationists
  • Soil health scientists
  • Economists

• But cultural expertise was also mobilized
Cultural Expertise Mobilized

• Musicians
• Chefs
The sustained criticism of the mega quarry and the demonstrated environmental impacts made it unlikely that the proposal would pass an environmental assessment.

But this did not appear convincing to The Highland Companies until more than one year after it was announced that an EA was required.

Sustained and informed mobilization against the quarry was necessary - bringing together a wide spectrum of skills.

This was an exceptional effort.

The NDACT movement has continued as – Food and Water First.
Enjoy local food, music and art!
Free wagon rides or bring your own bike to see the farmland saved from the Highland mega quarry!

Be environmentally friendly. Bring your own plate and fork!
Thanks

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References


