Creative Rutland
One City’s Story of Boom, Bust, and Revival

Environmental Studies Senior Seminar
Middlebury College
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Introduction

This community project is the product of the Environmental Studies Senior Seminar (ES0401) at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont from the Spring of 2014. Under the direction of Jon Isham, Professor of Economics and Diane Munroe, Coordinator for Community Based Environmental Studies, students in this capstone course engaged in a variety of community-based sustainability projects under the theme of “Imagining Vermont’s Environmental Future” through the lens of Rutland, Vermont. Our group consisted of four students in the Environmental Studies Program, each with a different skill set and knowledge base: Carly Fink (environmental studies and geography), Carson Hauck (conservation biology), Caroline Santinelli (non-fiction writing), and Zachary Pinto (conservation biology).

Our theme-based community partner for this project was Elizabeth Courtney, co-author of *Greening Vermont: The Search for a Sustainable State* and Gregory Sharrow, Co-Director of the Vermont Folklife Center. These partners worked with us to create final products that communicate stories of sustainability in Rutland, Vermont as a means of publicizing, encouraging, and inspiring a statewide environmental movement. They will use our work as part of an exhibit organized by Elizabeth Courtney and the Vermont Folklife Center.

Our specific project-based community partner for this project was The Carving Studio & Sculpture Center, an organization in West Rutland, Vermont that provides workshops, residencies, and exhibitions for the creation of three-dimensional art on the former quarry grounds of the historic Vermont Marble Company. We worked with Carol Driscoll, the Executive Director, Jonathan LaFarge, Studio Manager, and Robert Black, President of the Board of Trustees to understand the history of Rutland County in the context of the Vermont
Marble Company. Our work aimed to provide The Carving Studio & Sculpture Center with a web-based medium that connects their historic roots to Rutland’s current creative economy.

**Planning Process**

The first six weeks of the semester taught us the power of stories and storytelling. We began the semester by watching the documentary *The Blood in this Town* to learn about the city we would be working in for the rest of the semester, followed by reading *Greening Vermont* and texts from William Cronon, George Perkins Marsh, Bill McKibben, and Nick Santoro. These pieces, along with Nancy Bell and Emmanual Vaughn-Lee’s talks, informed us of the power of stories and how we, as liberal arts students, have the skills necessary to gather stories from others.

Our group felt that Rutland’s story would be told best starting with its rich industrial history. We started by reading works such as *Images of America: Vermont’s Marble Industry* to understand the role of marble in Rutland’s past. We found that the marble industry played a huge role in the vitality of Rutland city and how its obsolescence in the late 1900s led to huge economic ramifications. We then discovered how Rutland has used the creative economy as a means to rebuild its economy and identity. We delved deeper into the concept of the creative economy and found that it has been used all over the country and the world as a tool to help rebuild post-industrial cities.

We first met with our community partner, the Carving Studio and Sculpture Center, in the third week of the semester. We were immediately inspired by the quarries and decided to focus much of our story on marble. The Carving Studio did not express any specific needs or wishes from our project, but instead provided us with space to create what we thought would best tell Rutland’s story from the marble industry to today’s creative economy. After reading William
Cronon’s “Storytelling” and Tony Wagner’s *Creating Innovators*, we felt a combination of long-form written narrative with links to a website would make Rutland’s history accessible to a widespread audience. The narrative would follow Rutland’s history with the rise and fall of the marble industry and the introduction of the creative economy. We also decided to include audio clips on the website from folks we had interviewed throughout the semester to provide additional information beyond what we had written. Further, we decided to create three maps—one that would provide a reference of Rutland within the state of Vermont with an old aesthetic, one that showed locations of creative economy initiatives in downtown Rutland, and one that depicted the impact of the creative economy in New England.

**The Interview Process**

After a great deal of planning, organization, and research, we decided that our greatest source of information for this project would be through primary source interviews. We decided to gather the thoughts and opinions of individuals from two different knowledge-bases: Rutland’s marble history and Rutland’s creative economy. Our goal in interviewing these two groups was to gather information that would connect Rutland’s industrial past to its current creative revival.

Over the course of the semester, we interviewed the following community members: Carol Driscoll, Executive Director of The Carving Studio & Sculpture Center; Jonathan LaFarge, Studio Manager of The Carving Studio & Sculpture Center; Paul Costello, Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development; Dale Patterson, owner of the Hop’n Moose Brew Pub; Rebecca Tiger, Rutland resident and Assistant Professor of Sociology at Middlebury College; James Davidson, Curator at the Rutland Historical Society; Nick Santoro, artist and owner of Poetry in Stone; and various teachers and students at the Rutland High School. To
collect these interviews, we recorded the thoughts of each individual in person or over the phone, and then we transcribed the audio files.

We had planned to interview Bruce Bouchard, Executive Director of the Paramount Theatre and Katye Munger, President of the Rutland Young Professionals; but we were unfortunately unable to coordinate and schedule meetings with them. Our hope is that continued work can be done to interview and incorporate the voices of these and other individuals into our project in the near future.

**Final Products**

Many twenty-first century readers find it challenging to engage with long-form written pieces. In the media, we boil down pivotal global news into one-hundred-and-eighty character Twitter blasts; we list statistics in eye-catching info graphics and photos; we consider visual social media outlets such as Instagram to be critical methods of communicating everything from personal to global changes. With these trends in mind, our goal for our final product was to engage both the old and the new to explore the relevance of Rutland’s past to the stories of the present: “Old” technology—printed pages—and new technology—smartphones, QR codes, and a website.

**Narrative & Website**

With that in mind, we wrote a narrative with photographs and embedded QR codes linked to a website with a collection of audio interviews, as well as a copy of the narrative piece. The narrative paints a picture of Rutland’s vibrancy at the turn of the century due to the success of the marble industry then explains the resulting economic decline when marble was no longer in high demand. We discuss Rutland’s loss of identity and how the national media has chosen to highlight the city’s heroin problem—inevitably creating a poor image of the city. We then
discuss how Rutlanders have used the creative economy as a means to rebuild its economy. Lastly, we discuss the creative economy on a larger scale by identifying other cities that have used it as a tool to rebuild their post-industrial economy.

To write this narrative we divided up the sections between the four us. We compiled historical research that all of us gathered from library texts and online into a Google Doc. This was used as a reference as we all wrote our respective sections. We then compiled all of our writing into another Google Doc. Using this medium made the editing process much more efficient; we could all make real-time changes to the the narrative at the same time. The narrative went through numerous editing sessions, and drafts were given to peers and several Middlebury staff members in order to get feedback from those outside of the class.

Maps

The maps embedded in the narrative were created using ArcGIS and Adobe Illustrator and were created with the intention of providing a spatial representation of the information in the narrative. The first map is a simple reference map of Vermont depicting the railroad system in the state in 1902 (Early Vermont Maps and Atlases collection), main interstate highways (Vermont Center for Geographic Information Systems), and a few major towns and cities. Because it would be placed in the history section of the written narrative, it was created to have an old map aesthetic. The second map depicts a vertically oriented view of downtown Rutland’s creative economy initiatives, as defined by the Vermont Council for Rural Development’s Creative Communities Report. The third map was created after speaking with Paul Costello, the executive director of VCRD who spoke about the size of Vermont’s creative economy relative to other New England states. Following his direction, we consulted the New England Foundation for the Arts 2011 “Creative Economy Impact Report” and created a map that depicts the size of
New England’s creative economy per state based on the number of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, their spending per capita, and employees in the cultural sector.

Map 1: Reference Map of Vermont depicting the network of railroads in 1902
Map 2: Rutland's Creative Economy

Rutland’s Creative Economy
A guide to creative economy initiatives in downtown Rutland City identified and developed in the 2006 Creative Communities Report.

Creative Economy: The sector of an economy spanning arts, culture, business, and technology that offers jobs, wealth, and a unique identity to a community.

**Sustainable Rutland**
1. Winter Farmer’s Market
   251 West St.
2. Rutland Area Food and Farm Link
   67 Merchants Row
3. Energy Innovation Center
   Merchants Row
4. Three Tomatoes Restaurant
   (Vermont Fresh Network Restaurant)
   88 Merchants Row
5. Summer Farmer’s Market
   98 Merchants Row
6. Rutland Natural Foods Market
   77 Wales St.
7. Sunshine Natural Foods
   42 E Center St.

**Arts**
8. Chaffee Art Center
   16 S Main St.
9. Paramount Theatre
   30 Center St.
10. Castleton Downtown Gallery
    Center St. Alley
11. Wonderfeet Kids’ Museum
    17 Center St.

**Recreation**
12. Hiker’s Hostel
    23 Center St.

**Initiatives located outside of downtown**
- The Carving Studio and Sculpture Center
  636 Marble St., West Rutland
- Pine Hill Park
  2 Oak St. Extension
- Rutland Creek Path
  Between Pine Hill & Giorgetti Park.
Presentation

Our work culminated with a presentation in Rutland in front of our peers, our interviewees, community partners, and Rutland residents. The presentation included a slideshow of screenshots taken from our website as well as a short clip from Jim Davidson’s interview. While we found that many Rutlanders know about the creative economy, we hope that our presentation and final product will reach those unaware of the creative economy and provide...
them with a new perspective of the city. We also hope it will reach a wider audience beyond Rutland in effort to tell a different story than the current national narrative of the city.

Group Reflection

In terms of location, this project provided us with an opportunity to engage with a community unfamiliar to each of us. Before starting this project, we knew little about Rutland other than the ways in which it was portrayed in national media, and through our own knowledge as temporary Vermont residents thirty miles up the road. However, after twelve weeks of work, we have come to know Rutland on a more personal level as a place of creativity, innovation, and sustainable community engagement. This project gave us the opportunity to debunk the stereotypes of Rutland, and allowed us to engage with a community outside of Middlebury.

This project also provided us with a chance to both employ the skills we have each gained as students in the Environmental Studies Program at Middlebury College, while also developing new skills that will benefit us in the future. Carly utilized her spatial analysis and cartographic design skills to make the maps for the project; and she learned the process of making a website and creating audio pieces. Caroline employed her background in writing and narrative journalism to co-author the final written piece, and record and edit many of the audio clips on our website; and she learned the challenges and benefits of co-authoring a piece, and how to improve that process in the future. Zach applied his experience and understanding with resource insecurity to understand Rutland’s history and interpret its creative economy initiative; and he learned how to conduct a project that was based on qualitative data collection. Carson used his knowledge of environmental history to make connections between Rutland’s past and its current economic state; and he learned the art of using website and cartographic design to display ideas and information.
Conclusion

Overall, this project exposed us to the instrumental application of the creative economy. While each of us had heard of initiatives that would fall under this economic sector (i.e. Detroit Write-A-House), we were unaware that these were actually part of large-scale efforts used by communities to diversify and build resilient economies. In Rutland, we found that the creative economy model helped the community rebuild its economy after struggling to recover from the decline of the marble industry. In using creative economy initiatives as a tool for economic growth, these cities are able to thrive using economically and environmentally sustainable strategies. These initiatives are not dependent on a single natural resource. Rather, they rely on human capital—a resource more resilient to changing global markets and environmental conditions. By exposing the voices of Rutland’s history and creative economy, we hope to offer an alternative narrative of the city.

References


“Map Supplements for The History of Rutland, Vermont.”

TransRail_RR. Vermont Center for Geographic Information.


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