New-media Social Networks, Issue Networks, and Policy Communities:

Getting and Using Power

by

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We accept the thesis as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract

This PAR project used applied communications to get and use power to influence public policy. Informed by social and policy network theories, the method used Facebook as an organizing tool to create and position a recreation *issue network* in tension with an environmental *policy community*, exploring the concepts of *layering, conversion, exhaustion, policy image*, and *venue* change in an effort to influence policy. The introduction of a new-media social network as a competing influence in a policy network was an innovation, and demonstrated that the "strength of weak ties" may have implications for policy-making. The study concluded that a Facebook group was an efficient and effective organizing tool, capable of organizing an issue network and disrupting the status quo; however, the tightly coupled nature of a policy community makes it highly resilient to outside influence and an issue network may not gain sufficient influence to change policy.

Keywords: Facebook, new-media social network, policy community, issue network, policy image, venue manipulation, layering, conversion, exhaustion

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New-media Social Networks, Issue Networks, and Policy Communities:

Getting and Using Power

This project adopted a network approach to getting and using power. The network

approach to understanding complex systems has found application in both social and policy

research. New-media social networks such as Facebook have emerged from internet

technologies, and policy research has started to take note of the success of social network

theories in explaining the phenomenon of how efficiently new-media social networks can

organize large numbers of people into a group, presumably empowering individuals. Policy

network theory describes policy-making as a continuum between powerful *policy communities*

at one end, and weak *issue networks* at the other. Informed by social and policy network

theory, this study investigated the effectiveness of Facebook as an organizing tool to develop

an influential issue network and position it in tension with a policy community.

Power was used in this project to attempt to influence land use policy. Land use issues

almost inevitably result in a competition for resources, and that tension is aggravated when it

becomes a confrontation between disenfranchised interests and interests privileged by public

policy. In January 2002 the Capital Regional District (CRD) Parks Division on Vancouver Island,

British Columbia installed a gate on Harbourview Road in Sooke, closing vehicle access to old

logging roads. The roads had been used for decades by off-road recreation enthusiasts to

access four nearby community lakes (Island 4X4, 2002; Low, 1999). The installation of the gate

was the implementation of policy prohibiting motorized access, thus privileging non-motorized

users such as hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians at the expense of motorized access.

A participatory action research design was used, placing the researcher at the locus of *centrality* in a Facebook social network to determine if it could effectively organize an influential *issue network*. Specifically, the project used Facebook to organize a group with an interest in motorized backcountry access via the Harbourview logging roads. The Facebook group was used as the foundation of an issue network which lobbied for a policy change to permit motorized access. The research evaluated the utility of Facebook as an organizational tool by analyzing the development and impact of the issue network across the study timeline. It was primary research using a mixed method design that achieved its goal and objective by collecting, analyzing, and acting on empirical data, and evaluating the results on policy. Although the Facebook based campaign was fully invested in achieving the specific outcome of changing the CRD Parks' policy, it was the objective of this research to contribute broadly to understanding how strategic individual communication can empower individuals and shape our world.

The introduction of a new-media social network to construct an issue network as a competing influence in a policy network was an innovation. The study demonstrated the "strength of weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973), and concluded that a Facebook group was an efficient and effective organizing tool capable of organizing an influential issue network. The issue network gained influence through the application of the concepts *of layering, conversion, exhaustion, policy image*, and *venue* change; however, the tightly coupled nature of a policy community makes it highly resilient to outside influence, and it was found that an issue network may not acquire sufficient influence to change policy.

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT

Local Government

This project involves government policy, and it can be said that government policy

frequently solves a problem for one stakeholder by making a different problem for someone

else. Preservation vs. use policy is an example. Local governments in British Columbia are able

to make policy because they are granted specified rights, privileges, and powers by a written

document called a *charter*, which is issued by the Crown. Generally speaking, there are two

levels of government in BC – provincial and municipal. Regional districts appear as a third level

of elected government, and do in fact act as the local government for their unincorporated

territories, called electoral areas. However, regional districts are actually bureaucracies run by a

board of directors. The board is populated with appointees from municipal councils and the

elected directors from unincorporated electoral areas. Although the appointees are elected in

their jurisdiction, they are not elected to their seat on the regional district board. A regional

district is ultimately a bureaucracy, not a democracy, with its organizational structure enabled

under the Local Government Act. The Local Government Act is in transition with the passing of

the "Community Charter" (Buholzer, 2009). The Community Charter is the most recent

legislation in British Columbia reflecting a shift in the philosophy of government away from the

legacy of the Crown-ruled, top-down, hierarchical, bureaucratic structure described by

Maximillian Weber as he theorized about why people obey authority (Weber, M., as cited in

Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). The Community Charter puts power in the hands of local government,

the most responsive and accountable level. An understanding of the statutory autonomy of a

municipality within a regional district is essential to an individual seeking to make a difference,

because it is the municipal government that has the power to influence the bureaucratic

workings of a regional district.

Regional districts perform three basic functions: they act as a government for

unincorporated areas, they provide an organizational framework for inter-municipal

cooperation to advance the interests of the region as a whole, and they serve as an

administrative framework to implement provincial mandates. The Capital Regional District

(CRD) is the regional authority for the 13 municipalities and three electoral areas of south

Vancouver Island (http://www.crd.bc.ca). Regional districts essentially act as service providers

to subscribing members, and one of the services the CRD provides to the region is that of

regional parks. The CRD board of directors establishes policy mandates directing Parks

management, and the dominant policy mandate is that of environmental protection and

preservation. It is the policy prioritizing preservation over use that this project seeks to upset.

CRD Regional Parks

While the board of the Capital Regional District makes law out of policy, it is the CRD

Parks' policy that must first change in order to change the bylaw prohibiting motorized access

to the Harbourview lakes. The CRD regional parks system was established in 1966 and has

expanded to include over 11,500 hectares in 30 parks. In 2000 the CRD established the Land

Acquisition Fund with a tax on property. It has used the fund to acquire privately held land for

parks, with one of the first acquistions being the Harbourview property (Seraphim Lands) in

Sooke. CRD Parks management subsequently gated off the logging roads that enabled

backcountry access in the area. Opposition to the Harbourview gate was informally organized

by unsophisticated off-road recreation interests and brought to the CRD through loosely

connected representatives at multiple CRD meetings over several years, supported by over

1,100 signatures (CRD, 2001). Opposing the off-road recreation lobby were environmental

interests, and those interests are reflected in the CRD Regional Parks policies (CRD, 2001; Island

4X4, 2000). Although CRD Parks management acknowledge that recreation is part of their

mandate, the environmental protection agenda dominates policy so completely that off-road

recreation has been excluded from CRD Parks' definition of outdoor recreation (CRD, JDF Main

Page, 2010).

Did the ecological interest legitimately push out the off-road recreation interest because

it has a meritorious claim to exclusive public parkland use, or, as policy network theory informs

us can happen, did a powerful policy community simply dominate the policy-making of the CRD,

resulting in an unbalanced policy? Can social networks like Facebook help democratize the

bureaucratic nature of public policy by empowering individuals? Some say they can lack

credibility and utility (Hess, 2009; Huberman, Romero, & Wu, 2009), however, policy network

theory suggests a new-media social network like Facebook may be used by an individual to

create an influential issue network, thus presenting a credible challenge to public policy, and it

was this approach that was explored in this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Network: A New Paradigm

As science drills deeper and deeper into the fabric of reality, it is reaching the somewhat

dismal realization that the reductionist approach is close to bringing us to a place akin to that of

a witch doctor wisely examining a scattering of chicken bones and muttering prophetic

pronouncements about the chicken. We may learn a great deal about chicken bones, but if all

that remains in the final analysis is a disassembled chicken disconnected from its causal

network, the bones add little further knowledge about the life of a chicken. Reassembling the

chicken, never mind its life, from the attributes of its constituent parts has turned out to be a

problem, even for a witch doctor. If one turns one's mind instead to the empty space between

the bones, and to the invisible communicative connections forming the causal network in which

the unfortunately demised chicken was formerly situated, the notion of network is approached

(Barabazi, 2002; Latour, 2010). Network is a methodology that makes the invisible, visible. It is

the discovery of order in chaos, of hard reality constructed by communication in a fabric made

up mostly of holes. It is the notion of network that informs this study, which is ultimately the

pursuit of that most sought after of the invisible – power. Two sub-fields of network thinking,

social network theory and policy network theory intersect in this project. Social network theory

guides the path to acquiring power in a group, and policy network theory guides the application

of that power for a purpose.

Social Network Theory

Group organization has long been the means by which humans achieved a goal beyond

the capacity of an individual, and social networking was a method for organizing used in this

project. Although social network theory is well developed, the more recent type of new-media

social networking involving internet technology is as yet an emerging field of research, and

new-media social networks such as Facebook are a relatively recent phenomenon (Ginger,

2008). The undeveloped state of research is hardly surprising, considering Facebook was

established in February 2004 in a Harvard dorm (Facebook, 2010). Kahn and Kellner (2004)

describe the architecture of social networks, and make observations of social networks in

action. Other research has a more commercial, rather than academic flavour (faberNovel

Consulting, 2007). Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman (2007) study how college students interact

using Facebook, and Kleinberg (2008) reviews the convergence of social and technological

networks. Huberman, Romero, and Wu (2009) define social networks of consequence, finding

that many connections simply don't matter. In general terms, social network theory informs

how and why social networks constrain or empower individuals and organizations (Carrington,

Scott, & Wasserman, 2007; Cheney, Christensen, Zorn Jr., & Ganesh, 2004; Kadushin, 2005;

Kenis & Raab, 2003; Kenis & Schneider, 1991; Knoke & Yang, 2008; Monge & Contractor, 2003;

Rhodes, 2008; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Informed by social network theory, it was the

application of theory in organizing a group that was the first phase of this project; the use of

social networking to empower the researcher.

<div align="center">Social Network Analysis</div>

Social network analysis was used in this project to understand the power of the

researcher as it developed. Simply put, the network approach visualizes data, leading to insight

otherwise lost in the abstraction of numbers. The application of social network theory is found

in social network analysis (SNA) methods (Freeman, 2004; Hanneman & Riddle, 2005; Knoke &

Yang, 2008; Scott, 2004). Adopting the network approach, SNA methods draw the links and

describe relations between people as a communications network. This graphically maps paths

of power and influence, providing a visual and concrete representation of communication to

expose power structures that are otherwise invisible and abstract. The people and the links

between them form the objects and lines, nodes and links, vertices and edges, of a *social graph*,

useful for gaining insight into how and why a social network functions.

As stated by Maeno, Ito, and Ohsawa (2007), "The activity of an organization is often

under the influence of invisible, but relevant persons." Because a person of importance can

occur anywhere in a social network, and a social network grows organically from its

connections, analysis of the network requires that the data be unbounded and sampling can

not be used. The term *viral* has been used to describe the propagation of communication links

in a new-media social network, and SNA functions across extremely large data sets. Because of

the scale, automated data collection and graphical representation using computer simulations

are extremely useful and essential for analysis.

Centrality

The network approach is successful at explaining how and why an individual (actor)

gains power or is constrained by his or her embedded position in a network. In network theory,

power, or importance, is measured by *centrality* (Freeman, 1979; Leifeld, 2008; Wasserman &

Faust, 1994). Centrality can be thought of in a rather over-simplified way as a combination of

the number of "hops" communication must make to get to a destination, and the distance

connecting the path between nodes in the network. It generally refers to the speed of

propagation of information in a network, the amount of work necessary to propagate it, and

the amount of control over both the content of the information and the ability to propagate it.

Although there are over 200 *centrality indices*, there are three that are most commonly used to

measure the advantage or disadvantage (importance) of a structural position in a network:

Degree, closeness, and betweenness (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005; Knoke & Yang, 2008).

Degree Centrality

Degree centrality is the simplest and most easily calculated measure. As seen in Figure

A2 (Appendix), in a simple star network topology A is privileged with six *degrees of centrality*

because A holds connections to B, C, D, E, F, and G. Conversely, B, C, D, E, F, and G are

disadvantaged because they each hold only a single connection to A. Degree centrality is the

coarse measure of power, and generally, the more connections an actor in a network has, the

more powerful it is.

Closeness Centrality

A also enjoys a *closeness* advantage, being close to all other actors, while they are

distant (*farness*) from each other. An actor that is close to many other actors is generally more

powerful in a network.

Between Centrality

The third structural advantage enjoyed by A is the result of A being *between* each of the

other actors, while they remain disconnected from each other. From this position A can

mediate and broker exchanges between all other nodes in the network, and thus extract value

or impose a liability. An actor that is between many other actors in a network is generally more

powerful.

Eigenvector Centrality

While centrality indices such as betweenness and closeness seem similar, the difference is apparent as the network becomes more complex. If, for example, a node emerged between A and B, the measure of closeness would change relative to A and B, but not A and the other nodes. A would still have a total advantage of betweenness and closeness, and a higher measure of degree than all other nodes in the network. The new node would be more powerful than A relative to B, and B would become disadvantaged relative to all other nodes, as the new node is now closer to the aggregate network and between it and B. To account for this complex dynamic, an additional metric, *eigenvector* centrality, was successfully proposed by Philip Bonacich (1972) to summarize the multiplicity of variants of the first three measures and generalize centrality at scale across large, complex networks. Eigenvector centrality is the summarized measure of how easy it is for an actor to reach the most other actors in a network.

The Power of Centrality

Centrality is the promise of power. New-media social networks position the creator, or administrator, in a central structural position, and they are free for anyone to create. They self-assemble in a viral manner, exponentiating from internet based connections between members, and are capable of growing to colossal proportions. Facebook claims to have 4 million members (Facebook, 2010), and a recent estimate of the population of the internet puts it at 1.83 billion (Incisive Interactive Marketing LLC., 2010). Although the deliberate construction of centrality by an individual creating a new-media social network like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, and others appear to hold the promise of individual empowerment, the question remains: Does it in fact? Hess (2009) concludes these networks

can be juvenile and lacking in credibility, and other researchers have found that all social

networks are not created equal (Huberman, Romero, & Wu, 2009). This project aimed to

discover if the promise of the power of centrality holds utility.

<center>Policy Network Theory</center>

This work used power to influence policy. Although centrality may give power to an

individual, that power has no utility unless it is put to a purpose. The purpose of gaining power

in this study was to influence public policy. Without the network approach, public policy-

making traditionally focussed less on social relationships and more about statistical attributes

of policy objects. However, policy-making is a communication work product successfully

understood and described with the network approach (Coleman & Perl, 1999; Dowding, 1995;

Kenis & Schneider, 1991; Laumann, Heinz, Nelson, & Salisbury, 1991; Marin & Mayntz, 1991;

Marsh, 1998; Marsh & Rhodes, 1992; Rhodes, 2008). A complete understanding of every detail

of the attributes of the parts of policy sheds little light on the complex network of

communications that is responsible for its construction. In this study, knowledge of the

communicative links guided the application of the power of social networking, connecting it to

the policy network to influence the policy.

Although there is no parsimonious theory of policy networks at present (Kenis & Raab,

2003), policy network theory unpacks into two theoretical foundations: power dependence

(social exchange theory) and rational choice theory (Lahno, 2007; Rhodes, 2008; Thibaut &

Kelley, 1959). These theories essentially inform that people and organizations will generally act

to increase assets and reduce liabilities. Policy network theory describes policy-making as a

continuum between powerful *policy communities* at one end, and weak *issue networks* at the

other (Coleman & Perl, 1999; Rhodes, 2008). Policy-making is very seldom a zero-sum process –

winners tend to win something at the expense of losers losing something entirely different, and

one group seldom appreciates the value of the other's respective gain or loss (Wright, 2001). In

this case, the environmental preservation interests gained exclusive land use at the expense of

the off-road recreation community losing historical roadway access to the community lakes.

Land use policy is a practical, fundamentally political process that has nearly always

resulted in tensions between opposing interests, and in recent times environmental protection

has claimed a lot of ground from other interests. Pareto improvement is the concept of

allocating resources in a way that makes someone better off without making someone else

worse off, and environmental protection generally claims the capacity to achieve a Pareto

improvement (Carraro & Siniscalco, 1993). However, a system is said to be *Pareto efficient*, or

optimal, when a further reallocation necessarily comes at someone's expense. Land use is a

finite system that has had a lot of reallocation of resources since British Columbia was

colonized, and a Pareto improvement is an abstraction with no guarantee of social equity (Bar,

2004). As populations increase and developed area expands within a finite land base, Pareto

efficiency in land use policy is almost a guarantee of social inequity when exclusive land use is

reallocated for environmental protection as a matter of policy. Social inequity can present a

problem for policy-makers if the disenfranchised stakeholders can effectively organize

opposition against policy.

A weak issue network needs a strategy if it hopes to upset the status quo. A land use

study in British Columbia describes policy as a layered object, and examines three processes of

policy transformation: *layering, conversion*, and *exhaustion* (Thielmann & Tollefson, 2009).

Policy goals may be layered into or under other issues, goals may be coverted while retaining the original policy, and the energy of opposition may be exhausted by losing specific issues in the layers of general policy. One strategy for transformation is to keep awareness away from a policy goal as it is either introduced or eliminated. Similarly, as discovered in a study of two rare cases in which weak issue networks successfully reversed the position of strong policy communities (Pedersen, 2010), the key for an issue network to overcome a policy community is to choose its battle and equip itself with a strategy informed by two related theoretical concepts; *policy image* and institutional *venue* change.

Together, these five concepts converge to describe a path creating an opportunity for "policy entrepreneurs to try out new ideas"(Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Policy image can be converted into an asset or liability by changing the institutional venue, it can be layered into or under other issues to exhaust the energy of opposing interests, and policy ground may be gained by choosing a battle that does not attack the overall policy as a new local policy layer is quietly introduced. It was this conceptual path that was explored in the study.

Policy Network Analysis

Public policy is the epitome of the social constructivist paradigm, a communication work product that literally shapes the world in real and concrete ways (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Black, 2009). When public policy comes to ground in land use issues, the dependency of the social construct on multiple human beliefs and intentions is frequently confronted by the human-independent single reality of a physical resource, and a conflict of culture and value occurs. In the case of rural vs. "townie" communities, the *individualist* minded rural folk are likely to be less accepting of the *high power distance* and *collectivist* shape of policy made by an

uptown bureaucracy (Hofstede, 1980). Even locally, a confrontation with power in a policy

conflict will get into the media and involve intercultural communications across organizations,

so a professional communicator is well advised to be prepared to deploy the entire tool set at

his or her disposal (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn Jr., & Ganesh, 2004; Cooper, Calloway-Thomas, &

Simmonds, 2007; Connerly & Pedersen, 2005). A network approach is fundamentally a

communications approach, and communication is a well developed field with application across

disciplines.

Policy network analysis is to policy network theory as social network analysis is to social

network theory. The network approach has demonstrated utility and it is beginning to enter the

consciousness of the public policy community, as seen in the Master's level Social Network

Analysis course of the Central European University, Department of Public Policy (Central

European University, 2009). A policy network can be mapped in the same way as a social

network, plotting and linking the actors of importance and connecting them to the policy, thus

presenting a graphical view of an otherwise bewildering array of communicatively

interconnected elements.

Policy networks are linked interdependent actors such as government and non-

government organizations, and individuals with shared beliefs, interests, and objectives. A

policy network differs from a social network in that it is largely independent of individual

relationships between people. Although individuals certainly hold power within a group, a

policy is a group effort and not the product of an individual. In the case of public policy, the

influence of individuals is highly dependent on and greatly limited by artefacts, such as enabling

legislation. Networks form along a continuum, ranging from *policy communities* structured from

close and stable relationships at one end, to *issue networks* with a loosely connected,

conflicted, and transient membership at the other (Coleman & Perl, 1999; Rhodes, 2008).

Different policy communities can have conflicting beliefs, interests, values, and objectives, and

the relationship between differing networks can be a "crucial" policy consideration (Marsh,

1998). The relationship between the policy network of the CRD and the policy network of the

District of Sooke was explored and exploited in this study.

Data variables are categorized as two types, structural and compositional (Rhodes,

2008). Structural variables measure attributes of the information exchange between actors,

such as public meetings and other events, published articles, negotiation and legislation of

jurisdiction, policy discussion, invited input, perceived level of influence, participation in

decision making events, etc. Structural variables define *how* the actors are communicatively

linked. Compositional variables measure attributes of the actor, such as organizational

membership, members' names, positions, locations, role, etc. Compositional variables define *to

whom* the actors communicate.

Although statistical attributes such as income, education, demographics, environmental

impact, etc., contribute to policy decisions, it is communication (relations) between actors in a

policy network that constructs policy, and two networks can compete for policy outcomes.

Policy network analysis has recently shifted its interest to the communicative links, or relations,

between nodes (actors), rather than the attributes of the nodes. It acknowledges that the

exchanges between actors, such as information, reputation, ideology, common group

membership, and resources can be as important to policy outcomes as the attributes of the

actors, such as who they are, what they do, or where they are from (Leifeld, 2008).

Although useful, the introduction of SNA methods to the analysis of policy networks does not come without problems. Traditionally, policy network analysis has relied upon a tight boundary specification and sampling (Leifeld, 2008). Typically the boundary is set at all stakeholders in the policy issue, or the policy *domain,* and less influential actors are excluded from the data in the process of analysis. However, because an actor with influence can appear anywhere in a social network, social network analysis can neither define a boundary specification nor use sampling without running the risk of excluding the very data it seeks to discover. If the application of social network analysis is intended to discover invisible influence, the boundary specification runs diametrically counter to the goal of the analysis. As stated by Maeno, Ito, and Ohsawa (2007), "The activity of an organization is often under the influence of invisible, but relevant persons." This fundamental clash in methodology presents difficulties for hybrid social/policy network research that will continue to present challenges for further study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Analytical Autoethnography

As I deliberately put myself in a privileged position of power in this participatory action research project, an autoethnographic approach was adopted (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Vannini, 2009). Walliman (2005) differentiates between "gaining experience," and "research." An autoethnography could easily deteriorate into what Walliman refers to as "uncontrolled and haphazard activity." Delamont (2007) is direct: "Autoethnography is essentially lazy – literally lazy and also intellectually lazy." Against such objections, Anderson (2006) proposes five key features to redeem analytical autoethography: complete member researcher (CMR) status, analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of researcher/self, dialog with other research members, and commitment to theoretical analysis.

CMR

Anderson (2006) cites two types of CMR role; "opportunistic" and "convert" (Adler & Adler, 1987). The opportunistic type is when the researcher is part of the group before undertaking the study, hence explaining the interest. The convert type begins with an objective interest, but becomes converted to fully invested group membership during the course of the research.

Analytic Reflexivity

Reflexivity is generally important to the ethnographic researcher for identifying his or her influence in the research (Davies, 1999). However, Anderson (2006) observes that the researcher is co-situated in the research, and consequently should anticipate the effect of the research on his or her own sense of self, attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

Narrative Visibility

Ethnographers generally write themselves out of the narrative to maintain the focus on the "researched." The autoethnographic approach demands that the researcher expose his or her self in the record: no detached presence situated outside of the reality constructed on the written page, but a full reconstruction of the researcher/self as a character in the story (Anderson, 2006; Davies, 1999).

Dialog with Others

Anderson (2006) notes "the potential for self-absorption can loom large," and draws a distinction between evocative and analytical autoethnography. Evocative writing has its place, but it was applied communication with others to "inform and change" that did the work of this project (Anderson, 2006; Davies, 1999).

Commitment to Theoretical Analysis

Although empiricial evidence was the core of this project, the applied paradigm does not demand positivistic "undebatable conclusions" (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). As defined by the "goodness criteria" of applied research (Vannini, 2009), this work was more than merely an autobiographical anecdote in the memoirs of a researcher. Although "whatever works" is the method of applied research, the work was informed by two main theoretical foundations: social and policy network theories, the application of which is social and policy network analysis.

Methodological Integration of Analytical Autoethnography

I identified my CMR status in this research as being Anderson's (2006) opportunistic type, being part of the research group before undertaking this study. By posting to Facebook

and maintaining a journal, I maintained the analytical reflexivity and narrative visibility

necessary to document and expose the effects of the research on my own sense of self,

attitudes, beliefs, and actions; putting myself fully in the story. Dialogue with others occured

naturally through the interactivity of the Facebook platform and my real world activities,

avoiding "the potential for self-absorption" (Anderson, 2006). Policy and social network

theories informed to fulfill my commitment to theoretical analysis. With control imposed by

Anderson's (2006) categories, the autoethnographic approach enriched the analysis with the

qualitative "feel" born of the insight, intuition, judgement, and plain hunch of the

researcher/member in complex circumstances.

The Research Question

The research method was driven by the research question, which in this case crystallized

into: Is a Facebook group an effective tool for organizing an influential issue network? To

address the question, I created a Facebook group called "People who want off road recreation"

to act as an issue network (Facebook Group, 2010).

The Facebook Social Network

The Facebook social network was used to structurally position me in a central position

within the group. Social Network Analysis involves identifying the most important actors in the

social network, with importance defined by more than 200 centrality indices (Wasserman &

Faust, 1994; Leifeld, 2008). There are three centrality indices that are most commonly used to

measure the importance of a structural position in a network: degree, closeness, and

betweenness (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005; Knoke & Yang, 2008). The Facebook platform

structurally placed me as the Facebook administrator in a position of importance relative to the

group, giving me the control and access to the group data necessary to analyze the aggregate

function of Facebook as an organizing tool to establish an issue network. The position also

established my importance in the policy network, as it gave me clear influence in a very large

group.

To systematically keep track of what was happening, I used the Facebook group as a

journal (or blog, in current parlance), posting my observations of events on a daily basis, and

charting statistical data generated by the group. By its very nature, the Facebook medium

naturally complemented Anderson's (2006) complete member researcher (CMR) status,

analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of researcher/self, and dialog with other research

members. Although in a privileged structural position, as the Facebook administrator I had

legitimate CMR status as part of the group. Interaction with the group by posting content

developed analytic reflexivity, established the narrative visibility of the researcher, created the

dialogue with others, and acted as the sounding board on which intuition and insight could

emerge as expressed ideas.

The Facebook group was both a source of, and the container for my data; the

autoethnographic narrative itself. It served as an organizing tool; data were time stamped upon

entry into the Facebook interface, and the narrative was written as it occured. Because the

capability for automated data collection on the Facebook *Group* platform was extremely

limited, the Facebook *Page* reporting functionality was also introduced.

Isolating the influence of the Facebook group was confounded by other potential

vectors of influence on policy and could not be cleanly established, however, I had no prior

involvement with the issue of motorized recreation on CRD Regional parkland, and there was

no Facebook group active on the subject. In fact, preliminary inquiry indicated that there was

no active lobby at all, as any interest in it had long since given way to resigned acceptance of

entrenched CRD Parks policy; the policy image of off-road recreation was a liability in the venue

of CRD Parks, and the issue network had been layered, converted, and exhausted to oblivion as

described by Thielmann and Tollefson (2009). I had a natural zero-influence baseline to start

from, a very clear no-go policy to start with, and a completely fragmented issue network to

work with. The two positions (motorized access/no motorized access) were a binary opposition

(Goody, 1977), with the status quo settled in policy. Although acting in concert with other

influence such as media coverage, word of mouth, direct communication with politicians and

decision makers, and historical lobby efforts, the introduction of the Facebook group was a new

influence about which an inference can clearly be drawn in terms of its effectiveness in

organizing the resulting issue network. The influence of the issue network on policy, although

inferred, is less clear, and remains, perhaps, as a subject for further study over a longer

timeline.

As I set about the research it became clear fairly quickly, and somewhat surprisingly,

that the Facebook Group platform was a primitive interface with nearly no automated

capability of producing a social graph or anything else analytically useful. It simply informed

how many members the group had, and who they were. The Facebook Page had a more

commercial flavour with in-built analytics; however, a Group had members, while a Page had

impersonal Fans. Thematically, the commercial flavour of a Facebook Page did not seem to be a

direction that would evoke much support to build a membership, as the issue of motorized

vehicles on parkland is one that evokes strong sentiments, unlike business. The off-road issue

seemed to be a highly personal choice involving individual identity and a clash between local

off-road culture ("wheelers") and environmentalist "townies," so I elected to start with a

Group. I subsequently established a Page to take advantage of the automated analytics

available to the administrator, using the Group to promote the Page.

Method of Measuring Degree Centrality

One measure of the effectiveness of the Facebook group as an organizing tool was to

quantify the number of members it could attract, so I tracked and manually charted the

number on a daily basis (Appendix, Fig. A1). The membership number is also the measure of

degree centrality of the Group administrator, as explained in Fig. A3 (Appendix). Both the

Facebook Group and Page track the membership numbers. A drop in the group number was a

sensitive and immediate indication of something negative occurring in terms of relationship

between the members and the administrator. The daily membership statistic was also a means

of collating events in the policy network with the development of the size of the group.

Method of Assessing Effectiveness to Prompt Action

The Facebook Group had an Events tab that could be used to schedule an event and

invite the entire membership to attend, a powerful communications tool. A Page had a tool to

send an Update to all Fans, but it did not support direct communication from the Events

scheduler. As I attended key meetings in the policy process, I created a Facebook event and

published invitations to the group. The scheduling interface also acted as a handy data record

and permitted online interaction with the membership. Two important variables in measuring

the effectiveness to prompt action by the group were tracked: Initial response to group

invitations, and real world actions. The number of members indicating they would attend an

event by RSVP was compared to the actual number of members observed attending the event

to establish the measure of effectiveness of the group to motivate action on the part of its

membership. Facebook tabulates four responses to a group invitation: Attending, Maybe

Attending, Not Attending, and Not Yet Responded. These were compared with number of

people invited, and the number observed in attendance.

Method of Engaging in Group Dialogues

Two main interactive interfaces on the group are the Wall, and the Discussions tab. They

both allow any group member to engage in a dialogue, and publish multi-media material such

as text, web-site links, pictures, and videos. Pictures and videos are displayed in their own web

page as they are uploaded through the Facebook interface, and all of it can be commented on

by anyone. The content can be controlled by the group administrator, as can membership in

the group.

Method of Monitoring Media Coverage

Media exposure seemed another variable with relevance, so I monitored local news and

published relevant articles on the group by posting a link to the story, typically available on the

web site of the publisher. The Facebook group facilitates the discourse between its members,

inviting discussion of media coverage and allowing the membership to act as proxy researchers,

bringing media coverage to my attention that I would otherwise have missed. Media publishers

such as the Times Colonist and Sooke News Mirror allow readers to post comments, and the

Facebook group was useful in motivating group members to post comments supporting the

group lobby. Media coverage was one way of promoting the group to increase membership,

and key media stories were collated to the membership chart to analyze the effect of media

coverage on the group membership. Minutes and reports from meetings were also monitored

for reference to media articles to gain insight into the level of importance attributed by policy

makers to media coverage.

<div align="center">Method of Policy Network Analysis</div>

The goal of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of Facebook as an organizing

tool for an issue network, not to analyze either the social network or policy network in depth. In

other words, the study concerned itself with the effectiveness of Facebook as a tool for

constructing an influential issue network, not a deep analysis of either a social or policy

network. However, as an applied research project, the Facebook Group was to be positioned on

the policy network continuum as an issue network in tension with the environmental policy

community, so it was necessary to perform a basic analysis of the policy network to guide the

implementation strategy and measure the influence of the issue network. Additionally, the

organizational effectiveness of Facebook was not assessed simply in its capacity to organize a

group, but in its capacity to organize an *effective* group in pursuit of a purpose, in this case a

policy shift.

To analyze the policy network I searched out and inventoried people, organizations, and

documents with a relationship to CRD Parks' policy. Because policy networks can link policy

processes inter-governmentally, I paid particular attention to cross-over between local

government activities in Sooke and those of the CRD. To connect to the policy-making

processes I engaged the community planning processes both in Sooke and at the CRD by

attending and making presentations as a delegation at key meetings. The primary data sources

for the policy network analysis were internet-accessible meeting agendas and minutes, media

accounts, and public directories, which served to identify organizations, individuals, and policy layers. Policy deliberations and decisions were recorded in the meeting minutes, and they served both as data establishing the effectiveness of the issue network and the historical record of the issue and policy. Media accounts and public records remain as a lasting data repository for future research.

Methods of Strategic Implementation

Layering, conversion, exhaustion, policy image and institutional venue change were explored by introducing tangential issues and changing the venue to the jurisdiction of the municipality. Venue change was achieved by directing the lobby effort to the municipal council, not the CRD board or CRD Parks management. The policy image was changed by contextualizing preservation as a liability in the municipal venue; the loss of back country access in a place with little more to offer than back country access. Conversion was achieved by drawing attention to the impact of the park acquisitions on the municipal tax base, statutory authority over municipal area and zoning bylaws, general local opposition to CRD bureaucratic conduct, lack of use of the park, multi-use of park, and diversification of a resource dependent economy. Layering was achieved by embedding the issue as policy in multiple sections of the official community plan (OCP). The strategy was to shift attention away from motorized recreation and pull interest from a larger population into the issue network, sustaining the lobby long enough to exhaust the opposition. Motorized recreation itself was redefined, layered into joy-riding and transportation, and the issue image was constructed as "just a drive to the lake." The preservation lobby insisted that off-road recreation would destroy the delicate eco-systems and

pristine wilderness. This was countered by shaping the lobby as simply driving to the lakes on

the existing logging roads, as had been done for decades.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA FINDINGS

Key findings of this study were that Facebook was an effective organizing tool that vests considerable power in the group creator. Power is the result of a high measure of centrality directly linked to the size of the group. As the representative of a large issue network, the group creator had the credibility to connect to the policy network, and the use of the various policy network strategies was effective in mounting a direct challenge to the policy community.

The Facebook Network

Effectiveness as an Organizing Tool

The essential operation of the Facebook network was to import members' various email account or contact list entries, and other personal information into its relational database, where it searched out other users with matching entries and associated them to each other. The Facebook statistics page stated that it had more than 4 million users, so with access to their email contacts, Facebook had an impressive reach (Facebook, 2010). It also stated that the average user had 130 Friends on the site. With an email address and a couple of mouse clicks, I could reach out and touch a lot of people with a minimal investment of skill and time.

The group attracted 1,252 members from December 28, 2009 to April 28, 2010; 1,090 (87%) of them in the first two months (Appendix, Fig. A1). The membership number climbed steeply for the first period, and then flattened as the membership began to represent most of the interested people in the local population. In terms of attracting and organizing a large group in a short period of time with minimal investment of resources, Facebook proved both highly effective and highly efficient, as almost none of the members were known to me at the beginning of the study. Both the Group membership and Page Fans demonstrated a similar

development curve, with the Page benefiting from promotion to the membership of the Group.

Media coverage also served to promote the group, although most of the membership increase

appeared to be organic from the basic operation of Facebook. No increase in the rate of new

members joining the group was observed when news stories appeared in the media, and there

was no significant positive correlation found between media coverage and an increase in the

group membership. The single biggest spike in the membership data occurred when a

promotion to "Become a Fan" of the Facebook Page was sent to the entire Facebook Group,

prompting a jump in people joining the Page, and providing an indication of the ability of

Facebook to initiate action.

<div align="center">Effectiveness at Constructing Centrality</div>

There are over 200 indices of centrality (Leifeld, 2008), the measure of importance of an

object in a network (also called a vertex in a graph). As previously described, four of these,

betweenness, closeness, degree, and eigenvector are the most commonly used approaches in

analysis (Knoke & Yang, 2008). These indices measure power, and of the four, the eigenvector

approach was devised to summarize the others and measure power at scale in symmetrical or

reciprocal social structures (Bonacich, 1972). Simply speaking, the eigenvector approach is the

measure of an individual's power to reach the most objects in a network with the least effort.

Degree Centrality

Facebook positioned me as the group creator, or administrator, at the center of a mesh

network, similar to the star configuration in Figure A2 (Appendix). This structural position can

be visualized by drawing connecting lines between each of the outlying network objects, B, C,

D, E, F, and G, as seen in Figure A3 (Appendix). The administrator was more powerful in terms

of degree than anyone else, with a degree metric equalling the number of group members. In this case it was 1,252 by the end of the study compared to an average member degree metric of 130. However, that privilege is fully dependent on the administrator not abusing the goodwill of the group, as anyone can vote to unseat the administrator by unjoining the Group or "unliking" a Page, and a departure en masse would diminish the administrator's power relative to the policy network. The connection to the policy network is an additional degree of connection of great power significance, as the administrator is the only person in the issue network that can claim the connection with any credibility.

Eigenvector Centrality

Heavily weighted by degree centrality, the administrator also enjoyed an eigenvector advantage that no other individual within or outside the group could claim, because the administrator was the only one that could directly message the entire group at once. Others could post to the Wall and perform other functions visible to the group, but they could not directly send a discrete message to every other individual in the group, and the administrator can mediate and broker public content. The unmediated ability to reach everyone in the network with minimal effort is a critical distinction, because an opposing interest could simply join the group and bury the administrator's communication with noise by indiscriminately messaging the entire group or posting offensive public material. The Facebook group established eigenvector centrality for the group administrator with remarkable efficiency, giving me a massive communication advantage relative to the group over any other individual in it. By associating contact information in a relational database, the Facebook network self-assembled, and with a mouse click on the Message all members link, the administrator could

reach everyone in the entire network. Similarly, the Event function permitted the administrator to notify everyone in the group and pass on to them the ability to invite anyone else within their local clique. Assuming the Facebook statistic of an average 130 Friends, the sending of an event invitation or message out to the 1,252 group members could conceivably reach 156,000+ "friends of friends" in two hops (eigenvector) with the investment of a single mouse click by the group administrator and virtually no investment in assembling the network other than a few minutes to establish the group.

Betweenness and Closeness Centrality

Because the group administrator was neither between each of the group members, nor closer to any individual than anyone else, the position lacked power over group members in terms of betweenness and closeness, which is a significant departure from a star configuration and a highly democratic arrangement within the group. Similarly, the administrator is both between the group and the policy network, and closer to the group as a whole than the policy network. From this position, the administrator can mediate and broker group content and communication in (indegree) and out (outdegree) of the network. A message sent out by the group administrator carries the full weight of the group membership, and any message in to the group must be received through the administrator, giving the administrator a powerful advantage.

<div align="center">Individual vs. Group Identity</div>

The entire rationale for using Facebook as an organizing tool, instead of simply pursuing a crusade as an individual, depended on the ability of a group to be recognized as either an asset or a liability to the policy-making organization(s), and the larger the group, the more likely

it would be recognized as either an asset or liability. Policy network theory unpacks into two conceptually similar foundations: *Power dependence* and *rational choice* theories (Kenis & Raab, 2003; Lahno, 2007; Rhodes, 2008; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Simply put, these theories inform that people and organizations make choices based on maximizing assets and reducing liabilities. This principle suggests that a group will have greater prospects for success in changing the decision of policy-makers than an individual, simply because an individual is rarely seen as either a credible liability or an asset to an organization, particularly a government or public policy-making network. Such organizations are largely indifferent to individuals.

The Asset/Liability Distinction

The asset/liability distinction is key to the effectiveness of the group as an issue network. In this case, off-road recreation was plainly considered by the policy community to be a liability to their interest, and by extension, any group associated with the activity was a liability. On the other hand, the group membership represented a potential voting block, which would be an asset to some elected politicians, and a liability to others. While CRD Parks' management largely lead politicians in decision making, ultimately the politicians control the policy when it is voted into law.

Individual vs. Group Effort

Although the Facebook group began as an individual effort, it rapidly developed the credibility to sustain a group identity by pure force of numbers. Once the group had attracted a credible membership number, the identity of the group, originally "People who want off road recreation," designed to attract the attention of individuals with similar interests, was reconstructed into "South Island Motorized Recreation Council (SIMRAC)," assigned an internet

domain name (http://simrac.ca), and migrated to a Facebook Page to distance the more

structured group identity from the unstructured individual identities and unmediated dialogues

of the group. This positioning permitted other groups, such as clubs and associations, to

identify with the organizational identity of SIMRAC, rather than associating their organizational

identities to an individual, specifically me, or an unmediated group, which some might perceive

as a liability.

<p style="text-align:center">Facebook Page vs. Facebook Group</p>

The main difference between the Facebook Group and the Facebook Page was the way

the posting by the administrator was identified. Postings on the group were identified by the

Facebook system with the name of the administrator as an individual, while postings on a Page

were identified as posts by the page administrator as an organization. SIMRAC ultimately came

to be publicly identified as the voice of the motorized recreational community, with me being

identified in the media as "of the South Island Motorized Recreation Advisory Council"

(Cleverly, 2010, April 16; Westad, 2010). Although the media were of little significance to the

development of the issue network, the media carries great weight in the policy network, as

evidenced by the report from the CRD Parks' management to the CRD Parks committee citing

numerous news articles, and that ultimately defeated the lobby to change policy (CRD Parks,

2010, April 21).

A principal goal of SIMRAC was to differentiate the organized and responsible motorized

recreation community from the objectionable acts of individuals, and to distance the lobby

from the image of "The mindless, lazy rednecks who are attracted to these vehicles" (Appendix,

Table A5). The ability of an individual to cloak his or herself in an organizational identity with

the investment of a few mouse clicks is one of the most powerful functions of a new-media

social network. An organizational identity allows individuals to "break through the clutter,"

"unite their members around shared symbols," and "establish themselves as recognized and

legitimate players" (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn Jr., & Ganesh, 2004).

Effectiveness at Creating Public Image

Organizational identity was closely related to public image, and changing the public

image of the damaged "off-roader" identity was an important management challenge (Cheney,

Christensen, Zorn Jr., & Ganesh, 2004). The difficulty for the Facebook group as an organization

was to escape the tarnished image of off-road recreation while maintaining the group identity

associated with the interest. As it was the shared recreational interest that attracted group

members, that interest could not simply be set aside for some other form of identity. A

considerable investment of time was put into carefully crafting messages that projected a

public image of a responsible membership, and that effort appears to have been effective.

Table A4 (Appendix) demonstrates a number of observations in support of this conclusion. As

time progressed, media accounts shifted from identifying individuals to referencing

organizations, distancing the effort from individual acts.

Effectiveness at Communicating the Public Message

Closely associated with managing organizational identity was management of

organizational messages. In this case, there was a clear public perception of off-road recreation

that had been constructed almost entirely from the view of people with a limited view of what

off-road recreation is. References to "finding an area" for it to be practiced was a repeated

theme, as opposed to the request for designation of roadway for access to the lakes actually

being sought. Over the course of the study it became clear that this prejudice was so

entrenched that a modification of the message would be required to cut through the

preconceived mindset. I repackaged the message from "want off-road recreation" to "want

roadway access to lakes." The group was effective in communicating both messages, and it

became clear that the message itself needs to be carefully crafted from the outset to avoid

unintended consequences (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn Jr., & Ganesh, 2004). Off-road recreation

breaks down into essentially two categories: those using off-road vehicles as transportation to

recreational destinations - transportation, and those using off-road vehicles as recreation – joy

riding. It is largely the latter category that is associated with problems, although it was the

former that my primary interest was in.

By the end of the study the refined message was being received by the media and

published, however, policy-makers continued to make statements reflected in media headlines

such as "Push for off-roading in parks faces road-block" (Cleverly, 2010, April 16), and "Off-road

vehicles won't be allowed in regional parks" (Westad, 2010). On April 21, 2010, the CRD Parks

management presented a report to the parks committee with an attachment of copies of

numerous newspaper articles and letters to the editor (CRD Parks, 2010, April 21). Although one

of the letters mentioned the Facebook group, there is no indication that the Facebook group

itself was useful as a communications channel outside of the group itself. The group manifested

itself as somewhat of a liability, with opposing interests clearly monitoring the group as

evidenced by posts on mountain bike forums (simbs.com; vimb.com), and the citing of

irresponsible content as representative of the group. A major advantage of a web based

approach is that the search engines of the internet find and list information with remarkable

efficiency. This was demonstrated by a search for "Terrance Martin," "CRD," and "off-road" or other key terms. By the end of the study Google was listing dozens of links.

Overall, the most effective public message was communicated by a conventional press release and direct inquiry from the media, but the desired message of regaining roadway access to lakes never gained acceptance. Multiple articles appeared in every local newspaper and on television news over the course of the study, attracting attention as far afield as the Globe and Mail (Moneo, 2010, April 11). The local cable news channel sent a crew out and aired a segment on March 29 and 30, 2010, interviewing the Mayor of Sooke and several local residents, in addition to me (Shaw Cable, 2010). However, a telling statement by a former Minister of the Environment sums up the prejudice: "ATVs, by definition, are off-road vehicles. They say they will stick to two designated roads. That is absolute rubbish." (Westad, 2010).

<center>Effectiveness as an Action Motivator</center>

The effectiveness of the group as an action motivator was tested by analyzing the response to real world events posted on the group Events area. Eleven events were initiated, ranging from attendance at public meetings, to a clean up of garbage at a favourite off-road camp site (Appendix, Table A2). When the group event was created, the option to invite the group was selected, sending notifications out to the group membership as it stood at the time the event was created. Members have the RSVP options of "Attending," "Maybe Attending," or "Not Attending," all selected with a mouse click. The Facebook application permits the group administrator to see "Attending," "Maybe," "Declined," "Not Yet Responded" numbers. Table A1 (Appendix) shows the percentages for each category calculated by averaging all eleven scheduled events.

A variation was noted between the group number and the total invited number indicated by the Facebook platform. Upon investigation the difference appeared to be a bug in Facebook that caused it to miss forwarding notifications to some members on a random basis. Individual members could also block group notifications, although Facebook tracked blocked members under the "Edit Guest List" menu selection available to the administrator. It was also noted that the response rate from the group for real world events was not directly relational to the total group number, and that a core group of members appear at each event with little variation. The last event, on April 21, 2010, had the most invited members and was the most important event in terms of policy outcome, yet resulted in less than 1/2 of the expected attendance based on past experience. The event was a meeting scheduled by the CRD Parks Committee at 9:30 a.m. on a weekday, and it is highly likely that other obligations, such as work, carried a higher priority. The meeting minutes demonstrate the close relationships of the environmental policy community, with many of the speakers greeted by first name by the Chair of the Parks Committee, who is also the Mayor of Oak Bay (CRD Parks, 2010, April 21b).

<div align="center">Effectiveness at Fund Raising</div>

A test of Facebook's capacity for fund-raising was arranged with a group solicitation for a "pay to play gate-pass" contingent on being granted roadway access at Harbourview. An event was created titled "First come, first serve: Gate pass at Harbourview," soliciting pledges of $155 per pass. Because access was not granted before the conclusion of the study, it was not possible to ascertain the real world number of contributions. However, at 13.4% of invited members, the observed response was significantly higher than the overall average of 2.82% for

Facebook commitments to attend events, and it potentially represented $25,420 in cash

pledges.

<div align="center">Effectiveness of Group Dialogues</div>

A major challenge facing the issue network would appear to be literacy and education

(Southam Literacy Survey , 1992). As Hess (2009) concludes, a new-media social network can be

juvenile and lacking in credibility, and Huberman, Romero, and Wu (2009) conclude that some

social connections do not matter at all. In this case, rather than an asset, the Facebook group

could easily have become a liability to the goal of changing policy because the content was seen

as a reflection of the people writing it. Although posting on a forum such as Facebook was

unlikely to reflect a high level of scholarly writing, and technical communications phenomena

such as "texting" had a valid reason for the development of writing skills that look illiterate, not

all of the group dialogue could be dismissed as casual indifference to correctness. By

comparison to the Times Colonist comments (Cleverly, 2010) on articles related to the off-road

lobby, the tone was similar, although almost all of the Facebook comments were associated

with the real world name of the people posting them, whereas the Times Colonist postings

were largely anonymous. The group administrator could remove public content, or restrict it

being posted in the first place, but the exercise of that power came at a risk of alienating

individuals and causing a run on the group numbers. Although some supporters of the policy

community's position appeared to be similarly disadvantaged, much of the divide between the

policy community and the issue network appears to be literacy and education. While these

were both compositional variables, they had a clear relationship to how the individuals

communicate.

On March 18, 2010, an article appeared in the Times Colonist, headlined "Off-roaders want to roll into Island parks" (Cleverly, 2010, March 18). It generated 351 comments on the Times Colonist web site, many of them patently offensive (Appendix, Table A5). Examination of the individuals posting material of this nature on the Facebook group indicates that less than 1% of the group membership was inclined to engage in offensive conduct. The observation was suggestive of real world expectations, served as a potential asset for the lobby, and justified the decision not to moderate the group content.

A principal objection to off-road vehicles was irresponsible conduct, and this objection seemed to have been countered by the fact that very few individuals on the Facebook group were inclined to engage in irresponsible conduct in a venue where social restraint was almost entirely absent. To the extent that most people on Facebook opted to use their real names, a certain level of social restraint existed. By comparison, examination of the Times Colonist articles indicates roughly 8% of comments were removed for inappropriate material, most of which were posted by individuals opposed to motorized recreation. The fact that comments could be posted anonymously may account for the lack of restraint.

One of the Sooke District councillors posted a remark on Facebook, the first objective proof that it was a factor in the policy discussion (Facebook Group, 2010, February 9,12:14 p.m.). With only one posting by a person in a policy-making capacity appearing on the group, although it was likely that others viewed the content without engaging, the conclusion was drawn that, generally, the dialogue on Facebook was not helpful in engaging or persuading policy-makers.

Automated Facebook Analytics

A significant limitation of the Facebook Group forum was that it had no automated

analytical tools. While useful, Facebook clearly continued to be an application in development.

Facebook Pages had a more commercial flavour than Groups, and were equipped with a

number of tools. To access the full range of Facebook potential, in this study I combined both

Group and Page functionality. On March 19, 2010 I created a Facebook "Page," which had

analytics accessible to the administrator from the Insights link (Facebook Page, 2010).

The rate of attraction of people to the Page was assisted greatly by posting a link to the page on

the Group, and the Fan statistics followed a nearly identical curve to the Group Membership

(Appendix, Figure A1). The initial high level of new membership sign-up flattened out,

continuing to increase at a steady rate.

A statistical tool associated with the Page was the automated collection and graphical

display of data, visible only to the administrator (Appendix, Figure A4). This tool set is of

significance for the application of new-media social networks in policy network analysis. Data

collected by these tools are compositional variables in traditional policy network analysis.

For example, the demographics were compared to similar statistics collected in a survey

conducted by the American Motorcyclist Association in 1994 (American Motorcyclist

Association, 1995). The AMA study determined the mean age to be 39, while the mean age of

the Facebook page demographic falls in the 25-34 range. The AMA concluded that 91% in the

1994 study are male, while the Facebook Page statistics showed 76% male. These findings serve

to contemporize the demographic of people interested in this type of recreational activity. The

age range is shifting down, and the gender ratio is trending towards more female involvement

in what has been generally percieved to be a male activity. Demographic information is an important tool in policy network analysis, and the Facebook Page function was a simple and inexpensive data source.

<div align="center">The Policy Network</div>

<div align="center">The Network Continuum</div>

Marsh and Rhodes (1992) described policy networks as a continuum between "policy communities" and "issue networks." The environmental protection focus of CRD Parks' policy was an example of the environmental policy community in tension with the recreational issue network, and it reflected a policy tension that was neither new nor unique. The *preservation vs. use* tension had existed since land acquisitions for parkland became mainstream policy (Schultis, 2001). Although CRD Parks' mandate was both environmental protection and recreation, the environmental protection policy community dominated policy at the expense of interests of the recreation issue network situated towards the other end of the policy network continuum.

The membership of the policy community were individuals and organizations in possession of, or with an interest in the exclusive use of valued resources, in this case, the land area surrounding the lakes and the roadways of Harbourview. Both the membership of the policy community and the policy discussion related to this study were summarized in the CRD Parks committee meeting minutes of April 21, 2010 (CRD Parks, 2010, April 21b), and the CRD Parks management report (CRD Parks, 2010, April 21a). Mutual bargaining within the policy community occurred and a consensus was reached in the construction of policy.

At the other end of the policy network continuum was the disenfranchised issue network comprised of the unorganized off-road recreation community, largely individuals and small clubs or associations. The off-road interests were fragmented and had no structural power as part of the policy-making process. Off-road recreation was simply labelled "inappropriate" by policy community consensus and the issue was closed to discussion with no investment of community resources. The resources available to the issue network were largely from individual effort and volunteer contribution, while the policy community enjoyed government funding and organizational support. The challenge to the policy by the issue network was perceived as a liability, and as informed by policy network theory, the policy community moved to reduce the liability with an automatic consensus to counter the policy shift.

<center>Layering, Conversion, Exhaustion, Policy Image, and Venue</center>

As discovered in a study of two rare cases in which weak issue networks successfully reversed the position of strong policy communities (Pedersen, 2010), the key for an issue network to overcome a policy community is to choose its battle and adopt a strategy informed by two theoretical concepts - policy image and institutional venue manipulation. Thielmann and Tollefson (2009) describe policy as a layered object with some policy transformations occurring in three processes: layering, conversion, and exhaustion. Policy goals may be layered into or under other issues, goals may be converted while retaining the original policy to avoid confrontation between policy interests, and opposition may be simply exhausted by losing the issue in so many layers of policy that opposition dies a "death by a thousand cuts" (Brook, Bourgon, & Blue, 2008).

Policy image is subjective – an environmental policy excluding recreation may have had a positive image within the regional venue of the CRD, however, it had a decidedly negative image within the local venue of Sooke, so the venue was moved to Sooke to exploit policy image reversal. Further, the Sooke Mayor (also Vice-Chair of the CRD Parks committee) and council were attuned to the local community, and unanimously supported motorized backcountry access (CRD, 2010, March 9). The Sooke official community plan (OCP) was in review, and layering of the issue was achieved by successfully lobbying to have support for it written into the OCP language in multiple locations (District of Sooke, 2010). Conversion of the issue was done by associating the parkland acquisition to impact of the municipal tax base and positioning it as a zoning violation issue in Sooke zoning bylaws. Venue change, layering, and conversion of the issue served to keep it under the radar of the more regional attention of the environmental protection policy community, and it was written into the OCP without significant opposition. The effectiveness of the approach is demonstrated in comments on the web site of one of the more militant environmentalists: "And yet with Janet Evans' unwaivering [sic] support, the ATV-ers have made a blind-side attack that has at least got CRD's attention and caught us initially unprepared." (Cedar Sam, 2010).

Few things get people's attention more than a tax increase, and the acquisition of the large amount of property in the Harbourview area amounted to a reduction of the municipal residential tax base, which accordingly increased the tax burden within the municipality. The CRD, as a Regional District, was exempt from paying property tax to the municipality. The property constituted an estimated 20% of the residential tax base for the District. When the CRD acquired title to the properties, the District was put out of pocket a significant fraction of

tax revenue in perpetuity, an event that affected every taxpayer in the District. A significant

number of people used to go to Sooke for off-road recreation because of the proximity and

attractions of Harbourview. When the CRD gated off the roadways, the businesses of the

District lost the revenue brought by the recreational activity. Business revenue pays business

taxes, and business taxes reduce the residential tax load. Mayor Evans' view of the issue is clear

in her comments related to a previous land acquisition that had only 1/10th of the impact of

Harbourview: ""God damn them anyhow," Janet Evans said. "How much more land do they

need?"" (Moneo, 2004).

By situating the issue in the municipal venue it reversed the policy image and served to

recruit taxpayers with no direct interest in off-road recreation, whom, as network theory

informed, could be expected to act to reduce their liabilities and/or increase their assets.

Stakeholders included the taxpayers of Sooke, irrespective of their interest in recreation, and

the fiduciary obligation of the District administration demanded their interests be defended.

The effectiveness of the issue network was established at the March 17, 2010 CRD Parks

Committee meeting, as announced in the headlines of the Times Colonist: "Off roaders want to

roll into Island parks" (Cleverly, 2010, March 18). The media exposure finally caught the

attention of the environmental protection community, and on April 21, 2010 it moved into full

opposition (CRD Parks, 2010, April 21b), ultimately affirming the original policy. However, the

attention gained by the issue network resulted in a move by the policy community to use its

resources and protect its interest by facilitating alternate backcountry access on private lands

owned by logging companies. At the close of this study all indications are that legitimate

backcountry access will be established with CRD support on private resource lands.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This project set out to answer the question "is a Facebook group an effective organizing tool to establish an influential issue network?" The most apparent observation to be made is the extraordinarily short period of time between the Facebook group being established and the CRD Parks committee reconsideration of the policy. On an issue timeline of over 10 years, the policy reconsideration occurred less than three months after the start date of this project. Although the decision to reconsider was quickly reversed in the face of massive resistance by the environmental policy community, no other lobby in the entire timeline of the policy produced a reconsideration of the policy. Because a reconsideration of policy was achieved, the conclusion was drawn that the Facebook group was highly effective as a tool for establishing an influential issue network.

The Facebook group was effective because the network gave me power by situating me at the locus of centrality. It communicatively connected me with over 1,200 group members organized around the issue. Although I knew practically none of the group members, and communicated directly with very few of them on an individual basis, the group gave me an issue network with the capability of influencing the decision makers of the policy community. Once organized, I adopted the tactics of *institutional venue change, policy image manipulation, layering, conversion*, and *exhaustion*. By shifting the institutional venue and constructing a negative policy image, the issue network was joined to the policy community of the District of Sooke, and the competition ceased to be between an issue network and a policy community. The District of Sooke was itself a policy community, and by aligning with it, the goal of the issue network was layered into the objectives of a competing network, attention diverted from the

original issue, and resistance from opposition exhausted by diffusion as the issue network

choose a local battle and left the overall policy unthreatened. The Sooke OCP was a policy

document that had a five year review cycle, and at the close of the study there was no active

opposition to the supporting language put in it for off-road recreation. Layering had the effect

of drawing in other issue networks, building critical mass as multiple issue networks joined the

policy community of the District of Sooke, and ultimately, as informed by Marsh (1998), the

relationship between differing policy networks was the "crucial" policy consideration. Simply

put, the alienation of the District of Sooke was a liability that the CRD acted to reduce.

At the close of the study motorized access on parkland would not be permitted, and a

CRD-supported agreement for legitimate off-parkland backcountry access was likely, but had

not been achieved. However, the very fact that a process was set in motion in what was

previously static policy, barren of opportunity for "policy entrepreneurs to try out new ideas"

(Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), suggests Facebook has potential as a social organizing tool that

equips an individual with real power to shape policy. A communications professional need only

follow in the footsteps of "Shakespeare as a skilled craftsman fully aware of his tools and how

to use them" (Allen, 1975).

<center>Limitations of the Study</center>

This study adopted a network approach, which examines entire systems as objects with

little concern for the attributes of the constituent elements. It was also a PAR case study, and as

such can be criticized as bordering on the anecdotal. Its conclusions are open to argument, and

its method was messy. However, those are limitations accepted in a PAR project. By adopting

the network approach, the study achieved its goal, and hopefully contributed to the

understanding of how individual communication can empower people and shape the world. It

remains a task for others to satisfy the rigours of other research paradigms.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

This work demonstrated that social networks can be used to empower an individual to

influence public policy. Policy is sexy. It is scalable, has definable edges, and literally shapes the

world. In fact it can be reasonably argued that policy moves mountains, and without it the

machines lie idle. Policy can also create social inequity, and it is subject to the basest of human

motive. Hidden influence in organizations is an important issue, and the public interest is

served by research exposing the paths of power and influence in the sphere of public policy.

Social network analysis holds the potential to expose such hidden influence and democratize

the bureaucratic nature of government. Powered by technological advances, its methods are

capable of aggregating and analysing colossal data sets, expanding the domain of social

network research into that of policy networks. As social and policy networks both expand with

globalization, and converge with technology, research situated in the domain of professional

communication expertise can turn its attention to the fundamentally communicative nature of

policy and add greatly to a body of scientific knowledge pursuing an ever expanding knowledge

network reaching over the currently visible horizon.

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Appendix

Table A1

Average response of membership across all scheduled events

Average Invited	Observed Attendance	Attending	Maybe Attending	Not Attending	Not Yet Responded
906	1%	2.82%	10.3%	37%	35.1%

Table A2

Observed numbers of group members responding to scheduled events

Event Date	Total Invited	Observed Attendance	Attending	Maybe Attending	Not Attending	Not Yet Responded
01/25/10	751	5	25	96	316	314
01/26/10	839	20	55	125	290	369
02/04/10	745	4	17	88	400	240
02/04/10	605	8	17	109	330	149
02/08/10	931	15	33	127	489	282
02/11/10	817	0	12	118	421	266
02/11/10	996	0	9	78	343	566
02/13/10	920	20	65	165	441	249

Table A2, cont.

03/08/10	1076	3	40	26	114	932
03/31/10	1039	3	20	125	593	301
04/21/10	1246	10	14	102	502	628

Table A3

Commitments of cash

Invited	Observed Attendance	Attending	Maybe Attending	Not Attending	Not Yet Responded
1228	N/A	164	166	544	354

Table A4

Comments Reflecting Shift in Public Image Over Time

"Wheelers, or off-roaders, packed the council chambers at the Sooke Municipal Hall on Tuesday, Jan. 26, all but shutting out others who wished to speak at the public hearing for Capital Regional District Bylaws…"(Raits, 2010, January 29).

"About 450 people have signed up with a new Facebook group called "People Who Want Off Road Access." That's fewer than the 1,089 who joined "People Who Want A Tim Hortons In Sooke," but still not bad for three weeks." (Knox, 2010).

Table A4, cont.

""Off-road interests are being pushed aside by environmental interests," said Terrance Martin of Sooke, who urged Capital Regional District directors to strike an advisory committee to work with ATV groups." (Lavoie, 2010).

"This motorized user group is not particularly well organized" (Dan, 2010).

"…the ATVers have run a very slick campaign, catching most of the environmental groups and like-minded people off-guard." (Burger, 2010).

"But Terrance Martin of the South Island Motorized Recreation Advisory Council, who has asked the CRD to open the Harbourview Road gate in Sooke for access…"(Cleverly, 2010, April 16).

"But Terrance Martin of the South Island Motorized Recreation Advisory Council said off-roaders don't want to tear up mountainsides and destroy habitat…"(Westad, 2010).

"Spurred in part by a persistent and well-spoken lobby, the Capital Regional District parks committee…"(Sinclair, 2010, March 23).

"Terrance Martin, on behalf of the South Island Motorized Recreational Advisory Council, insists the group has no designs on covenanted property, only on existing roadways…"(Sinclair, Parks use groups remain entrenched, 2010, April 20).

Table A4, cont.

"…it's time that we listened to them. They're a large bunch, they're tax payers, they pay into

the park acquisition fund…"(Evans, 2010)

Table A5

Comments from the Times Colonist Web Site

"Do not open those gates to Harbourview ever again! The disgusting mess left by the

druken losers back when they had access is still everywhere." (Cleverly, 2010, March 18, 11:15

a.m.).

"The mindless, lazy rednecks who are attracted to these vehicles would never walk into

these areas." (Cleverly, 2010, March 18, 2010, 11:26 a.m.)

"*This comment has been removed because it contains material which was deemed*

inappropriate." (Cleverly, 2010, March 18, 2010, 12:21 p.m.)

"Put down your beer and pick up book and learn about what the impact of your oh so

wholesome activity is on these areas." (Cleverly, 2010, March 18, 2010, 8:41 p.m.)

"WAY TO DESTRUCTIVE

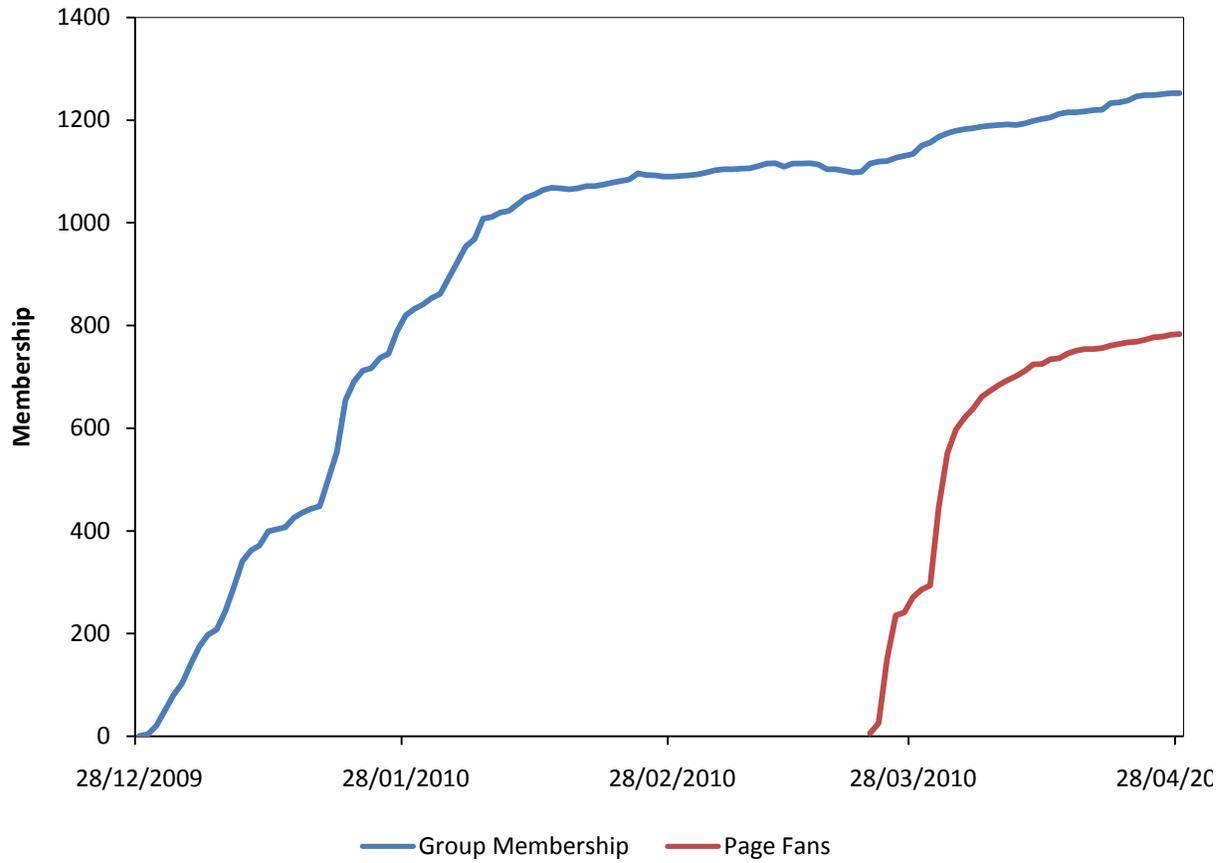KEEP THESE YAHOOS OUT OF OUR PARKS" (Cleverly, 2010, March 19, 2010, 8:35 p.m.)

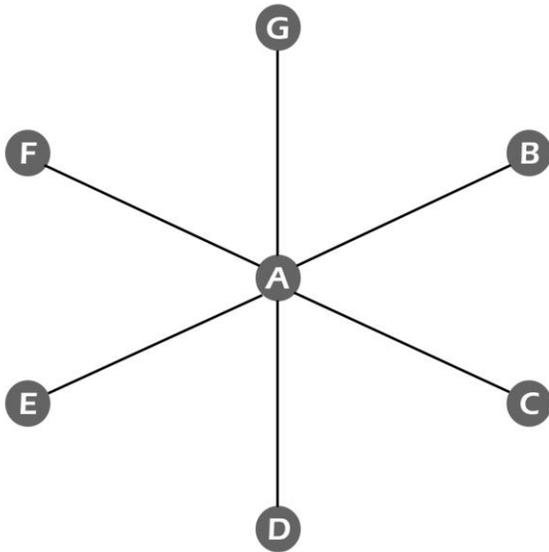*Figure A1*. Chart of membership development

Figure A2. Centrality in a star network.

Power is generally recognized as a property of social organization, and an individual gains

power from holding a privileged position in a social network. For example A can gain resources

from any or all of B, C, D, E, F, and G, while they can only go to, or through A. Adapted from

Hanneman, R. A., & Riddle, M. (2005). Introduction to social network methods: Chapter 10:

Centrality and power. Retrieved May 3, 2010, from Robert Hanneman's Homepage:

http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C10_Centrality.html. A enjoys the power of
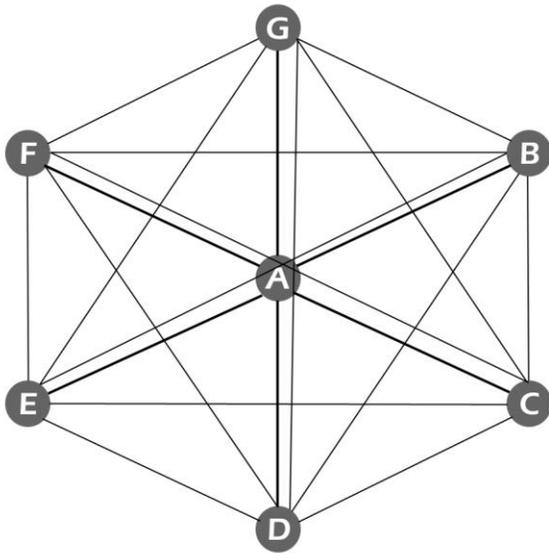
six degrees of centrality.

Figure A3. Centrality in a mesh network.

In a mesh network topology the power wielded by A is more democratic, as A does not enjoy

exclusive betweenness or closeness. However A may still be privileged by degree centrality if

the others are disconnected on any link. The Facebook group is a mesh network with the

administrator enjoying a much higher degree centrality as a result of the group members being

linked, on average, to 130 peers, while the group administrator is linked to all 1,200+ members.

Adapted from Hanneman, R. A., & Riddle, M. (2005). *Introduction to social network methods:*

Chapter 10: Centrality and power. Retrieved May 3, 2010, from Robert Hanneman's Homepage:

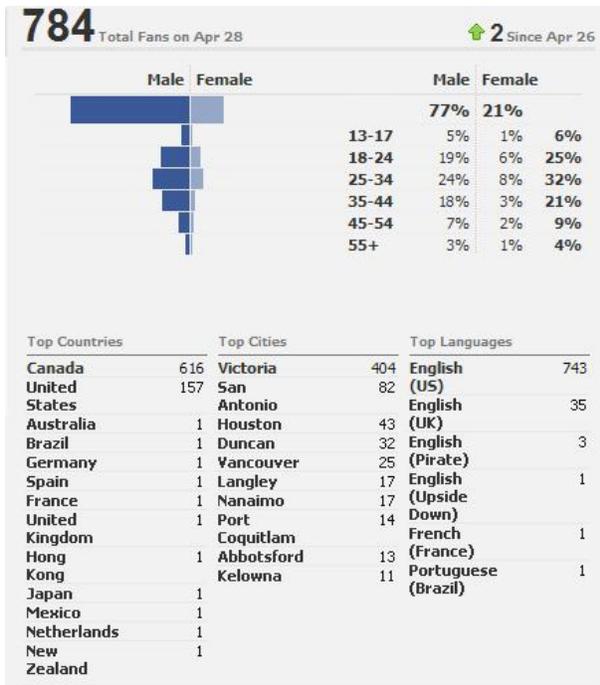http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C10_Centrality.html.

Figure A4. Demographic from Facebook Page.

Figure Captions

Figure A1. Chart of membership and key events.

Figure A2. Power is generally recognized as a property of social organization, and an individual gains power from holding a privileged position in a social network. For example A can gain resources from any or all of B, C, D, E, F, and G, while they can only go to, or through A. Adapted from Hanneman, R. A., & Riddle, M. (2005). Introduction to social network methods: Chapter 10: Centrality and power. Retrieved May 3, 2010, from Robert Hanneman's Homepage: http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C10_Centrality.html. A enjoys the power of six degrees of centrality.

Figure A3. In a mesh network topology the power wielded by A is more democratic, as A does not enjoy exclusive betweenness or closeness. However A may still be privileged by degree centrality if the others are disconnected on any link. The Facebook group is a mesh network with the administrator enjoying a much higher degree centrality as a result of the group members being linked, on average, to 130 peers, while the group administrator is linked to all 1,200+ members. Adapted from Hanneman, R. A., & Riddle, M. (2005). Introduction to social network methods: Chapter 10: Centrality and power. Retrieved May 3, 2010, from Robert Hanneman's Homepage: http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C10_Centrality.html.

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