

FROM BOX SUPPERS AND CARD GAMES TO VINEYARDS AND VIEWSCAPES:  
COMMUNITY DISCOURSE IN THE EXURBAN AMERICAN WEST

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A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
University of Missouri

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

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DECEMBER 2009

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

FROM BOX SUPPERS AND CARD GAMES TO VINEYARDS AND VIEWSCAPES:  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my advisor Dr. Soren Larsen. His understanding, motivation, and guidance were irreplaceable. Thank you, Dr. Larsen, for supporting and challenging me along the way. I could not have done this without you.

Dr. Urban and Dr. O'Brien, I give you my sincerest thanks and appreciation. Thank you for listening when I needed to speak and for questioning when I needed to be challenged. Not only have you helped me with this research but also I hope, to have become a better researcher.

I am grateful to my fellow colleagues in the "Red Canyon Research Group" for your encouragement and critical eyes, both in the field and out. I would like to also thank the residents of Garden Park and Fremont County without whose open dialogue and kind natures this thesis would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

Generalizing to the process of creating meaning amid exurbanization, this study considers how residents of Fremont County, Colorado have constructed community meaning as amenity-driven migration has given rise to local social and economic reorganization. I use a nested discourse analysis, first at the single-valley scale of Garden Park and second at the countywide scale, to explore how residents define what it means to live in their dynamic landscape. Results suggest that residents from across “traditional” old-timer/newcomer divides often share meanings of community and that these meanings are layered within discursive interactions that occur above and below the scale of inquiry.

Residents respond to their social and physical environments, their (often contested) construction of them, and act from within multiple discursive understandings. By focusing on a single example – the exurbanization of Fremont County, Colorado – this study explores the face of the exurban community in the American West and suggests that multi-layered local discourse analysis of the dynamics of exurban community interaction might provide insight for future community well-being.

## Chapter One: Introduction

In many places in today's American West, relatively stable ranching communities have undergone rapid transformation as amenity-driven migration and urbanization have led to a period of social and economic restructuring. This work focuses on the particulars of one case of exurban development in Colorado's Rampart Range. The analysis considers perceptions of community as such reorganization has unfolded in Fremont County, Colorado, first in a micro-scale analysis of resident discourse in Garden Park, a small valley in the northern part of the county, and subsequently in a countywide discourse analysis of the construction of community meanings during the exurban transition.

Studying the dynamics of exurban community interaction provides insight into future community well-being beyond simply identifying changes to the built and natural landscapes (Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff 2008). Generalizing to the process of creating *meaning* in an exurbanizing setting, this study considers how residents have constructed community amidst the shifting social and physical landscapes of the exurban process. I explore how residents themselves define what it means to live in Garden Park and Fremont County, and how their relationships and perspectives lend meaning to their valleys and lives. The analysis concentrates on the meanings associated with community, the social interactions that underpin community dynamics, and the places through which new community relationships form.

Evidence of rapid change appears at first glance as an increase in Fremont County's infrastructure: new roads and new houses, a decrease in cattle ranching—the traditional *métier* of valley families—an increase in non-ranching residents, weekly deliveries of potable water, and most plainly a change in land-use practices (e.g., increases in amenity-driven residential development, llama breeding farms, cultivation of small-scale grape vineyards, other “hobby” farms and ranches). Whereas current studies on exurbia center on the drivers of social and landscape change, the larger economic and political context of rural restructuring and on landscape fragmentation, this investigation is centered on the people of the area as they tell who they are and what it means to live together in their changing county.

This research was motivated by a lack of holistic knowledge regarding in situ socio-cultural processes amid exurbanization as well as the popular and scholarly uncertainty concerning continued development and in-migration in the perceived absence of meaningful exchanges among property developers, homebuyers, scholars, and existing residents. It centers on notions of the new and the old, and on the difficult task of discerning what community means at a moment when traditional understandings confront non-traditional transformations of a place. By focusing on a single example – the exurbanization of Fremont County, Colorado – I explore the complex face of the exurban community in the American West.

This thesis is organized at two scales of analysis: a single mountain valley and the county as a whole. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature of exurban development and community social change and sets the contextual background for Fremont County,

Colorado. Chapter Three explains methods used for a discourse analysis of resident perceptions of community. Chapter Four presents results of a discourse analysis of resident perceptions in Garden Park. Chapter Five presents results of a similar analysis at the level of Fremont County, in particular focusing on community as “co-opetition”. Chapter Six draws connections between the findings in the two previous chapters, discusses layers of community meaning across social scales, and offers concluding thoughts.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **An exurbanizing American West**

Rural America has undergone tremendous change in the past thirty years, particularly in amenity-rich areas that have attracted significant numbers of new residents. Exurban development of late twentieth-century rural North America, however, is distinct from past technological revolutions such as those that introduced the tractor or the combine harvester to industrialize the agrarian landscape. In place of alterations in resource extraction or production cycles, many regions today see a change to the landscape stemming from marketing the consumption of non-industrial amenities. Unlike the expansive and sprawling suburban development that stretches from an urban core outward toward rural districts, exurbanization is characterized by spotty or leapfrog residential development situated within commuting distance of an urban center.

A growing body of literature investigates the links between exurbanization and population density or sprawl, fragmented development patterns, or changing land-use patterns. And though there is a common understanding of exurban development as referring to rapid, clustered population growth in low-density areas outside of urban centers (c.f. Sultana and Weber 2007), there is little agreement about precisely what exurbanization is. In investigating the “semantic uncertainty of the exurban concept,” Ban and Ahlqvist (2009) review six definitions of exurbanization based on one or more characteristic attribute: distance to an urban center, population density, commuting time to an urban center, population ethnicity, or household income. They suggest that a

common stumbling block is analysis based on the conceptualization that exurbia has fixed boundaries and propose fuzzy-set theory to deal with the imprecise borders of exurbia (Ban and Ahlqvist 2009). In this conceptualization, any given area can exhibit exurban characteristics expressed as an intensity of membership: the five-acre exurban parcels outside of a major Midwestern city will share some characteristics with the exurban development studied here (larger-than-average lot sizes; residents commute regularly to the urban center for work and services), but exurban areas in Colorado also include issues related to aridity and proximity to public lands. Notwithstanding, the focus of this inquiry into exurbia is not the mechanics of change that such development brings to a landscape, rather the relationships of meaning among the individuals who intentionally or unintentionally find themselves in exurban space (Harper 1987).

Across the American West, real-estate developers have purchased, subdivided, and sold former agricultural land, touting its panoramic vistas and the opportunity to return to what they portray as a more idyllic lifestyle: a detached home, open vistas, and ready access to nature (McCarthy 2008). The allure of exurban development is one reason for its uneven spread; it is purposefully situated in areas of high natural amenities and aesthetic appeal but with access to the city when needed. Developers encourage discontinuous residential sprawl as they seek to avoid the negative externalities associated with cluttering the landscape with houses, which would undermine the “natural” landscape aesthetic and by extension, value of exurban real-estate. Local and regional land-use policies also can encourage sprawl by either mandating large lot sizes or more simply by not managing growth in an effective and assertive manner. Exurban development grew more than 15% in the 1990s in Colorado, New Mexico, Montana,

Idaho, Nevada, and Utah, and it was particularly concentrated near federal lands and in areas of scenic mountainous terrain (Purdy 1999).

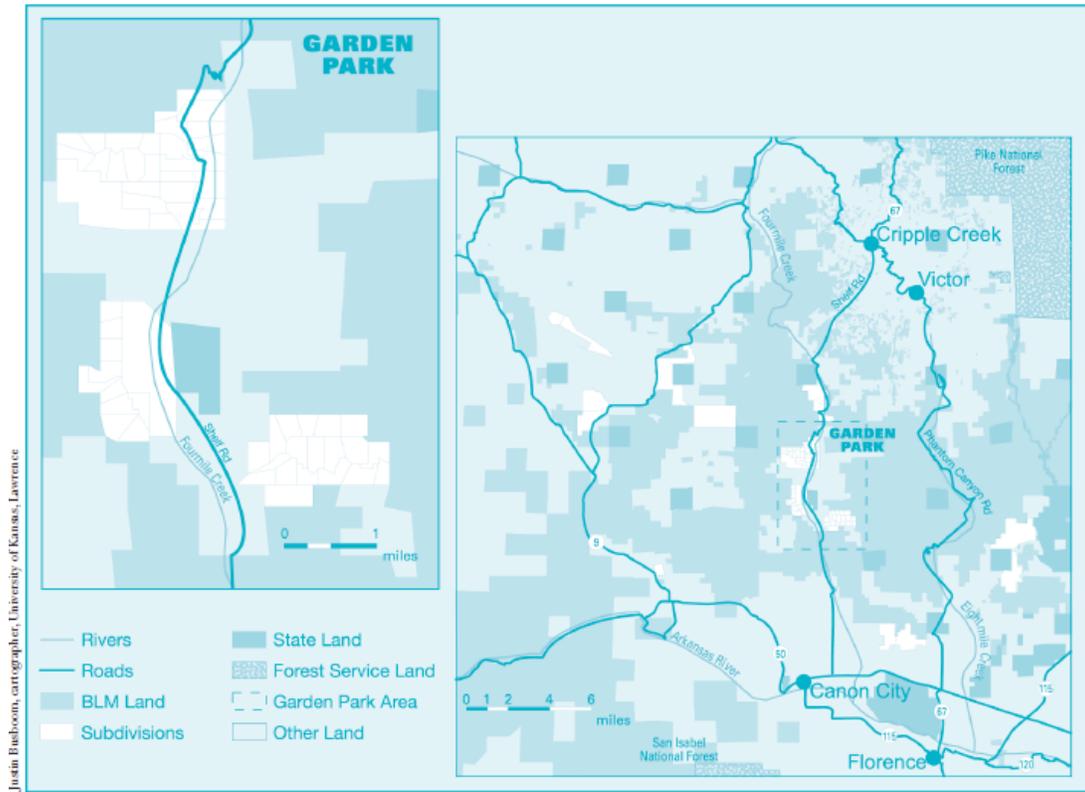
Recent studies of exurbia in the American West have turned toward the investigation of the cultural and social aspects of landscape change in exurban communities (Larsen et al. 2007; Walker and Fortmann 2003; Walker 2003). This study continues in the same path yet restricts its focus to the social construction of the community meaning and the contexts of place associated with this process at the scales of a single valley and the county of Fremont in southern Colorado (Larsen et al. 2007).

Garden Park is the hub of a multi-year study of adaptive learning networks in the exurban developments of Fremont County, CO (See Figure 2.1). Recent arrivals to exurbanizing settings possess a range of environmental knowledge, from little at all to specialized values and perspectives. They often know little about the landscapes in which they find themselves, and their individual decisions may contribute to the degradation and fragmentation of their new surroundings (Sheridan 2001). Consequently, new residents often encounter a steep learning curve regarding environmental and cultural resources. With little knowledge about how recent arrivals adapt environmental know-how to their new surroundings or how this knowledge expands with increased social interaction in their new communities, local decision makers find community level environmental decisions to be increasingly complex (Walker and Fortmann 2003; Gosnell, Haggerty, and Travis 2006).



**Figure 2.1:** Fremont County is located in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains along the Arkansas River in south central Colorado. Garden Park is found in the northern section of the county, between Cañon City to the south and Cripple Creek to the north.

*Maps courtesy of Justin Busboom, University of Kansas.*



I designed my research to operate in this context and to explicitly consider the socio-cultural dimensions of the exurban change occurring in the county, in particular in the valley of Garden Park, and how residents define and engage community amid their changing social and physical settings. Meanings of community are neither simple nor static, but instead fluctuate in concert with changes in social form and function. Consider the radical demographic and social change occurring in this “new” American West of interspersed ranches, ranchettes, and amenity-consumption-inspired homes. More importantly for this study, however, is the fact that meanings circulate across scales (Paasi 1991). In this study, I look at how the localized meanings that have developed among the residents of Garden Park fit into a larger discourse of community at the scale of Fremont County.

### **Community as relationship**

As with *nature*, a single notion of *community* is not adequate to represent the variety present in this or any other community. Nor is one community more real or “authentic” than another (Delanty 2003). My aim is not to consider community as an aspect of propinquity, that is, I do not propose that physical closeness alone breeds a sense of social connection (Bradshaw 2008) But I do limit the physical area of this study to residents at two scales, Fremont County and Garden Park, because interactionist and network theories have shown that the strongest community associations are typically associated with “bounded” networks (Shibutani 1961). Although bounded networks do not need to be localized, the premise of this study is that county and valley serve as

bounded (though not mutually exclusive) contexts for such networks, both historically and possibly in the future. Nor do I consider community in political terms as a replacement for higher levels of governmental authority (Herbert 2005). Rather, I use *community* to refer to the human interaction established by social relationships as these occur in situ. This is not to deny the possibility of community relationships beyond the county or valley, but rather to set the context for the analysis presented in this study. Specifically, the ethnographic results document the dynamic creation of shared space and identity over a relatively short period of time.

The distinction between stable and transitional communities is worth considering given the focus of this study. Meaningful behavior is learned and requires sustained connection and interaction over time (Littrell and Littrell 2006). Davidson-Hunt (2006) has demonstrated how indigenous communities sustain these interactions through processes of adaptive learning and reciprocal relationships. The exurban milieu, by contrast, throws the dynamics of learning and interaction into particular relief as it is far from certain that these interactions will be sustained over time. In fact, the entire question of community resilience and cohesion is an open question in the exurban context (Charnley, McLain, and Donoghue 2008).

When defined as sustained relationships or interaction, community does not fit the modernist notion of social-technological change eroding the so-called “traditional” community (Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Domahidy 2003). Similarly, in the exurban context, community dynamics are not as simple as a newcomer/old-timer divide. In his discussion of *personalism*, Delanty centers on the interplay between the individual and

his or her participation in community: self-fulfillment, solidarity, and collective responsibility (Delanty 2003). Instead of viewing identity as a zero-sum friction between individuality and community, personalism suggests that individualism and identity may be strengthened through conflict without damage to larger community. Self and community are shaped through dynamic interaction. Indeed, the identities (roles, expectations, performances) and spaces created through this active process are what define community—not static structures or widely held cultural values (Delanty 2003). This view of community, then, emphasizes that the concept is ultimately defined by resident practice, not simply a larger culture, structure, or belief system. One Garden Park exurbanite expressed a “traditional community” value while describing a discussion of irrigation techniques she had shared with a neighbor: “We do everything around here. We help the neighbors. We do whatever we have to do.”

When conceptualized as ongoing interaction, community becomes a fluid phenomenon, and so it is useful to explore how individuals interpret these changes as a way of not only discerning contemporary community cohesiveness but also the potential for enhanced social interactions in the future. In the exurban transition, for instance, use of ethnographic inquiry to invite residents to review the social ties on which they rely to support their goals and identity is one way of learning about the character and possibility of the broader social and environmental interactions (Davidson-Hunt 2006). Admittedly, a social network may have an explicit spatial component in that people tend to live close to others in their own network and are inclined to join their neighbors’ networks (Johnston 2000). Yet, individuals also typically belong to multiple and embedded networks that transcend local-global distinctions; thus, knowledge created in one network

may cross boundaries to be enacted in a completely different network. This has led some theorists to contend that networks are “scaleless” (Barabási 2003) and boundless. This phenomenon is reflected in Garden Park, for example, as newly settled and relatively long-time exurban residents indicate some interaction with each other and with external actors: on a regional scale, these include the assistant vintner in Cañon City, the local office of the U.S. Forest Service, or the Fremont County Cattlemen’s Association; on a global scale, these include relatives, friends, work associates, and the internet.

Perceptions of community meaning are produced through resident action and communication. Individuals rely on information from their relationships (e.g., friend, neighbor, acquaintance) to inform their own local knowledge and decisions. The influence of these interactions even extends to the decision of which information and perspectives should be accepted and which should not. In other words, individuals acting within networks are constantly asking the question: “What makes sense in my situation” (Kaup 2008)? While networks guide these interactions, factors such as location, identity, and social structure are becoming increasingly separate—less intertwined in community’s inherent character as technology changes methods of communication and meanings of spatial distance (Flora and Flora 2008). This presents the possibility for disconnects between individual decision-making and the social and environmental contexts in which those occur. In the exurban West, this means exurbanite decisions reflect more than their chosen Old West surroundings. Study of resident interaction and individual participation in the “community,” then, becomes ever more important as a means to understand what it means to live in the exurban West.

## **A changing Fremont County and Garden Park**

Fremont County finds itself part of the second wave of exurban development in Colorado. Though less populated than other Front Range counties, Fremont County saw marked growth in its population in the 1990s (Schnell et al. 2004). From 1990 to 1999, the county's population increased by 38.5% (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Still growing over the past decade, the rate has since slowed to 2.5% from 2000 to 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009).

Similar to other production-oriented valleys in the county, the ranching community in Garden Park initially materialized as households supplying vegetables to surrounding mining communities, namely the coal mines to the south near Florence and gold mines to the north in the Cripple Creek-Victor area. With the end of major mining operations in the area at the close of the nineteenth century, orchards and crop fields transitioned to ranchland and the valley's households turned to cattle grazing and alfalfa production. Transhumance emerged as a practical option for Garden Park families because of their proximity to large tracts of federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management, a low overall valley population, and sufficient surface-water rights for irrigation (Johnson, McMaster, and Sorenson 1980).

By the mid-twentieth century, small-scale ranching of herds ranging from a few dozen to 200 head provided the principal livelihood for the valley's families. Yet by the close of the century, most families had turned to some means of economic diversification to ensure their well-being. Family members found employment nearby in Cañon City, at

one of several area penitentiaries, or in government office. By 2001, two of the large ranches in the valley had been sold and subsequently developed as several dozen 35-acre ranchettes (Schnell et al. 2004). The 1972 Colorado Senate Bill 35 effectively frees developers from providing access to utilities on lots of 35 acres or more; the law was designed to relieve pressure on the groundwater supply by spacing demands for wells across the landscape. Lots of 35 acres or larger are exempt from many county zoning regulations but are subject to covenants associated with Property Owners Associations. Although new homebuyers bare the monetary burden of drilling wells for water and connecting to the electric grid, farmland in Colorado's Front Range is worth ten times more when it is sold for residential development (McCormick 1998).

As is the case elsewhere in exurbia, the growth in Fremont County's exurban population speaks to an influx of residents whose livelihoods are divorced from the land on which they reside. These amenity migrants are typified by a desire to connect their lifestyle to their rural surroundings while retaining economic ties to urban areas. Gosnell and Travis (2005) suggest that amenity demand for ranches or ranchettes is one of several key variables in the emergence of new ranch-ownership regimes, i.e., ranchland ownership is driven in large part by the demand for the consumption of land amenities instead of agricultural production, and this phenomenon is now expressed in patterns of exurban development in many western states (Gosnell and Travis 2005). The continued in-migration of newcomers to rural areas creates a critical mass of residents who not only have new access to local resources such as land and capital but also engage these resources with myriad and distinct values regarding land use and community identity (Spain 1993).

Perceptions of community as markers of rural, exurban spaces are therefore produced and reproduced across the landscape by “old” resident-producers and “new” resident-consumers at multiple scales to generate diverse and sometimes contested meanings (Halfacree 2006). The following chapter presents discourse analysis as a flexible means of examining community meaning that links changing meanings of community to the larger social and economic changes occurring in the exurban American West. Such local and specific analysis helps us to examine narratives of the rural landscape in a way that highlights differences and similarities in how residents look at and participate in their environment (Cadieux 2005). That is, understanding the meanings residents create for their changing community may suggest ways for engaging exurban populations beyond the limits of the amenity or production-oriented models of the rural landscape (Cadieux 2005).

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Given that multiple and fluid meanings for community result from human interaction in social relationships operating at multiple scales, discourse analysis offers a critical approach to considering the significance of community meaning to residents of exurban landscapes. Qualitative analysis through grounded and axial coding of structured-interview data allows for a critical, place-based study of the meanings exurban actors give to their changing environment and of the process through which these meanings are formed (Yin 2003). It allows us to compare and contrast residents' perceptions of their social interaction, explore their production, and begin to understand how meanings themselves are subject to translation across different scales.

### **Study area and context**

Textual materials for this study consisted of transcripts of structured interviews with 90 residents, field notes, and notes taken during or immediately following periods of participant observation. Materials, analysis, and reflection occurred at two scales: Garden Park and Fremont County.

Fremont County is situated in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in south-central Colorado. The county covers an area of approximately 3,900 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to about 50,000 inhabitants. The county's main centers of population, Cañon City, Penrose, and Florence, are found along the Arkansas River in the central and eastern parts of the county. Located approximately eight miles north of Cañon City, Garden Park's (16 km<sup>2</sup>)

43 properties<sup>1</sup> are found in the central sector of northern Fremont County along County Road 9 leading to the late nineteenth-century mining town of Cripple Creek.

Garden Park is home to the University of Kansas' (KU) geology and geography field camp. I chose the Garden Park study area because of its location in a county experiencing significant exurban development, the depth of ethnographic data available from previous KU field camp studies, and the potential for strong construct validity as the field camp is also the hub of a larger National Science Foundation (NSF) project researching adaptive learning networks and environmental learning among exurban residents (Yin 2003). The long presence of the KU field camp—geography students first began attending the camp in 1976—necessitated certain consideration during the study: initial contact and subsequent discussions with Garden Park residents were eased by familiarity with the camp and its regularly returning faculty, yet the camp itself is seen by many valley residents as a community “member,” thereby complicating the study of community processes and meanings.

The latest data were collected during summer 2008 and 2009 under the auspices of the NSF investigation of adaptive learning networks among exurban residents of Fremont County. Generally, interviews with Garden Park residents occurred between July and August 2008. Fifteen Garden Park households were interviewed within a snowball sample stratified by length of residence, representing a non-random sample of approximately 35% of property owners in the valley. Though some interviews with residents from other areas of Fremont County occurred in 2008, most occurred between May and August 2009.

For the discourse analysis of community meaning in Garden Park, I incorporated data collected at the field camp beginning in 2001 and then again annually between 2005 and 2008 (39 interviews). For the discourse analysis of community meaning at the county scale, I focused on data collected between 2006 and 2009 (51 interviews).

### **Study design and data collection**

The annual interviews with Garden Park and county residents tack between discussions of their typical land-use patterns and their sense of community. With each year, interviews progressively moved from general questions of how residents came to be in Garden Park to specific questions regarding property modifications, personal definitions of community (e.g., “What does community mean to you?”), and social interaction. The appendix at the close of this study presents the objectives and sample questions from each year of annual interviews.

Data were collected at the household level from the adult decision-maker responsible for “household property modifications.” In cases of multiple decision-makers, both (or more) decision-makers were interviewed whenever possible. The participant sample was chosen non-randomly and identified in a snowball method stratified by length of development. Participants for the initial round of 2008 interviews were identified and contacted based on participation in past field camp research. Further rounds of interviews in 2008 and 2009 were established based on previous interviewee recommendations or through direct cold calling of county exurban residents. In late summer 2008, an invitation to observe a meeting of the Tallahassee Area Community,

Inc., a recently formed area non-profit corporation, resulted in a new source of potential study participants (2008-2009) in a previously unstudied area of the county.

Interviews with exurban residents conducted in the summers of 2008 and 2009 followed a similar NSF protocol and averaged approximately one hour in length. After initial introductions, interviews followed the same general pattern: summary of the NSF study's purpose, expectations for the interview, request for oral consent from the interviewee(s), completion of the principal interview elements, and requests for potential interviewee recommendations. At the close of each discussion, interviewees were thanked, given a gift card for a complementary drink at a Cañon City coffee shop, and invited to a thank-you barbecue at the field camp at the close of the summer field course in August. Interviews were recorded in digital format and subsequently transcribed. Following each interview, a post-interview reflection was completed noting interview setting, interviewer observations, and any other impressions not captured by digital recording or interviewer notes. Historical information for the county, previous journal articles on the area, and a complete GIS database of property holdings and the physical landscape of Fremont County<sup>ii</sup>, formed the basis of contextualizing interview data.

Results for this study are based on analysis of 39 semi-structured interviews of new and long-time Garden Park residents (taking place in 2001 or 2005-2008) and 51 semi-structured interviews of Fremont County residents (2006-2009). Data from semi-structured interviews were further informed by interviews with Fremont County employees, with U.S. Forest Service GIS staff, with staff and the Curator of the Royal Gorge Regional Museum and History Center, with the Assistant Vintner of the Winery at

the Abbey in Cañon City, and by five weeks of participant observation between July and August 2008.

As the conceptual basis for the methodology, discourse refers to the ensemble of social practices through which the world is made meaningful. It finds expression in a variety of textual and non-textual forms and practices through which humans interact with one another and their environs. As a social construction, discourse is inherently complex and contested, and discursive constructions are embedded within references to one another across both space and time (Foucault 1969). Typically, however, the social relations of power and prestige tend to ossify discursive expressions into singular “formations” that can endure for long periods of time. Over time, these formations can become so taken-for-granted that they become “hegemonic,” that is, accepted as “natural” truth or “common sense.” In the context of this study of the exurban transition, however, the discursive constructions of community are undergoing rapid change and are open to contest and alternative meanings.

Grounded theory provided the methodological frame for analysis of interview data that revealed distinctive discursive constructions of community (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Open or descriptive codes of community were initially developed based on a pilot coding exercise of an initial set of interviews, field notes, and reflective memos. As an inductive method, open coding on the theme of community allowed for patterns to emerge from the data (e.g. ranching as shared labor). These first-level codes were cross-checked through structured questions added to the interview protocol and as subsequent data suggested further elaborations to the descriptive codes of community meaning.

Short descriptions of each open code were created to avoid confusion. For example, “ranching as shared labor” refers to instances where community was described in terms of working together without remuneration to support the needs of one ranch (e.g., haying, cattle drives, barn-raising). The initial code set was applied systematically to all interview transcripts, constantly comparing “new” codes to “old” interviews. A combination of HyperRESEARCH (v 2.8) qualitative analysis software and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets was used in applying grounded codes to the data.

As analysis progressed and familiarity with the data increased, open codes were organized into analytic (or “axial”) codes, that is, groupings of similar open codes under a single theme. Upon reaching a saturation point where the coding categories accounted for all reports on community meaning found in the interview data, analytic codes were interpreted against both known reference groups in the valley and the contemporary research on community dynamics discussed in Chapter Two. This interpretation or extension of codes beyond the grounded data is the axial coding stage. Axial codes form the basis for grounded coded theory, or the generalizable statements about meaning and process in context. For example, “ranching as shared labor” speaks to community interaction based on need. These coding results were then interpreted against contemporary research on the human and environmental dynamics of exurban change in the American West to interpret their significance in broader terms. Upon conclusion of the analysis, the results were returned to the research participants in the form of a project report made available in hard copy and digital form.

## **Chapter Four: Community meanings in Garden Park**

Socioeconomic changes and widespread rural restructuring in the American West have given rise to two distinct social groupings in many Fremont County valleys, including Garden Park: traditional ranchers and exurbanites (referred to colloquially as “newcomers” and also known in the literature as “amenity migrants”) (Schnell et al. 2004). Most ranching families in the valley have roots extending back several generations; one ranch has remained in the same family for over a century. The newcomers are owners of 35-acre ranchettes, urbanites and suburbanites attracted by available recreation opportunities and the appeal of the rural lifestyle (Schnell et al. 2004). Regardless of their provenance, new and long-term Garden Park residents call their valley home and profess real, though distinct and varied, connections to their surrounding landscape. This connection lies at the center of the multiple strands of meaning that underpin how “community” is understood in Garden Park.

In this chapter, I present the results of a grounded analysis of community discourse in Garden Park, Colorado, a valley of approximately 16 km<sup>2</sup> home to 28 households found ten miles north of Cañon City. With the sale of two large family-owned ranches in the past decade, this small valley in northern Fremont County has seen a notable increase in its amenity-based, exurban population. As such, the small valley serves as a micro-scale case study for considering the role of interaction, meaning, and place in the context of community formation and political-economic change as residential

developments expand, population increases, and normative perspectives shift from an Old West of material production to a New West of recreation and amenity consumption.

## **Results and discussion**

Development by 35-acre blocks has been shown to fragment the physical landscape; at the very least it contributes to considerable variety in land-use decisions and preferences (Gosnell, Haggerty, and Travis 2006). The smaller parcels and presence of more landowners also have been documented to lead to conflict and potential disharmony (McCormick 1998). In his study of La Plata County, Colorado, plant ecologist William H. Romme suggested that the state's 35-acre ordinance creates a housing pattern that is equally destructive to social relationships; because new exurban residences are physically separated, they will unlikely lead to the formation of deep social bonds with neighbors (Romme 1997). But is proximity an obligatory requirement for a shared sense of purpose or community identity? Community's significance is dynamic, to be negotiated and renegotiated as social structure adjusts to the perceptions of the people that lend it meaning.

Larsen et al. (2007) identified four reference groups in the Garden Park population: (1) ranchers; (2) non-rancher long-term residents (10+ years); (3) residents of one of the valley's subdivisions; and (4) a small group of subdivision residents with surface water rights to Four Mile Creek (Larsen et al. 2007). A reference group denotes a subset of people who collectively perceive their environment in a similar manner through sustained interactions over time, i.e., an individual's perception of his or her environment

is affected by interaction to form increasingly common and shared interpretations (Harper 1987). The ranching households have sustained such interaction for over two generations. The non-rancher long-term residents began to move to the valley in the late 1970s, and while small in number (only five households), they formed strong interaction ties with one another and the ranching community (e.g., they shared party telephone lines with ranchers and held community events together). Created in 2001, one of the valley's subdivisions exhibits households that interact regularly, primarily because most of these residents recruited one another to retire together in the area. Finally, five households in a separate subdivision share rights to irrigate with surface water; consequently, they must interact regularly to exchange information, regulate water allocations, and share equipment. The five themes of community emerging in Garden Park generally follow this breakdown of valley sub-groups, i.e., one theme or sub-theme is linked to a particular reference group. But in several instances, the theme of community as expressed by one reference group closely parallels the meaning given by another.

### ***Community as Home***

In Garden Park, the notion of home—a connection to the park and the landscape—was central to many valley residents. Home as idea, however, is divided into two perspectives that closely follow the valley population's larger division into traditional ranchers and exurbanites, a separation that echoes the demarcation Walker and Fortmann (2003) describe as a difference between being attracted to a landscape's "natural and scenic qualities... untied to... production" and conceiving of the landscape

as a source of livelihood or production (Schnell et al. 2004; Walker and Fortmann 2003). For the long-time ranching residents, home was defined most consistently as an aspect of the embodied landscape that found expression in a geocentric understanding and inclusion of the physical world: a concept of the valley as the place of routine, everyday life. In the case of the more recent Garden Park residents, home referred more often to the built environment and its purposeful setting on the landscape. The notion of “imposing order” is valuable to understanding this conception of home. For the ranchers, order was not imposed on the home in terms of its internal décor or organization. Rather, it was imposed on the working landscape, the productive ranch, or home writ large its physical surroundings. For the exurbanites by contrast, order and coordination were integral to the house’s interior as symbolic of home. House and home, after all, were the primary investment and vehicle for exurban consumption of the landscape.

*Home as “It’s just home”*

Asked about the design of the buildings on his property, one rancher responded: “We would decide to build something, [and] just built it”. Physically, ranchers’ houses give the impression of an unpremeditated history in the valley, of life lived as a rhythm of interaction with the land. Clutter and aged structures (e.g., rusted metal roofs on sheds; dilapidated potato cellars) are not an uncommon sight outside ranchers’ homes, but this landscape lacks order only to those looking for a sense of home in the purposeful cultivation and commodification of a particular rural or natural ideal. This paradox becomes clearer when one ventures inside a ranch home: the artifacts document a long history of existence in place. Walking into the living room of one ranching couple, for

instance, revealed a collection of hunting souvenirs (e.g., deer and bearskin) and bronze ornaments mostly of horses or of cowboys in rodeo action. The rancher made the bronze pieces himself, depicting more than 30 years of life on the ranch.

For this rancher, home was the hub of his work on the landscape. It was a place of memories and relaxation, but more than that it was the center of operations for his 2500-acre ranch. Contrasting the productive utility inherent to his sense of home, the rancher juxtaposed the exurbanite houses in the nearby subdivision: “Some are pretty big.... It’s a symbol with them; it’s a status...with us it was just shelter.... We built the barn first.”

In a neighboring ranching couple’s house, a few miles south, the unplanned interior fashion design was repeated. A number of tables and dressers lined the walls of the living room, which once had been an extended porch but now was roofed and walled in. Pink tablecloths and blue trim vied with scores of pictures, figurines, and statuettes to catch the eye. Two golden elephants, a cowgirl, a cowboy, a series of frog figures, and even Mickey Mouse peeked out of a very personal yet public glimpse into the ranching couple’s history. The home, in other words, was an accretion of disparate personal artifacts gained during the course of everyday existence.

When asked if they felt a connection to the land, she responded softly and sincerely, “It’s our baby.” Her husband quietly added, “[Living off the land], do it because you love it, not for the money”. She farmed; he ranched. Both husband and wife were raised in Garden Park and brought up their own children in the valley. Having lived in the valley more than sixty years, this couple has moved into town since the time of the

interview. They cite the inability to make a living at cattle ranching and retirement as motives for leaving. Unable to take care of the land, they wanted to have their retirement settled and have all necessary details arranged for their children who are unable to follow on the same ranching path.

The ranchers' homes are dually personal; they are the chief "factories" of their livelihood, but they are also intimate and charged with emotion. Their homes seem to express interdependence with their physical surroundings; instead of a barrier, the land is an unseen member welcomed as part of the way home is conceptualized. This theme appears as one aspect of life in Garden Park that differentiates the ranchers from the exurban residents: for the former group, home is inclusive of the land. This is not to say that exurban residents do not convey an attachment to their homes and properties. In Garden Park, the difference appears to be in how that connection is expressed. Newcomers to rural areas are often more likely than long-time residents to express their connection to their surroundings in terms of environmental quality or sustainability (Spain 1993). Home, therefore, takes on a more exclusive notion. The "exurbanite" home includes the surrounding landscape, but as something separate: land and wilderness are an attractive feature (an amenity) on the other side of a well-placed pane of glass.

*Home as "Just look at that view"*

A general theme regarding how homes are differentially situated is evident on the several mile drive north on County Route 9, the sole public roadway through Garden Park. The older ranching homesteads are clustered in the valley bottom, along Four Mile

Creek, and rarely are they distant from the road itself. Their positions indicate a time in the valley when easy access to vital water and water rights pointed to streamside location. Houses in the sub-divisions, however, are generally found at higher elevations in the valley, set on the slopes and positioned to take advantage of mountain views. Beyond the possibility of drilling a well, water delivery service and private sub-development roads open more landscape for housing that is situated to take advantage of the valley's amenities, not as a hub for small agricultural production.

In describing what he most values about his land, one exurban resident replied, “[The] 360 degree view any direction. It’s a good view--not too many places you can find in Colorado with this view.” His response is indicative of exurban residents in Garden Park and of amenity migrants in general (McCarthy 2008). Less concerned with an intimate connection to the land and focused more on the personal situation of lifestyle on the land, the exurban interpretation of home centers on being *on* the landscape versus being *in* the landscape.

Another exurbanite described his family’s rationale for choosing their building site. Placed some distance above the valley floor and on a flattened hillock, their house is wide, low, and oriented toward the southwest. Abutting federal land and Cooper Mountain at the rear of the parcel, their house’s expansive windows and wide front porch offer brilliant views of the distant Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The building site was chosen specifically for this view and the house subsequently sited; the resident did state, however, that they were constrained by needs for easy access to the subdivision’s roadway and to power supply.

The purposeful design of the home continues into the interior. A modified log cabin kit, their house's décor showcases the family's hobbies. He is a hunter; she is an educator. A bearskin has a place of pride on the living room wall, an apple motif is scattered throughout the kitchen and public living areas, a child's bedroom is styled with flags and eagles, and the guest bedroom is referred to as "the antler bedroom." Several hanging wooden plaques sprout antlers from the walls (no heads, just antlers), and a red wagon with wooden slat rails sits against one wall, piled high and nearly overflowing with deer antlers.

Compared with several of the ranching homes, the hunting/wildlife theme is similar, but the effect is not. The distinction is in the intent: the exurban family purposefully and thoughtfully chose the look and feel of their housing design and décor to portray a New Western lifestyle, whereas the ranching family's residence is a more organic, unaffected collection of artifacts unconsciously symbolic of the Old West of production. The intentionality of the exurban home as a purposive design extends to the outbuildings and their arrangement on the property. Behind and to the side of the house, so as not to mar the view of the mountains in the front, there is a permanent gazebo with multiple picnic tables, a large grill/roisserie combination, and a pistol range. All are meant to maximize enjoyment of the natural surroundings and all reflect the recreational/amenity interests that drive amenity migration (McCarthy 2008).

Though welcoming, attractive, and unique to the family, the exurban residence could be placed virtually anywhere in the West and blend in. The ranching home, by contrast, bespeaks a connection specific to Garden Park and Fremont County. Though

hunting, Western lifestyle, and patriotic memorabilia are common subjects in most of the homes in Garden Park, their situation in exurban homes reflects a less immediate attachment to the adjacent landscape.

### ***Community as “We have to go to town”***

Space and distance from services is another theme of community meaning in Garden Park that reflects a difference in social interaction between the long-time residents and the more recent exurban population. The Garden Park residents interviewed for this project varied in their description of the spatial extent of community covered by the valley. Social interaction for ranchers was historically centered in the valley with some connection to Cañon City. Exurban residents have tended to include a larger spatial area in their descriptions of the Garden Park community that extends beyond Cañon City.

Many of the exurban residents describe their lifestyle as being on the fringe of community interaction; going to town is an everyday necessity. Although exurbanites often cited “being on the outskirts” as part of community life in Garden Park, this designation was not inherently negative. It is more a question of the “services” offered by the natural amenities in the valley (e.g., the viewshed, opportunities for recreation); they do not extend to more traditional community services and hence those “missing” services must be sought elsewhere. As one exurban resident put it, “The only drawback is that we have to go get our mail.”

Only a handful of the new residents in Garden Park hold water rights to Four Mile Creek. Although surface water is used primarily for irrigation, it is a reminder of the scarcity of water in the valley. Although many of the new residents have spent substantial resources on drilling wells, the geologic and geomorphologic composition of the valley hardly guarantees that wells will produce any water, let alone potable water. In the past ten years, the water delivery truck has become a familiar site on County Route 9. One rancher expressed his bafflement at exurbanites' apparent acceptance of the normalcy of this situation: "[They must be] crazy to do it...why come out here? One of the biggest things is water...some here haul water, it's a never-ending damn chore! [This is] dry, God-forsaken land!"

When asked about local places where people gather, ranching families indicated the valley's schoolhouse or the Southwark residence<sup>iii</sup>, one of the area's long-time ranching families. Closed in 1964 as part of a county consolidation plan, the Garden Park schoolhouse was historically a central gathering place for the valley's eight ranching families. Just before the Southwarks moved to Florence (a village a few miles east of Cañon City and about 20 miles from Garden Park), one long-time rancher said, "I don't know what we're going to when you move because your house is the one we all drop in."

Except for periodic homeowners' association meetings, exurban residents, by contrast, seldom mentioned gathering places inside the valley. More often, they indicated social connection to extra-valley associations (e.g., the Cañon City Chamber of Commerce, the Rocky Mountain Elks, the Cañon City New Neighbors Club). This is not to imply that ranching families limited their social interaction to the valley; historically,

they also were involved in regional organizations such as the Farm Bureau, the Cattlemen's Association, or the Rodeo Association.

The ranchers' space of social interaction is best described as a circle: historically centered in Garden Park, interaction began at the homestead and extended outward to include interaction with valley residents and more distant Cañon City organizations. The space of social interaction for exurban residents is more reminiscent of a set of embedded but disconnected circles: with their house and homeowners' association at the center, their interaction appears to skip the range of the valley and to pick up again at the Cañon City level and beyond.

### ***Community as "Being local" ("credentialing")***

The traditions and practices associated with ranching helped create a distinctive "way of life" in Garden Park during the twentieth century; while attracted to those traditions, most exurban residents do not participate directly in them. In fact, the two groups have different perceptions of what the local traditions are (Spain 1993). Many exurban residents expressed an interest in the natural and social histories of Garden Park, adopted that knowledge, and subsequently exhibited it as a means for expressing their "local-ness," that is, their credentials for being members of the local community. In this community theme, being *local* becomes a discursive exercise in validity construction that connects an objective history (e.g., facts, figures, documented local events) to one's own experiential history.

After having sold his family's homestead, a former valley rancher joined the new owners and their neighbors on a hike and picnic lunch on the property. After the new owner asked after the ruins of an old cabin on the property, the rancher took several quiet moments before responding: "You all can own the property, but that will always be Aunt Lizzie's house to me, no matter what. Sorry." The new owner quickly rejoined, "No problem. That's what we'll call it!" Although I was not present for this conversation (recorded by Larsen in field notes June 2, 2008), I was present with fellow researchers at a subsequent hike on this same property. The new owner's neighbor guided the hike and as we passed the old cabin, we were introduced to it as "Aunt Lizzie's house" but not to how this was known. This is an example of "credentialing" behavior that contributes to understanding the meaning of community among the exurban population in the Park.

In a 2008 interview, the wife of one exurban couple was describing recent property modifications to the interviewers when the husband co-opted the conversation to provide the interviewers with a sense of the local community.

There are two famous caves here... Marble Cave and Fly Cave on the creek. Marble Cave was an Indian ceremonial cave. And there's evidence that the settlers were in it as early as 1870s, I guess. They left their graffiti in there and dated it. Fly Cave [has a] fly found no other place. They get frequent visits from entomologists.

In exurban studies, a familiar sentiment among long-time residents is a shared loss of their community; newcomers neither respect nor attempt to understand their traditional way of life. As Walker and Fortmann (2003) add in their study of Nevada County, California, "the moral undertone is that exurbanites do not understand local cultural traditions of work on the landscape." Although a loss of community was

mentioned by ranching families; one former rancher stated, “[W]ith all the children of the ranchers leaving, you can’t sustain a community, and that kills a place... the lack of community.”

Yet, new Garden Park residents do show an interest in their area; it is, however, less socially connected to other Garden Park residents. Asked if they had much interaction with the valley’s long-time residents, the couple cited above responded that they were “at the fringes of Cañon City” (note no mention of Garden Park) but that they had conducted some research at the Cañon City public library and several area historical sites.

It is noteworthy that the newly built homes in Garden Park do not compare to the multi-million dollar constructions referred to in the Nevada County study nor is the difference in economic means between old and new residents as overt. The remaining ranching families in Garden Park had connected themselves to the extra-valley economy before the influx of exurban residents. Save for a handful of retirees, all of the valley’s exurban residents (I do not include property owners whose primary residences are outside Garden Park) gain their livelihood from outside the valley. Economically, there are parallels between the new and long-time residents of Garden Park, and socially there are similarities as well. The behavior of credentialing represents a small discursive connection that has opened between these two worlds, but it remains to be seen if increased knowledge of local history and society will translate into future efforts on the part of exurbanites towards community well-being in the valley (Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff 2008).

### *Community as Box suppers and card games*

The meaning of community cited most often by ranching families concerned the absence of frequent interaction at the valley scale. People-centered and cohesive, this understanding of community encompassed the valley's eight ranching families and in subsequent years included the handful of long-time non-ranching residents. Neighbors were few, but families knew each other well and the valley population acted as an extended family.

Here, connection among the ranching families centered around two aspects: interdependence for accomplishing the arduous manual labor required in ranch work and the intimate social connection and support born of that reliance. One rancher commented that, "The farming ground is the life-blood of the place." While this assertion was replicated across interviews and is true in economic terms, the Garden Park schoolhouse was seen as the social heart of the ranching community.

Closed in the 1960s after a round of school consolidation in the county, the Garden Park schoolhouse also served as a community center for the valley: potluck dinners, dances, and box suppers. Box suppers were a form of local fundraiser. Women of local households would make box suppers, which were then auctioned off to the highest bidder. Whoever won the bid won the supper and the chance to eat with whomever had prepared it. Older men in the community frequently drove up the price while younger men fretted over winning their sweetheart's entry. Describing such an auction, the wife of one ranching couple disclosed that once she was married she no

longer wanted her husband to bid more than \$5.00 on the box. After all, she had made the meal and the \$5.00 was partly hers as well.

Recalling the past, one ranching family thought that the valley's community "would be come strong if they revived the old school house." Although the ranching families' comments overall focused on the schoolhouse restoration as a means to restore formerly close social interaction, they also pragmatically referred to the changing economics of the area as undermining the nature of social interaction in the valley. Most of the new residents are not tied to production and their focus therefore is outside the valley. Without the necessity of in-valley interaction based on the ranching lifestyle, resultant social connections that tie the whole valley are less probable. It is also appropriate to question whether the social interactions of 28 households of diverse interests and employment (full-time residents versus the 43 property owners) could realistically resemble those of eight families dedicated to ranching.

At the close of the 2006 field season, long- and short-term valley residents began to develop plans to restore the schoolhouse using donations and funds from the Colorado State Historical Society (Larsen et al. 2007). For the long-term residents, the schoolhouse was a place of memory and a link to their lived past. For the short-term residents, the schoolhouse was a symbol of the "Old West," something they could adopt as their own (cf. "credentialing" above). Schoolhouse restoration efforts are ongoing and although the building has distinct significance for Garden Park residents, it may serve as a place and space for the building of new, shared community in the valley. The current and most popular proposal is to transform the restored building into a Chautauqua where

residents can participate in cultural and entertainment events.

***Community as “Hay together, brand together”***

“We do everything around here. We help the neighbors. We do whatever we have to do.” Recounting an aspect of her everyday life in Garden Park, this four-year valley resident (at the time of the 2008 interview) encapsulated the crux of the final community theme: mutual support. Based in the practice of sharing labor without remuneration to support the needs of one ranch (e.g., haying, cattle drives, barn-raising), this theme is not connected solely to ranching families. In today’s Garden Park, it is particularly associated with ranching families and the exurban families with water rights but also to the few long-term non-ranching families.

At its heart, this theme is about interaction based on need, but whereas in the past need was closely associated with labor and an extra pair of hands, today’s interaction is more nearly linked with need for appropriate, valley-specific environmental information and coordination, especially with regards to water resources. One exurban resident recalled an event that occurred during her first year in the valley, an event that describes the continued need for this type of mutual support:

The whole thing about the hay, the flood came through and washed out our entrance so we couldn’t get out here to the hay. And that was the first year learning about what ranchers and farmers go through. You know, you’ve got all these expectations, you’ve put all this money into the drill seeding, you’ve done all the watering, and then you couldn’t do the harvest because we didn’t have an access, because our access got washed away. So...you start to learn!

The shift in mutual support away from labor parallels larger changes in general agricultural production: increased mechanization, improved feed, higher quality seed. But the local essence of mutual support has not changed. Nearly all of the exurban residents engaged in some type of agriculture (the sample ranged from horse-raising and hay production to gardening and viticulture) and all of the exurban residents holding water rights cited instances of learning about the local landscape from long-time ranching families. In nearly every case, the ranching families included these same residents among the short lists of the exurban residents with whom they had interacted socially.

This type of interaction is not restricted to exchanges between exurban and long-time residents. Two exurban households, neighboring properties both holding water rights, have devised a system to support their individual agricultural needs. Owners on the northern property have horses and raise hay for feed as well as for sale. They periodically spray herbicides to control the growth of noxious weeds and less nutritious grasses. During times of strong wind, the herbicide (applied by spraying) was blown to the southern property where it damaged the neighbors' grapevines. After some interaction and information exchange back and forth, the more northerly neighbors have switched to an herbicide that is less damaging to grapes but still effective for their needs, and the southern neighbors have hung a windsock so that wind direction is easily noticed. The grapevines are healthier and the northern neighbors also use less herbicide; spraying on less windy days means they use less to cover the same area.

At first glance, this type of mutual support is seemingly opposite to the conventional portrayal of life in the exurbs. Among those exurban residents who engage

in some type of agricultural production, regardless of its scale, some social interaction based on mutual support is an integral part of life in Garden Park. It is in this regard that they may even begin to approach the changing lifestyle of ranching in the valley. Ranchers are no longer dependent on shared manual labor and consequently less dependent on each other. Some cause for this, however, must also be attributed to the decreased number of ranching families in the valley and the smaller size of cattle herds in general. With increasing economic costs of maintaining large expanses of agricultural land, ranching families themselves have become more tied to life outside the valley.

Several of the ranching families cited the ranching lifestyle as a primary motivation for remaining in the valley (Johnson, McMaster, and Sorenson 1980). Yet even some 30 years ago, ranching alone was not sufficient economic means to support a ranching lifestyle in Garden Park. Only one out of the then seven ranchers in the valley relied solely on ranching for his family's livelihood. Already at that time, several ranchers were considering developers' offers to purchase their ranches in their entirety (Johnson, McMaster, and Sorenson 1980).

## **Conclusions**

With rural restructuring making the family ranch an increasingly remote possibility for subsequent generations in Garden Park, many ranching families fear for the future of their ranches and for their way of life. As the value of land as potential real estate for exurban developers far exceeds its value as ranchland, subsequent generations are less able to support the way of life that their parents and grandparents held to. One

long-time rancher commented on his fellow ranching neighbors selling their land, “It’s their land, they can do what they want.” He further elaborated on the changes occurring in the valley: “The new people want scenery, rocks, and trees.... We did land clearance. We cleared trees for 14 years, but then the piñons grew back and it went bad.... Why fight it? It’s worth so much money for houses.”

Ethnographic research into the shared meanings of community in the exurbs has potential for exploring the small-scale, place-specific accounts of community transformation in the exurban context. Understanding the production of multiple meanings of social interaction in a rapidly changing locale points to opportunities for engaging diverse reference groups as they create their community. Identifying these places of engagement would be particularly crucial for any non-governmental or public organizations seeking to engage the whole of the geographic community of Garden Park; some community themes run throughout the valley’s population groups while other interpretations are specific to one group. Identifying the common notions and places of differences, however, provides greater potential for working with the valley on the level of its landscape.

Although evidence for social fragmentation exists in the Garden Park case, there also occur indications that the fragmentation of the valley’s traditional definitions of community does not leave the current embodiment of Garden Park’s social interaction bereft of historical ties. Consider the case of the Garden Park schoolhouse. From the lens of grounded theory, the schoolhouse appears to have a historical role as the focus of a special-interest (or locality-oriented) field—a field resulting from the local interest of

an organization to accomplish a specific goal (Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff 2008). In *Community as Box suppers and card games*, long-time residents' recollection of the central role of the schoolhouse in the social landscape gives witness to the distinct role of the schoolhouse in the creation, support, and maintenance of the valley's ranching community. In interviews of short-term residents, the schoolhouse also shows up as a distinct focus; now in a credentialing role, it represents a place on the Old Western landscape that can be adopted—the focus of an emergent special-interest field of Garden Park local identity. The schoolhouse plays a recurring role for multiple reference groups in the valley; understanding how this type of role may help local actors act upon shared interests is essential to grasping what specific community potential exists in the valley.

In *Community as "Hay together, brand together,"* the notion of mutual support is attuned to the sharing of environmental information. This special-interest field may well indicate a space for engagement that merges long-time residents' in-situ environmental know-how with short-term residents' desire to live in tune with the ecological needs of the region (Walker and Fortmann 2003; McCarthy 2008; Cadieux 2005)—“needs” as framed by amenity-oriented desires but not inherently at odds with production-oriented stewardship of the land.

In their profile of participative residents in Western communities, Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff (2008) offer a description of the positive deviant—a profile of the participative community resident engaged in the community field, a scale larger than a special-interest field (Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff 2008). Their study encompassed five counties in southern Utah, employed household surveys with a sample size of 2,179.

In comparison with the remainder sample population, participative community residents were more educated, came from smaller towns, had lived longer in the community, reported higher levels of involvement with local groups and activities, and socialized more regularly with neighbors (Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff 2008).

Beyond a valuable profile of participative residents of exurban Western communities, Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff's findings point to those local residents who not only are interested in what happens in their immediate area, but who also have relevant local information. Local information is indispensable for stable, grounded community-based action. Combining the authors' approach to finding participative residents with the validity of ethnography and participant observation can ensure that "participation," "community," and "local" are locally legitimate. The combination of approaches from a grounded-theory perspective—empirical description and place-based meaning—allow for a locally relevant engagement across the community field benefitting policy planners, organizations, and community members looking for a way to engage the larger community in improving community well-being.

Not a strict matter of choice, exurban development does not portend a complete termination of conventional rural values or a complete end to the "ranching way of life" in Garden Park. Social interaction remains important but the stage for that interaction is typically larger for exurban residents. And many local residents are actively adopting, using, and sharing what local knowledge they learn, be it local history or place-specific environmental knowledge. Especially relevant will be understanding how to engage all local residents in interaction that develops community well-being across reference

groups.

Chapter Four explores the narrative of the Garden Park community as told by its residents, old and new. I use results from qualitative analysis of resident interviews and participant observation to tease out distinct themes residents attribute as indicative of their community. Some themes imply expected differences in perspective between short- and long-term valley residents, yet the apparent changes to the valley's broad social character belie interactions among old and new residents that speak not to community fragmentation but to evolution and formation.

## **Chapter Five: Community as “co-opetition”: exurban community meaning in Fremont County**

In the previous chapter, the discussion of community meanings in Garden Park revealed that some themes were particularly associated with exurban residents while others were more strongly emotive of the long-time ranching population. Still others spoke not to a single reference group but rather found expression across reference groups. Just as some meanings are evident across populations, other meanings can cross social scales. Community meanings as expressed by residents of Garden Park are not divorced from broader community discourse about exurbia but are layered within it.

In Chapter Five, I expand the geographic scale to consider interviews from across Fremont County while narrowing analytical focus. This chapter explores the emergence of a single example of broad scale discourse of community meaning among Fremont County exurbanites: community as “co-opetition”. Following a similar method of grounded analysis of community discourse as discussed in Chapters Three and Four, results presented in this chapter emerged from the analysis of 51 interview transcripts of residents from different exurban areas in Fremont County.

### **Results and discussion**

New owners of ranchland in the American West are not the farmers and ranchers of the traditional west (Gosnell, Haggerty, and Travis 2006). The goal of land ownership is changing; instead of production-oriented activities, focus has shifted to the

consumption of natural amenities as a dominant goal of land ownership, thereby increasing the numbers of in situ residents without direct economic link to the land (Gosnell and Travis 2005; Schnell et al. 2004). Across Fremont County's exurban developments, there is a new resident population similar to Garden Park's "subdivision residents" reference group (Larsen et al. 2007).

Colorado's 35-acre ordinance allows developers to sell lots of 35 acres or more without wells and effectively creates a quilt-like pattern of relatively large "patches" for new exurban sub-developments (McCormick 1998). Romme suggests that this housing pattern is destructive to emergent social relationships in exurbia: because exurban residents are physically separated, they are less likely to form meaningful social bonds with their neighbors (Romme 1997). This chapter discusses Romme's conclusion in light of community as "co-opetition" discourse. It argues that meaningful social bonds are not based on geographic proximity alone. Rather, they are formed within a discourse that mitigates between reliance and independence. Walker and Fortmann (2003) describe this tension that is at the heart of exurban development in the new American West as "stem[ing]... from a fundamental contradiction: a development and natural resource economy depends upon a conceptualization of space as largely separable and individualized, whereas a 'new' economy based on 'consumption' of rural landscape qualities depends upon a view of the *landscape* as a space of multiple interdependencies and responsibilities to the common good."

### *Community as “co-opetition”*

Keeping Walker and Fortmann’s notion of “multiple interdependencies and responsibilities to the common good” and shifting focus from the larger rancher/exurbanite tension, the results presented in this chapter find that a discourse of “co-opetition” dominates exurban understandings of their community as a whole. It is grounded in the link between community and the aesthetic and recreational consumption of the landscape by amenity migrants (Walker and Fortmann 2003). Fremont County’s exurban populations arrived thinking of the county’s “natural” or “pristine” landscapes, but their common desire did not entail a shared normative definition of what a “natural” landscape should look like. The heart of this “co-opetition” theme lies here. Amenity migrants’ investments depend on a certain construction of landscape, but they neither agree on how to construct this landscape nor on what it looks like.

Homes in Fremont County are often situated in remote settings; winter weather can be harsh, particularly for those residences set among private roads (no public snow plows to clear roads) or “off-the-grid.” Exurban residents must therefore frequently rely on one another because of their physical, environmental reality (they *cooperate*), but they may not agree on how to construct their landscape and its aesthetic (they *compete*). Describing the multiple, mutually supportive relationships he maintains with a neighboring family, one exurban resident finished with, “So there’s this, kind of, what I call, co-opetition.” He further explained:

The competition for what this place is going to be about up here ultimately. Is it going to be agricultural? Is it going to be mining? Is it going to be mixed-use? What’s it going to be? And then the

cooperation on everything else because, you know, we all live together up here. We're thirty-five miles from town. If something's going to happen, you can't wait for somebody from town. You know, you've gotta kind of call on your neighbors.

This view of the exurban social landscape describes larger competition between ideas of production and consumption-oriented landscapes (Walker and Fortmann 2003), yet it also suggests that physical separation is not a major constraint on social relations.

The increased distance between residences introduces the notion that need, not proximity, may play a key role in fostering social interaction in the exurban context. In fact, one exurban resident described relations with neighbors in her subdivision as “much stronger up here than I have ever felt in town. In any town that I've lived in, anywhere. And we have moved a lot.” Another resident described a similar contrast, “The people here are pretty close. Everybody needs everybody. So, there's a lot of contact.... Probably more contact than we had when we were in Houston in the suburbs and our neighbors were 13 feet away.”

Exurban residents show an awareness of the effect distance has on their own and their neighbors' daily routines. In describing his preparations to make the trek “down into town,” one resident said, “And when you're headed to town you might call the people you keep in touch with and say, ‘Hey I'm headed into town ... you need anything?’ Or somebody would call you and say, ‘Can you get me some sugar next time you head into town?’” Contrary to the sentiment expressed by some ranching families that there's no interaction and no sense of community with the influx of subdivisions, exurban residents in the county describe a level of social relation that often exceeds their previous experiences. Awareness of distance appears to foster a basic level of

cooperation among members of the same subdivisions. Yet in describing themselves, exurban residents commonly cited self-reliance and autonomy, not collaboration, as defining traits of their reference group. One interviewee commented, “You’re not quite off-grid, but you’re kind of close. So there’s a certain independence to that, and with that independence, people have strong opinions.”

In describing their efforts to proactively work together (e.g., through the Property Owners Association), one exurban resident described the working environment as having “a lot of leaders” without many followers. Two examples commonly arose as the county’s exurban residents described their intertwined experiences of cooperation and competition: emergency situations and formal property organizations. In describing mitigating potential emergency situations, several residents cited a practice of not locking a front door or back door while away from their homes. “We all knew that there was a door that was open. Because if you have car trouble and [if] you’re... a long way... [y]ou knew you could go in and use [the] phone and get help. We’ve always left our home open for that reason.” These residents express an active knowledge of their living environments and an active consideration of their community members. Of course, not all residents have such open attitudes regarding their homes, but in relaying the story of a neighboring family, another resident expressed his neighbors’ embodiment of “co-opetition”:

We had a couple people that were building houses here, this was back ten years ago, and totally from opposite polar extremes as far as views on everything. I mean they wouldn’t even wave to one another if they were passing on the road. But then there was an incident where one of the folks was working on their house... and their spouse was in town, and they [the spouse in town] couldn’t

get a hold of them, and they thought, “Wow, something happened.” And so they [the spouse in town] called the person who is like their nemesis, and those folks said, “We’ll get over there right away.” You know, there was just no question about it.

It is not just in urgent situations that exurban residents encounter community as “co-opetition.” The majority of subdivisions in Fremont County maintain Property Owners Associations (POA). In the typical case, a POA is instituted instead of a homeowners association, as it is common for a subdivision to have a much larger number of property owners than resident homeowners. The structure and bylaws of POAs are often set up by developers and then transferred to exurban residents. But given the “independent strain” of many residents, POAs are not well-liked institutions. One resident summarized her family’s experience, “I was on [the POA board] for three years. My husband was on for four years. But there are some people in here that are just plain nasty. And we’ve just disassociated ourselves.” Another resident said, “Oh you don’t wanna go there! [Laughter] Well I’ve been the president the last three years and I quit last week, so ... you don’t wanna go there! [Laughter] Mountain properties should not have homeowner’s associations!”

Tension within POAs is not just a function of differing opinions or disagreeable personalities. It is linked to residents’ divergent beliefs of how community relates to the aesthetic consumption of the landscape. For example, one interviewee expressed disbelief as a new (now former) resident responded to a visiting official’s advice on home/yard maintenance that would discourage wildlife, especially bears, from coming too close to the home, “And this one lady spoke up, ‘Well let’s just get rid of them.... Well if they’re a problem, let’s just get rid of them. Let’s just kill them off or haul them

off.’ [The visiting official] said, ‘Ma’am, they were here first, and they will be here when you’re gone.’ And sure enough they were.”

Other exurbanites described less marked but equally illustrative examples of the range of exurban residents’ diverse expectations of community cooperation vis-à-vis what should be. “It’s interesting because some people come out here and they want to live in the country, but they think they’re in the suburbs. And they’re thinking about things like... sidewalks.” Or, “we’ve actually had people move here from the big cities and say, ‘Well we can’t have these gravel roads. When are we going to pave these roads? And when are we going to put in street lights?’” Within the county’s exurban population, there is disagreement over constructing a “proper” landscape and as amenity migrants’ principal motivation for coming to the area was the landscape, conflict and competition are often present.

A main function of Property Owners Associations is year-round maintenance of roads, including snow removal during winter months. Roads inside subdivisions are private and the POA must make arrangements for and finance maintenance of their private roads. These seemingly straightforward arrangements confront competing expectations of what the everyday landscape should look like—and also what the “official” community should do to support that view. One resident described recent disagreement over snow removal in his POA, “Well you get somebody that maybe is from out east where they were plowing at three and four inches, and they’re used to driving just you know, a sedan around, well, you know, that’s gonna be a little difficult out here ‘cause we’re just not gonna touch the snow until it gets to a certain depth, so you

know, you gotta arrange yourself.”

Results suggest that the interplay between cooperation and competition in community as “co-opetition” discourse occurs at multiple levels of exurban resident interaction, from informal, individual relationships to the more formal relationships of community covenants. Beyond its emergence at multiple scales of community interaction, I would like to briefly discuss three distinct variations of the “co-opetition” theme that emerged in this analysis, two of which recollect the previous chapter’s discussion of community meaning in Garden Park.

*An “old-timer” among newcomers*

First, this discourse links status as an “old-timer” among newcomers in the exurban community to historical and environmental knowledge of the landscape. Second, recall Chapter Four’s discussion of community as “being local” or “credentialing.” Mastering local or natural environmental history and subsequently exhibiting it as a sign of “being local” is a means to connect local history with personal history and create valid local credentials.

In the examples from Garden Park, exurban residents repurposed what they had learned to create their “local-ness.” Exurban residents in other areas of the county expressed similar attitudes regarding value in knowing local history and geography. After relating the story of two ranchers caught for two weeks in a 1959 snowstorm, one interviewee stated, “Most of these new people that have moved in here don’t have a clue where anything is. [They] don’t know that the Tallahassee schoolhouse is down there. Don’t know anybody. And before we even thought about building here, we knew where

everything was.”

A notable difference in analysis at the Fremont County level, however, suggests that “credentialing” is more than a purposeful, personal exercise in validity construction. One resident in southern Fremont County related how his validity as an “old-timer” was equally pressed upon him by other exurban residents, “[I]f I go down to the general store, there’s people there who’ve accepted me as, you know, part of the landscape. But frankly, anyone new coming in looks at me as an old-timer, and the folks at the general store have, you know, kind of embraced me.”

This same resident adopted this identity of “old-timer” among newcomers and had created a resource aimed at helping more recent exurban residents with their transition to Fremont County. He described the internet site he created as a way “to keep other people from making the same mistakes we made. And, you know, as far as building their home, drilling their well, putting their septic system in.”

*A perceived a lack of community*

This variation on the discursive construction of community as “co-opetition” centers on those exurban residents who seek independence and isolation on the consumption landscape, or those who find that physical distance and low population density preclude possibility for social interaction.

Recall Chapter Four’s reference to community as “we have to go town.” In that case, space and distance from services were indicated as themes that reflected a difference in social interaction among ranching families and exurban residents. This

variation conjures that same focus on space and distance but instead centers on differences among exurban residents at the county level. Note that the spatial scale of consideration is a major distinction between the current discussion and that found in Chapter Four. Previously, the focus on a single valley's notions of community meaning suggested that that Garden Park's exurban residents viewed their "community" as encompassing a larger spatial area than did their neighboring ranchers. By contrast, the valley was the nexus of ranchers' social interaction.

In the preceding discussion, exurban residents described aspects of their lifestyle as "being on the outskirts" and were not seen as necessarily negative. Here, however, there is more of a hindrance or even preclusion to social interaction because of desire or distance. One exurbanite couple described their limited social interaction as purposeful—perhaps reflecting an extreme variant of the independent personality discussed above. "Well, you know, we, we're out here. We got used to it. [M]y son and my daughter... come over during the weekends sometimes. But other than that, we don't socialize or anything." Further describing the intention behind their lack of socialization, he clarified, "I think the reason that people moved in, I think [that] they think the same way I do. You know, they don't want to get involved with anything."

Whereas this example indicates a self-directed act of separation, perceived lack of community is not always self-imposed. In discussing relations with a neighbor, one exurban resident related her interpretation of the exurban landscape, "[T]his area... [is] going through this transition from what land use used to be which was mining and cattle and such. It's kind of transitioning to residential. A lot of these ranches are being

divided up into 35-acre home sites. It's a conflict.”

She was expressing the division between the production and consumption-oriented landscapes expressed in the literature, but was also reflecting on the state of her relations with a neighbor (McCormick 1998; Walker and Fortmann 2003). Recounting her neighbor's upstream damming of a creek that washed out the private bridge on her property, she reflected on the already-strained relations with the neighbor.

He and I have had problems already. When I got here, he informed me that he was going to be running cattle on my land because he and his family had always run cattle on this land. But the upshot was I had to get an attorney and ... Well, his original story was that he had an easement or a lease or some sort of this land, but that turned out not to be true. Then he kind of backed off and said well I don't really have any legal rights but I've always done it and that's what I'm going to do. So, letters between lawyers went back and forth and he backed off. I don't want trouble with him. I want to coexist.

In this case, distance and space are not speaking to “being on the outskirts” of social interaction. Instead, here social relationships are hampered by very different views of the consumption landscape.

### *Anti-uranium mining*

In this variation of “co-opetition,” the discursive linkage of community to a consumption landscape is threatened by uranium exploration in the northwestern area of the county. Exurban residents in the area responded by forming a non-profit corporation aimed at halting mining activities, activities at odds with amenity consumption of the “natural” landscape. In summer 2007 following an upturn in the market price of uranium, Black Range Minerals, Limited (BRM), an Australian mining company,

obtained permits from the state of Colorado to begin exploratory drilling on the Taylor and Boyer Ranches in Fremont County. Both ranches fall within the Tallahassee-Twelve-mile Valley region of the county. In 2007, the Colorado Department of Health and Environment issued three notices of intent (NOI) to BRM, who was unaware of the additional need to obtain conditional use permits (CUPs) from the county: the exploratory drilling and proposed mining site lie within 500 ft of 44 property owners in the area (Fox et al. 2009; Hawkle 2009). One exurban couple whose property borders the mining site recalled their introduction to the uranium exploration, “We looked out our window one night and there was this huge light over here.... I mean huge light! We had no idea what it was and it must have been there a week or two before people started [to realize].” At the time the drilling halted for lack of local permits, one community member estimated that between 70 and 100 exploratory holes existed.

In February 2008, one Tallahassee area household (a husband and wife) organized a meeting of area property owners associations (POAs) to discuss the proposed mining and represent area property owners with one voice. At this meeting, Tallahassee Area Community, Inc. (TAC) was formed. TAC membership was first limited to residents with access rights to Country Route 2 (Tallahassee Rd.), but has since expanded. “There are about 10 or 12 of us that are core members. And then there’s been sporadic involvement from the other 200 registered members of the organization.” While TAC was being formed, BRM applied for a CUP from Fremont County so they might continue exploration efforts. While the county’s Planning Commission recommended that the Board of Commissioners deny the permit for potential harm to public health and the creation of “adverse environmental conditions,” the board granted approval for the permit

on July 8, 2008. On July 9, 2008, several TAC members filed suit against the Fremont County Board of Commissioners and against Black Range Minerals (Fox et al. 2009).

Exurban residents have expressed concern over water contamination and declining property values. “Property values as far as I’m concerned are going down the toilet. We have about a \$600,000 investment here and right now I think it’s worthless. So financially it’s been devastating.” Discussing water quality and contamination tests, another resident commented, “We test it every six months. We bought into the, you know, the plan from the Black Range, you know, doing the water tests. Well it was part of the conditional use permit that they had to... really establish a baseline. It’s a little late to establish a baseline after you’ve drilled holes, but you’ve still gotta do something.”

The potential uranium mine has caused some exurban residents to question their investment as amenity migrants in Fremont County. “Well, we’re holding off on a few things. Trying to finish up things around the foundation, but... as far as... doing any major improvements, we’re holding off because we just don’t know what’s gonna happen up here... and is it a waste of our money to put any more money into the property or not?” Their construction of the “natural” landscape, the landscape for which they purchased their home, is now in question. Though concern is the dominant tenor of exurban residents in the Tallahassee-Twelvemile area, not all are of the same mind. Reflecting on his interaction with area long-time residents, one exurban resident suggested, “But the old-timers around here’ll say, ‘Oh, they come up about every twenty years, and the price goes up. And here they come.’ ‘Cause there’s billions of tons of uranium right up here, under this whole area. But, there’s uranium everywhere. It’s

where is it the most feasible to mine that counts.”

## **Conclusions**

As the rural restructuring that makes many ranching families fear for subsequent generations’ opportunities to maintain a ranching way of life, grounded theory research at the county level shows that change in social interaction and community meaning in Fremont County is far from a unidirectional collapse of community. Rather, it would suggest that community interaction and therefore its meaning reflect the scale of resident interactions.

In this chapter, I explored the results of a county-wide study of a single, broad-based discourse of community as “co-opetition.” Results of resident interviews suggest that a dominant theme of community among Fremont County’s exurban residents centers on the interplay between competition and cooperation. Exurban residents act not from within a single discursive understanding, but instead respond to dynamic physical and social environments, and their construction of them, as well as discursive interactions that occur both above and below the scale of inquiry.

Results suggest that discourse of community as “co-opetition” is rooted in the linkage between community and amenity migrants’ aesthetic consumption of the landscape. This discourse shows amenity migrants’ assets and investments as dependent on certain definitions of landscape as “natural” or “wild.” Among exurbanites themselves, these definitions are contested and as such, exurban residents’ efforts to

construct their landscape and its aesthetic often create social tension, which, in turn, is mitigated by a physical environment that often requires residents to rely on one another.

This chapter challenges Romme's straightforward assumption that the physical separation among exurban parcels indicates less meaningful social relations among neighbors (Romme 1997). Although site and situation do play into social interrelations, they do not have a singularly decisive role in constituting social bonds and hence community meaning. Examples of community as "co-opetition" discourse occur from the scale of individual interaction to that of formal Property Owners Associations. Three distinct variations of the "co-opetition" theme emerged from county-level analysis: a perceived lack of community, "credentialing" as an "old-timer" among newcomers, and efforts to halt uranium exploration and mining efforts in the Tallahassee and Twelvemile Valleys. Discourse analysis elucidated how each variation of community as "co-opetition" was linked to more encompassing environmental realities of remoteness, harsh conditions, and wildlife interactions.

Exurbanites' perception of a lack of community centered on notions of those individuals seeking isolation and autonomy on the consumption landscape. Becoming an "old-timer" among exurban newcomers rested on linking experiential history with objective local history (e.g., historical or cultural). Related to Chapter Four's community as "credentialing" discourse, analysis at this scale suggests that "local-ness" can be both strived for personally and reinforced through externally motivated social relation and construction. Uranium exploration by Black Range Minerals challenged many exurban residents' notions of their amenity landscape. They had come to consume "nature" and

its viewsheds, not reconsider the investments they had made to construct their particular interpretation of the landscape aesthetic.

In closing, the theme of exurban community as “co-opetition” suggests, in a fashion similar to the analysis of Garden Park, that social interaction is complex and sometimes contradictory—a dynamic change that does not suggest community breakdown, rather emergent community meanings and new opportunities for engaging interconnected and engaged actors in their landscape.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **Conclusions and future directions**

*Community* in this study refers to human interaction established by social relationships as they occur in place. This definition emphasizes community relationships as shaped by resident practice--not culture, structure, or belief system. Meanings evolve along with changes in social form and function. Consider the demographic and social change of the exurban American West of interspersed ranches, ranchettes, and public lands. In this study, I explored how localized meanings of community developed among residents of the valley of Garden Park fit into the larger discourse of community occurring in Fremont County.

Gosnell et al. (2006) suggest that though amenity ranchers may be able to lessen ranching intensity, they “may not take a comprehensive ecological approach to restoration. There is an obvious need here for effective outreach and information, but also a challenge in developing communications with new buyers.” Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff (2008) suggest studying the dynamics of exurban community interaction for insight into future community well-being that goes beyond identifying changes to the built and natural landscapes. They further suggest a profile for finding Western exurban communities’ participative residents—those residents who are knowledgeable about and engaged in their communities.

Gosnell et al. and Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff indicate that consideration of community interaction and meaning will reveal invaluable information about residents’

relationships, motivations, successes, and challenges. This type of focused, place-based information is essential in understanding what is meaningful to rapidly changing populations.

Human interaction in social relationships across multiple scales generates multiple, fluid, and often times, contested meanings to community. In the exurban transition, discursive constructions of community undergo rapid change and are open to negotiation. Community meaning and perception are produced and reproduced by “old” resident-producers and “new” resident-consumers across scales and contexts for social interaction (Halfacree 2006). A discourse analysis paired with grounded and axial coding offers a critical approach for discovering the meanings of community that are most significant to a population at a given moment while also linking those changing meanings of community to the larger social and economic changes occurring in the American West.

Understanding the local and specific meanings that residents create for their changing community and examining narratives of the rural landscape to highlight differences and similarities in how residents look at and participate in their environment may suggest ways to engage exurban populations beyond the limits of amenity or production-oriented models of the rural landscape (Cadieux 2005). As one resident put it: “When you think about it, people that come here for the most part have a certain independent strain anyway. They came here because they have an inner independence. That doesn’t mean they’re antisocial. They just have ... they can be by themselves somewhat and not be uncomfortable. And they can do a lot of things on their own without having to count on someone else.”

Echoing the community as “co-opetition” theme’s ongoing interplay between cooperation and competition, this exurban resident captures the dominant discourse of community among exurban residents of Fremont County. The tension at its heart lies in the link between community and the (often contested) aesthetic construction and consumption of the landscape. Results from Garden Park interviews suggest that community meanings may emanate from a particular reference group, find expression in multiple groups, or operate across social scales. Analysis of meaning at both valley and county reveals that discursive interactions occur above and below the scale of inquiry.

Ranchers in Garden Park regretted their lost sense of community while exurban residents happily expressed the joys of newfound close-knit community. Exurbanization brings change to the American West, but contrary to McCormick and Romme’s suggestions that exurban development’s physical and social fragmentation lead to conflict and potential disharmony (McCormick 1998; Romme 1997), analysis at the valley and county-wide scales in this study suggest that community discourse in exurbia is complex and contradictory. At both scales of analysis, this study identified a community theme that centered on residents connecting personal histories with objective histories, thereby increasing their “local-ness”. Garden Park’s “credentialing” residents and Fremont County’s “old-timers” suggest exurban resident behavior that may be similar to the Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff’s participative residents of exurban Western communities—those residents interested in what happens in their area and having relevant local information. One possibility of future research may be investigating the link between exurbanites’ “credentialing” behavior and potential future efforts toward community well-being (Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff 2008).

Scale in this investigation was used as a methodological tool to unearth grounded meanings of community in Fremont County; it aided in uncovering distinct meanings within imagined and often contested landscapes. Consider scale's value regarding the community as "co-opetition" theme. Countywide scale of analysis initially brought the theme to light, and analysis at a fine-tuned scale revealed that "co-opetition" also is present at the very micro level as Garden Park residents interact to produce their aesthetic landscape.

That is, "co-opetition" appears as a scale-less vehicle through which community residents talk through, handle, and mediate conflicts. Reconsider the example of two exurban resident households in Garden Park, both members of the same reference group, who share access to surface water rights on Four Mile Creek. Recall from the previous discussion of mutual support, that the owners on the northern property have horses and raise hay for feed as well as for sale. They periodically spray herbicides to control the growth of noxious weeds and less nutritious grasses. During times of strong wind, the herbicide was blown to the southern property where it damaged the neighbors' grapevines. Each of these exurban households held a particular image of an imagined landscape: Both productivist imaginings, the first is closer to the ranchers' landscape of cattle production whereas the second, while still agricultural, is a relatively new land-use practice by some of the valley's exurban residents.

Notwithstanding, these competing visions of the landscape were mitigated by the residents' cooperation. After some discussion of each household's needs and related information exchange, the northern household switched to an herbicide that is less

damaging to grapes but still effective for their needs. The southern neighbors hung a windsock so that wind direction is easily noticed, indicating which days the wind is likely to carry the herbicide southward toward the grapevines. Now spraying on less windy days, the northern neighbors use less herbicide to cover the same area of hay, and the grapevines are healthier.

Tracing the “co-opetition” discourse through scales of inquiry leads me to speculate on its nested quality and how it might be useful beyond the confines of this investigation. I would suggest that the meanings created for community in Fremont County are meanings created through real interaction between human beings. “Nested” does not suggest that countywide discourse of “co-opetition” delimits interaction at the micro scale. Rather, the cooperation and competition mediated between structure and agency in the creation of one theme of exurban community: “co-opetition.” Could the same mediating theme be applied to other communities undergoing rapid social and economic restructuring, such as new sub-developments at the edge of suburban expansion?

Exurban development does not foreshadow the end of traditional rural values or the demise of the “ranching way of life” in Fremont County. In Garden Park, local residents adopt, use, and share their knowledge of local history or local environmental know-how. Understanding how to engage local residents in interaction that develops community well-being across reference groups will be especially important for applied studies of community well-being.

Rural restructuring makes many ranching families fear for subsequent

generations' opportunities to maintain a ranching way of life. Grounded theory research at the county level suggests that change in social interaction and community meaning in Fremont County is far from a unidirectional collapse of community. In fact, the results suggest new (albeit changed) community interaction and methods for studying place-based community interaction that highlights the local knowledge and significance that may point toward Mataritta-Cascante and Luloff's community well-being or developing targeted outreach and communication messages for new amenity buyers.

## Appendix

Analysis included data collected in annual interviews with Garden Park and Fremont County residents in 2001 and again between 2005 and 2009. Broadly centered on property modifications, sense of community, and social connection, each year’s study had a specific focus.

Year	Interview Objective and Sample Questions
2001	<p>The 2001 round of interviews attempted to identify residents’ general motivation for coming to Garden Park as well as how they learned of the valley, their plans for any property modifications, and their relations with neighbors.</p>
2005	<p>The aim of the 2005 interviews centered on perceptions of being an area newcomer or old-timer, expectations of living in the valley, social interaction, physical housing design, and the effects of any housing covenants on property modifications. Sample questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why/how did you come here? What do you call this place?</li> <li>• How did you design your house/buildings?</li> <li>• What is your relationship(s) like with your neighbors?</li> <li>• Have the housing covenants affected you?</li> </ul>
2006	<p>The purpose for this round of interviews was to investigate perceptions of community. Interviewees were asked to define “community,” describe how and where they spend their time, and reflect on their connection to Garden Park. Sample questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is community to you? What makes a strong community? Do you think you live in a strong or weak community?</li> <li>• Where do you spend your time for work and recreation? Are there places people gather? Do you belong to any social groups, organizations, volunteer groups, etc?</li> <li>• How long have you lived here? How long do you live here during the year? Why did you move to Garden Park? Have these reasons or ideas changed since you have been here? Do you feel a connection to the land? If so, how?</li> <li>• Pretend National Geographic is doing an article on sense of community in Colorado for ranching valleys. Take photos to</li> </ul>

	accompany the article. Tell us your feelings about the following photos and how they relate to your sense of community.
2007	The objective of this round of semi-structured interviews was to identify both the changes residents have made to the landscape since their arrival and where they had learned any associated techniques.
2008 <sup>iv</sup>	<p>Summer 2008 interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours each and consisted of four main elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Confidential participant profile/Review and verification of past interview information:</i> age, occupation, length of residence, geographic origin, and completion of a Sense of Community Index (SCI) survey.</li> <li>• <i>Private-property modifications:</i> Participants identified planned and recent property modifications including a list of when and why it occurred and if the decision involved consultation with others.</li> <li>• <i>Group landscape projects and arrangements:</i> Participants indicated whether they were involved in group projects involving landscape change, indicating who was involved, when the project began, and why.</li> <li>• <i>Social networks assessment by each study participant:</i> Participants were asked to complete a modified Personal Acquaintance Measure (PAM) for each relationship identified above.</li> </ul>
2009	<p>Interviews for 2009 continued with the same basic protocol of the 2008 season, save that participants were not asked to complete a Sense of Community Index survey or a Personal Acquaintance Measure. Principal interview elements were therefore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Confidential participant profile/Review and verification of past interview information:</i> age, occupation, length of residence, geographic origin, and general participant inquiry</li> <li>• <i>Private-property modifications:</i> Participants identified planned and recent property modifications including a list of when and why it occurred and if the decision involved consultation with others.</li> <li>• <i>Group landscape projects and arrangements:</i> Participants indicated whether they were involved in group projects involving landscape change, indicating who was involved, when the project began, and why.</li> </ul>

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<sup>i</sup> According to the Fremont County Tax Assessor's Office, 43 individuals own parcels in Garden Park. Parcels are of varying size and not all owners have built homes on their parcels.

<sup>ii</sup> With special thanks to the Fremont County Tax Assessor's Office for providing this information.

<sup>iii</sup> "Southwark" is a pseudonym. Place names are accurate but any individual or family names have been changed.

<sup>iv</sup> Interviews conducted in 2008 and 2009 were under the auspices and structure of the aforementioned National Science Foundation project researching adaptive learning networks in Fremont County, Colorado.