Knotty Tales: Canadian Staples and Post-Staples Forest Policy Narratives in an Era of Transition from Extractive to ‘Attractive’ Industries

Jocelyn Thorpe, L. Anders Sandberg

Abstract

Political economists have typically understood the forest sector as part of the Canadian staples economy: early European settlers used forests for fuel, farming and construction purposes, and industry began later to cut raw timber and manufacture pulp and paper for export. According to the staples narrative, introduced by William Mackintosh and elaborated by Harold Innis, in order to settle the land and extract its resources, including forest products, colonists and settlers built an entire society and economy “organized around the labour force, technological regime, legal order, and financial system needed to serve the ends of resource extraction”. Building upon Innis’ work, a nationalist political economy school has criticized the domination of the Canadian resource economy by foreign capital, markets and technology, and advocated a ‘made-in-Canada’ industrial strategy. Studies on the forest sector have been especially prominent in probing the contingencies, specificities, and possibilities of building a forest policy that is more socially equitable, more value-added oriented, and more integrated into the national economy. More recently, however, many observers in the political economy and policy community tradition have noted a shift from an “extractive to an attractive model of development” within the forest sector, or what Hutton calls the “staples in decline syndrome”. Though he concedes that it is possible to overstate the staples in decline syndrome, he maintains that “we may be at the advent of a ‘post-staples’ state, in which resource extraction is essentially a residual of the national economic structure, a vestige of an historical development which sustained many Canadian regions”. In order to evaluate the extent to which Hutton’s observations ring true, this chapter grapples with divergent methods of approaching and analysing forestry.

Keywords

Forests, Resources, Canada

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Knotty Tales: Canadian Staples and Post-Staples Forest Policy Narratives in an Era of Transition from Extractive to ‘Attractive’ Industries. 2007 in Canadian Political Science Review. According to the staples narrative, introduced by William Mackintosh and elaborated by Harold Innis, in order to settle the land and extract its resources, including forest products, colonists and settlers built an entire soci more. 8 Citations. Add To Collection. The staples theory can also be used to gain an understanding of Canadian society. Fisheries to Fur Trade to Wheat Economy. Instead, they had to be concerned that their own infant industries would be strangled in the cradle by cheap imports from both Britain and the United States. Unlike Canada, the United States could use tariff barriers to keep out British wares, and with its rapidly growing urban and slave population in the 19th century, the United States could absorb far more manufactured goods. The legacy of structural features associated with staples is seen in a variety of areas in the 20th century. Some of the following sections in this chapter explore the persistence of Canada’s staples economy from wheat and fish through oil and gas.