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## “We Didn’t Move Here to Move to Aspen”: Community Making and Community Development in an Emerging Rural Amenity Destination

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# **“We Didn’t Move Here to Move to Aspen”: Community Making and Community Development In an Emerging Rural Amenity Destination**

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## **Abstract**

Residents of high amenity rural areas in the U.S. are grappling with the community-level impacts of their small towns increasingly becoming destinations for in-migrants, seasonal residents, and tourists. This case study of an emerging destination uses alterity theory to examine how amenity migration affects residents’ community making and subsequently their community development efforts. Residents tend to see their community as divided into two social groups based upon opposed stances towards development; one resistant to any form of change and the other open. The ‘Keepers’ are seen as stuck in their ways and closed to any form of development while the ‘Changers’ are perceived as trying to change too much and turn the community into a more established amenity destination—like Aspen—through various local development projects. In-depth interviews with residents and observations in one amenity destination show how two groups exist and differ along key social and demographic dimensions, but how residents’ interests in community development are more intertwined than they assume. The negative perceptions that residents have of each other, however, have real consequences for the town because it fosters misunderstandings, prevents cooperation, and inhibits the building of social capital which prevents integrated community development efforts. Specifically, it creates the reality and perception that various development projects do not have everyone’s support or input and it has prevented some efforts from occurring at all. This research provides rural sociologists and community developers with a more nuanced understanding of how the growing trend of amenity migration can shape residents’ daily interactions as well as overarching community development efforts.

**Keywords:** amenity migration, community making, rural community development

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## **1.0 Introduction**

While some rural areas across the United States face economic and demographic decline (Carr & Kefalas, 2010; Hamilton, Hamilton, Duncan, & Colocousis, 2008; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018) or chronic poverty (Duncan, 2014), others rich in natural amenities are experiencing a different set of social and economic challenges (Green, Deller, & Marcouiller, 2005). High-amenity rural communities across the U.S., particularly those in close proximity to urban areas (Johnson & Stewart, 2005) and in the Intermountain West (Krannich, Luloff, & Field, 2011), have become magnets for young families, recreationists, remote workers, and retirees in search of a higher quality of life in rural settings (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; McGranahan, 1999; Winkler, 2010). Residents of these rural amenity destinations are often more worried about issues such as population growth, the impact of development on the

natural landscape, and affordable housing than population loss or economic decline (Hamilton et al., 2008). The connection between attractive natural amenities and rural in-migration is clear, as are some of the social issues that can emerge at the community level such as culture clashes (Smith & Krannich, 2000; Ulrich-Schad & Qin, 2018) and growing inequality (Winkler, 2010). However, limited work has explicitly examined how this demographic trend shapes community making processes, or the ways people create and cultivate community (defined below) together on a daily basis (Macgregor, 2010), and subsequently, how these interactions impact local community development efforts.

This paper presents a case study of an emerging amenity destination in rural Colorado to answer two interrelated research questions through the lens of alterity theory: (a) How do different resident groups view and interact with each other (e.g., make community), and subsequently, (b) How does residents' community making matter in local community development efforts? Through in-depth interviews with 59 residents of River Town<sup>1</sup>, Colorado, and observations I explore how individual-level processes of social interaction and construction of group differences impact the community as a whole through impeding integrated town development efforts. With regard to community development, I focus, like Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan (2012), on the:

process that entails organization, facilitation, and action, which allows people to establish ways to create the community they want to live in. It is a process that provides vision, planning, direction, and coordinated action towards desired goals associated with the promotion of efforts aimed at improving the conditions in which local resources operate (p. 297).

According to Macgregor (2010), 'community making' involves the many different ways people create and cultivate community together. Thus, community making includes how people interact with one another on a daily basis, including who they interact with, where they interact, how often they interact, and under what circumstances. Similar to field theory, this perspective contends that the most critical feature of a community is the social interaction that occurs regularly through interactions of residents (Wilkinson, 1991). While definitions of community abound, I also find Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan's (2012) useful in this rural context because it accounts for shared physical space, interactions, and ties between people. They define community as "a locality comprised by people residing in a geographical area; the resources such people require to subsist and progress; and the processes in which such individuals engage to distribute and exchange such resources to fulfill local needs and wants" (p. 295).

It is crucial to better understand how rural amenity migration impacts community making and subsequently development processes given: (a) the persistence of this demographic trend both within the U.S. and globally (Lekies, Matarrita-Cascante, Schewe, & Winkler, 2015); (b) the changes and challenges associated with amenity migration, including for both communities (e.g., as places) and community (e.g., as a process); and (c) the need for a better understanding regarding how such outcomes

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<sup>1</sup> I use a pseudonym throughout the paper to keep the identity of the study town and individual residents confidential. When necessary, I also change names of community events, development projects, or places that would reveal where this study was conducted.

impact local community development efforts and might provide insights into how such efforts can better integrate diverse community voices (Lekies et al., 2015; Matarrita-Cascante, Zunino, & Sagner-Tapia, 2017).

## 2.0 Literature Review

While tempered during the Great Recession (Ulrich-Schad, 2015), rural places in the U.S. with attractive natural amenities have been growing in population through in-migration since the 1970s (McGranahan, 1999). Because of this demographic trend, academic interest in the trend of amenity migration, or what some also refer to as lifestyle or leisure migration (e.g., Van Noorloos, 2013), in the U.S. and elsewhere has proliferated (see Gosnell & Abrams, 2011 for a review; Lekies et al., 2015). Many studies focus explicitly on the movement of people from urban to rural areas for lifestyle reasons (Cadieux & Hurley, 2011; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017; Moss & Glorioso, 2014), yet people also move to emerging rural amenity destinations from more established ones as those communities morph into places where people no longer want to live, and they lose their rural character that drew people to them in the first place (Sherman, 2018; Ulrich-Schad, 2014). This body of literature includes studies of permanent migrants and/or seasonal residents of amenity destinations at domestic and international scales.

The loss or decline of community as a result of population change has been a focus of sociological research since the 18th century (Day, 2006; Lee & Newby, 1983; Stein, 1964; Zorbaugh, 1929). The assumption has often been that population growth driven by modernization, industrialization, and urbanization causes a decline in *gemeinschaft*-like relationships, or those based upon feelings of togetherness or mutual bonds, which are replaced by more *gesellschaft*-like ones, or those based upon instrumentality, rationality, or exchange (Toennies, 1957). In this view, as populations grow, individuals become increasingly oriented towards their own self-interest rather than the interests of the larger group(s) to which they belong.

More recent studies continue to examine various measures of social well-being and change but in the context of amenity-growth in rural areas (see, for example, Krannich, Petrzalka & Brehm, 2006; Krannich et al. 2011; Stedman, Goetz, and Weagraff, 2006). Not only has this research focused on the volume of new residents, but also on how the characteristics of new residents and their interactions with long-term residents impact destination communities. Some studies have documented how rural in-migration can bring social heterogeneity and change, including shifts in local power and stratification systems, and challenges or clashes in community values and attitudes (Lichter & Brown, 2011; Salamon, 2003; Smith & Krannich, 2000; Walker & Fortman, 2003; Ulrich-Schad & Qin, 2018; Winkler, 2010). Studies have also shown how amenity migration can lead to social exclusion and inequality (Park & Pellow, 2011; Winkler, 2010; Winkler, 2013), a loss of political control for long-term residents (Walker & Fortman, 2003), and contrasting levels of community participation between seasonal and permanent residents (Matarrita-Cascante, Luloff, Krannich, & Field, 2006; Matarrita-Cascante, 2014).

Within amenity growth communities, important differences between migrants or second-home owners and long-term or permanent residents have been documented: including that newer residents tend to have higher income levels, arrive from more urban places, have higher education levels than long-term residents (Moss & Glorioso, 2014; Schewe, Field, Frosch, Clendenning, & Jensen, 2012; Krannich et al., 2011), and have distinct environmental behaviors (Matarrita-Cascante, Sene-

Harper, & Stocks, 2015). Various groups also have different views of amenity growth, its consequences, and how the related impacts should be handled (Jobes, 2000; Jones, Fly, Talley, & Cordell, 2003; Kondo, Rivera, & Rullman, 2012; Lynch, 2006; Marsh & Griffiths, 2006). In other words, residents differ along important socioeconomic lines, and not all residents agree on whether or how amenity growth is a positive or negative trend for their respective communities. Fortman and Kusel (1990) further suggest that it is less that new residents have different views than long-term residents, but that they instead bring voice to views that already exist. Other research with a more explicit focus on seasonal and retired residents has found that residents, despite how long they have lived in a place, can share common goals and values and can be relatively well-integrated within a community (Schewe et al., 2012). There are also studies that focus less on the social impacts of amenity growth on residents and places, and more explicitly on the economic (see, for example, Hunter, Boardman, & Saint Onge, 2005; Saint Onge, Hunter, & Boardman, 2007; Reeder & Brown, 2005; Spain, 1993) or environmental implications (Abrams, Gosnell, Gill, & Klepeis, 2012; Lynch, 2006), which is not the focus here.

While a large body of research examines the negative implications of amenity growth as discussed above, studies have also shown how rural population growth can play a role in economic development or community revitalization (Deller, Tsai, Marcouiller, & English, 2001; Freudenburg, 1982; Galston & Baehler, 1995; McGranahan, 1999; Power, 1996; Reeder & Brown, 2005). For example, Reeder and Brown (2005) found that, overall, recreation dependence has a positive effect on community well-being because it increases local employment, wage levels, and income, reduces poverty, and improves education and health. Community leaders or rural development practitioners often promote amenity-based development as a strategy for economic growth. In response, communities shift to a reliance on natural and cultural amenities to attract tourists as well as permanent and seasonal residents (Bourke & Luloff, 1995; Crowe, 2006; Dillon, 2011; Winkler, 2010). At the same time, while developers, business owners, and homeowners may fare well in the context of amenity growth as business increases and values of houses go up, jobs related to tourism and recreational development are often low-paying, unstable, and seasonal (Krannich et al., 2011; Marcouiller, Kwang-Koo, & Deller, 2004), indicating that this path of development may not benefit all segments of a population equally. As Winkler (2010) shows in her work, the poor and young in these types of communities are especially vulnerable. Winkler, Deller, & Marcouiller (2015) similarly find that counties with more recreational homes have lower levels of economic well-being as indicated by per capita income, poverty rates, and income inequality.

Ultimately, research suggests clear differences between amenity migrants and longer-term residents of amenity growth areas; however, few studies have examined how these differences are constructed, and how these differences or boundaries are reproduced (Krannich, Luloff, and Field, 2011; Sherman, 2018). Two recent qualitative studies, one by Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017), and another by Sherman (2018), examine individual-level experiences or processes of boundary formation in amenity growth communities. Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017) examine how non-intrinsic differences are constructed between migrants and residents in an amenity-migrant community in the Chilean Andes using in-depth interviews with members of both groups. This study finds that interaction between the groups is often superficial and limited and leads to negative value judgements between the long-term and new residents. Through ethnographic and interview work in the rural U.S.,

Sherman (2018) focuses more on the processes of social division creation and reproduction in an amenity development community. Sherman uncovers how long-time working-class residents are marginalized in their home communities through changes in how local symbolic capital is used and is defined by newcomer groups.

Like Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017), I examine social boundary construction in amenity growth communities, but do so using a case study in the U.S. Sherman's (2018) study also focuses on the U.S. but does not explicitly examine how outcomes of amenity growth (e.g., social divides) impact local development efforts. Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017) examine how the limited and negative views that long-term and new residents have of each other affect integrated community development, and find that these perceptions lead to diminished efforts in this regard. For example, they find that the 'us vs. them' mentality has led to a lack of shared community goals and growing distrust and apathy towards local development organizations. Similarly, a study of amenity migration in Costa Rica suggests that community development efforts are not integrated between locals and migrants and that they are primarily driven by rural local residents (Cortes, Matarrita-Cascante, & Rodriguez, 2014). This study argues that inclusive community development is not occurring because of the lack of residents' interaction. Simply put, this lack of interaction creates and reinforces barriers to meaningful communication, including local development efforts that involve diverse community stakeholders. Matarrita-Cascante (2017) also shows in his research in amenity growth communities in Costa Rica that community development efforts themselves are crucial factors in overall positive community outcomes amidst amenity development. This study will add to this growing body of literature by further interrogating how amenity migration influences the construction of residents' relationships to one another as well as how the quality of these residents' relationships shapes overall community development in a U.S. context.

### **3.0 Framework for Analysis**

Similar to Matarrita-Cascante et al.'s (2017) study, I use alterity theory to examine how residents' views of each other are formed and how such views matter in community making and community development processes. Alterity theory focuses on how different individuals or groups encounter one another (i.e., 'the other'), and realize that they are separate and thus different, which in turn affects the interaction between the groups (Levinas, 1999; Todorov, 1984). In this context, in the migration of distinct social groups to amenity destination communities, 'newcomers' become viewed as outsiders, and long-term, permanent residents as locals, further shaping their identities and interactions with one another. As outlined by Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017), "the construction of one and the other plays a role in how those two groups think and value the other, affecting their interaction and formation of social bonds" (p. 5). The three dimensions of alterity theory are further used to outline what these socially constructed groups of community residents know about the other group (epistemological), how people within these groups value those in the other group (axiological), and how people in each group interact with those in the other group (praxeological). Finally, I use the findings from this analysis to inform how local community development efforts are impacted.

## 4.0 Methods

I spent a total of four months living in an emerging rural destination community in Colorado observing and talking to residents about how the community works on a daily basis during the summer and winter of 2013. See Table 1 for a demographic profile of the community.<sup>2</sup> I consider River Town to be ‘emerging’ because, while the community is growing, it has not yet experienced the same level of population growth as many well-known ‘rural’ destinations (e.g., Bozeman, Montana, Aspen, Colorado). Along with reading local newspapers and following various institutions, businesses, and organizations on social media, I attended many types of local events such as church fundraisers, political meetings, farmers' markets, and contra dances, and spent time watching people interact on a daily basis in local restaurants, coffee shops, and other public spaces. I took daily field notes to record what I saw and heard that was pertinent to my understanding of how the community works, particularly the different social groups that exist and how they interact.

Table 1. *Select 2010 Socioeconomic and Demographic Indicators for River Town Census County Division (CCD), Colorado, and the U.S.*

	<b>River Town CCD<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>Colorado</b>	<b>U.S.</b>
Population	10,000	5,029,196	308,745,538
Population change, 2000–2010	15.0%	16.9%	9.7%
Non-Hispanic white	90.0%	81.3%	72.4%
Over age 25 with a bachelor’s degree or higher*	30.0%	35.9%	27.9%
Median age	45.0	36.1	37.2
Median family income*	\$55,000	\$70,046	\$62,982
All people in poverty*	10.0%	12.2%	13.8%
Unemployed*	5.0%	4.7%	5.1%
Employed in arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food Services industry*	15.0%	10.1%	8.9%
Housing for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	25.0%	4.6%	3.5%

Sources: 2000 and 2010 Censuses; 2006–2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (indicated by \*)

+The numbers for River Town have been rounded to help protect the identity of the study community.

<sup>2</sup> The ‘community’ data is for River Town Census County Division (CCD) because many residents who live outside of the official town limits still consider themselves residents. At the county level, there are multiple towns that residents could consider to be ‘their community’. In this case, I let residents in the county determine whether or not River Town was the community in which they met these needs and wants.

The primary source of data for this analysis is 59 semi-structured in-depth interviews that were conducted with a wide array of residents (see Table 2 in the findings for more information about characteristics of the interviewees). Interviewees were asked about (a) how their town has changed in recent years, (b) what they do and do not enjoy about their community and living in it, (c) how they envision their town in the future, (d) what different social groups exist and their own social networks, (e) their daily activities, and (f) their thoughts on local issues including development and population change. I purposefully selected a wide range of community members to interview, including local political and religious leaders, business owners, retirees, young adults, ranchers, and telecommuters, to get a broad perspective of community life. I oversampled local formal and informal leaders given their awareness of local development efforts. Some participants were recruited through referrals while others were purposively selected because of their position within the community or some other social status (e.g., age, occupation, duration in the community). I spoke with 30 women and 29 men ranging from age 24 to 85. Reflecting the racial composition of the town, all interviewees were non-Hispanic white with the exception of one black man. While some had only moved to the area within the past few years, I spoke with others who had lived in the town their entire lives, as well as others at a variety of lengths in between.

During my time in River Town, I started testing how my initial understandings of community structure and prominent issues based off of my interview and observational notes matched with residents' understandings, as done using extended case method approaches (Burawoy, 1998). After asking them for their initial responses to my standard questions, I would tell them what some of my preliminary findings were to get their feedback. After my time in the field, I transcribed the interviews myself and used NVivo software to conduct open coding without using preconceived themes to let patterns emerge from the data, a form of grounded theory (Esterberg, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I first conducted open coding to examine themes in how residents in the community viewed one another. Once it became clear that residents generally viewed people within the community along the lines of their openness to change and certain types of development, I further explored the interviews for evidence regarding how the two groups of residents knew each other, valued each other, and finally, interacted with each other. Specifically, I coded for how different types of residents practiced community making on a daily basis and how the perceptions of these groups impacted community development. I examined community making by focusing on what types of residents interacted with each other, when and where they interacted, and with what frequency. With regards to development, I coded for specific issues or projects, what different types of people thought about such issues, and how residents envisioned the future of their community.

Findings are organized into four sections, the first three aligning with the dimensions of alterity theory regarding how residents know, value, and interact with one another and finally, how these views and interactions impact community development efforts.

## **5.0 Findings**

### ***5.1 What People Know About the Other—Epistemological***

Residents frequently had much to say about what groups they thought existed in town, though not all was based on their own experience, and not all matched with my observations. One should keep in mind that these assessments were often based more on what people thought they knew about each other, or value judgements, than

facts. Additionally, as will be discussed more in depth later, while people belonging to these groups did interact, they were limited in many ways, which often hurt the accuracy of their perceptions of one another. As the population grew, residents said they generally saw the town as increasingly divided into two social groups, one that supported growth and change and new forms of development and one that was resistant to it. As was common, a resident of 25 years described the two types of people in town and how they were characterized by their differing views on community-level change:

I would say that there's kind of this dichotomy of people who want the town to grow and modernize and people who say 'it ain't changing, it's fine the way it is, we don't need any more people here.' And I know I have had some people who have been on the chamber of commerce and stuff and have said sometimes that it's like pulling teeth to try and get any change. And it's kind of like the farmers who show up at the town meeting in their cowboy boots who sit there like this [arms crossed].

Additionally, some interviewees had their own set of labels they used to distinguish different types of residents and their views on change:

I think there is still a Jetsons versus the Flintstones kind of issue that goes on. Even up to 5 years ago there were people who wanted to rip up Main Street and turn it into a dirt road again. So you've got different ideas of what should happen or shouldn't happen in town.

My community observational and interview data also indicated that River Town residents had varying proclivities for change and that these views correlate with some key socioeconomic characteristics (see Table 2). These differences in views, however, are less anti-change or pro-change than residents perceive them to be and are better characterized as a continuum. I found it is more that they have different views about *the type* of change or development that they want to prioritize or see as 'good' for the community as opposed to being pro- or anti-change or development. In this paper I subsequently refer to the two groups that exist in town as the 'Keepers' and the 'Changers.'<sup>3</sup> The Changers are those who are more supportive of new, or what they see as 'untraditional', types of development, such as the New-Old Project that is based off of New Urbanism design principles (see Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, 2000). In stark contrast to older housing developments in River Town that featured large lots and homes, New-Old Project aimed to promote quality of life through walkability, mix-use buildings, increased density, and increased social

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<sup>3</sup> These two groups are best thought of as ideal types (Weber, 1949), or social constructs that represent extreme views of change and development in River Town. You will find people who are resistant to any new ideas and forms of development in town and those who push for development that might compromise the town's character and longstanding institutions, but those types of people are less common, and most fall somewhere in the middle of a continuum. I interviewed both 'strong' Changers and 'strong' Keepers, however, the bulk of interviewees fell in-between the two extremes. Along with their contrasting views towards development and differing social characteristics, Keepers and Changers could be characterized by how they made and experienced community and by the local social institutions they participated in or frequented.

interaction through purposeful design. Changers often perceived these types of development as being good for the local economy, but also more socially- or environmentally-friendly than other more common forms of development (e.g., box-chain stores, gated communities). The Keepers were more supportive of development that was economically-focused and that did not alter what they saw as longstanding community character or culture.

Table 2. *Characteristics of River Town Interviewees*

<b>Location on Continuum</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% Newcomer (10 years)</b>	<b>% Newcomer (5 years)</b>	<b>% with college degree</b>	<b>% female</b>	<b>Average age</b>	<b>Business Owner</b>	<b>New-Old Project Ties</b>
Strong Changer	13	76.9%	53.9%	84.6%	30.8%	44.0	69.2%	46.2%
Moderate Changer	16	50.0%	37.5%	87.5%	50.0%	49.6	56.3%	25.0%
Neither	16	56.3%	50.0%	75.0%	68.8%	50.6	18.8%	6.3%
Moderate Keeper	8	0.0%	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%	59.9	25.0%	0.0%
Strong Keeper	6	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	33.3%	74.2	33.3%	0.0%

The Changers tended to be younger, more recent in-migrants, and have higher education levels. Their economic situations ran the gamut: some had family money, some were self-sufficient, and some were just scraping by and some even relying on help from family. Many Changers were also entrepreneurs or business owners and discussed starting their own local or online businesses or telecommuting as the only way to be able to live in this particular community. Others, young and old, were piecing together multiple part-time or seasonal jobs, often so that they can pursue the outdoor lifestyle they desire in this small community with abundant recreational amenities. All Changers thought the town could be more vibrant economically, either in terms of employment opportunities that were year-round and well-paying or for their businesses and wanted it to have an even greater variety of social, cultural, and recreational opportunities.

The Keepers tended to be, but were not universally, long-term, older residents of the community with lower levels of education. For instance, all six ‘strong’ Keepers had been living in River Town 10 years or longer. One ‘moderate’ Keeper had been there less than five years. As described by a resident of 20 years, “You have certain people that are retired and moved here because it was a small quiet town with dirt roads. And it is a place where they really don’t want to see a lot of change.” Although people who moved to the community more recently did tend to be more open to change and new forms of development than long-term inhabitants, not all long-term residents were Keepers, and not all newcomers were Changers.

### **5.2 How People Value the Other—Axiological**

The general perception was that the Changers were pushing for types of change that the Keepers did not like because they saw such efforts as compromising the traditional character of their town. On the other hand, the Changers saw the Keepers

as unsupportive of any form of change and stuck in their old ways. Specific local development projects were among the most controversial issues in River Town, and they played a role in how residents constructed social boundaries between the two groups and made value judgements about other residents. As one resident explained:

I think that those development issues have been the most divisive things that have happened since I got here. And they represent the different groups in town and their interests and their phobias and the whole bit. We really haven't had a lot of social issue things. I mean there's always these little grumblings. But I think the development issues have been the big thing. We haven't had people who are like, you know, saying racist comments toward different groups in town. I really haven't heard that.

Common controversial issues brought up in interviews and in town political meetings related to development included: 'new' residents bringing in 'new' ideas for town 'improvements' (e.g., uniform business signage in town, sidewalk bumpouts, etc.), proposed or existing housing and/or business development projects (e.g., New-Old Project), the 'revitalization' of Main Street, and zoning of residential or commercial areas.

Keepers frequently discussed how they did not understand why people moved to town and then tried to change it. They wanted the community to remain the same—or go back to the way it was—preferred that no new people with new ideas about how to 'improve' the community move to town and wanted to preserve what they see as the traditional character of River Town. As one elderly lifetime resident said:

One of my most negative things is the new people who move here and want to get us to be like where they came from. This is a great story, an older lady that I knew ten or fifteen years ago, was at the grocery store. This lady was behind a woman who was checking out. The woman was chewing out the checker, saying 'I could not find any soft mozzarella! I just don't understand! When I was in California, I could always get...' She was going on and on. The checker said 'I'm sorry. We don't get enough demand. We don't carry it.' My friend said 'You know, ma'am, why don't you just move back to California?' There are people with that attitude who come in here. The first thing they want to do is change us.

More specifically, Keepers worried that the identity of the town was being compromised with too much change and that what they loved about the community would be lost. Keepers frequently spoke about their fears that River Town was becoming too much like other well-known mountain towns, which had become too gentrified and populated for their taste. Some interviewees had previously lived in or visited places like Aspen or Breckenridge, but now favored River Town because it had not yet reached the same level of gentrification and still felt like a 'real'

community to them. A resident of 20 years who had married a valley native exclaimed:

And we don't want to be uppity. There are those who want, I believe, the change, and I don't know who all of them are, but they want the change, and then there are those who want it to, they want to be able to support the kids who are graduating, they want the kids to be able to get the jobs here, they want the town to be successful, but they want River Town. We didn't move here to move to Breckenridge. We didn't move here to move to Aspen. So why did you move here if you are trying now to turn it into Aspen?

Thus, issues like adopting a uniform sign code for all businesses, or creating sidewalk 'bumpouts' with trees, benches, bike racks, and artistic trash receptacles, were often seen as forms of change or development that were a threat to their town's low-key character and would make them too much like these other places. In other words, the Keepers' views of their community's future did not include the same types of development or amenities as the Changers. The Changers, on the other hand, saw these changes as building a better place to live.

Because newcomers more frequently had views in line with the Changers, as the community grows from in-migration, the numerical balance in River Town is shifting from Keepers to Changers, which had many Keepers worried. As one Keeper commented:

When I first got here there were certainly a lot more Flintstones and now there are a lot more Jetsons and that's what's happening in a lot of these recreation communities. And those people have desired new things...so those changes are occurring and there is a group of people who want a Baby Gap on the corner and there are those people who think it is just a matter of time before the town is ruined and they have to move elsewhere where the roads are still gravel.

Related to the fear that Keepers had about losing their grasp numerically on their community, is that they were losing local political power as people more open to non-traditional forms of development moved to town and voted for local leaders who were more supportive of the type of project epitomized by New-Old Project.<sup>4</sup> Many feared that if too many Changers were elected to the town board that they would lose local political control, and importantly, decisions related to development policies, in their town. As stated by one long-term resident:

I've got friends that are on one side of the political banner, she's an ex-mayor. And ran the town, ran the town the old way. And then getting

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<sup>4</sup> It should also be noted that some of the fear regarding New-Old Project specifically, and how developers might use politics to benefit themselves, stemmed from corruption and scandal with a past housing development in town.

everybody's opinion on something instead of just the squeaky wheels. And she is now out and this kind of thing and the squeaky wheels are rounding up their people that aren't from here. And, you know, and this kind of thing. And they are trying to, they are pretty much getting away with anything they want right now. And till something changes it's probably going to be the downfall of [River Town].

It is true that in recent years more Changers have been elected to local political positions, however, most note that they are still dominated by the Keepers.<sup>5</sup> They also feared that they were losing control of many public social spaces (e.g., restaurants, shops, parks) as demands shifted with the changing population.

In contrast to Keepers, Changers saw their community as being improved with new 'amenities'. For instance, this includes a greater variety of shopping, dining, employment, and entertainment options as described by one Changer who had lived in the community for 15 years:

They want to have a lot of amenities around, everything from high-speed Internet access to music festivals during the summer. I mean the biggest thing when I got here was the rodeo, but the rodeo is kind of petering out and now the biggest thing is kind of the kayak [name of event], the music fest, that sort of thing.

While economic benefits were a part of the rationale or motivation for Changers to create new businesses or events in town, the developers and the Changers who utilize them also felt like they provided additional places for town residents to make and experience community, not detract from it as Keepers saw them. In order to see such economic and social ideas come to life, more and more Changers were becoming involved in local politics or taking part in formal and informal town planning and development groups. They were using their social, financial and political capital to create the changes they wish to see, which were not always seen favorably by all town residents. As described by a young Changer: "We have been living here for about 10 years and it has vastly improved. We had a packed bluegrass band the other night and that would have never happened 10 years ago." Again, rather than seeing the community as 'lost' with new types of growth and development, Changers saw it as becoming stronger and a more desirable place for them to live.

### ***5.3 How People Interact with the Other—Praxeological***

Even though the town is small and has limited options, the two groups had different restaurants, bars, or coffee shops that they tended to frequent, stores where they usually shopped, recreational activities that they liked to pursue, and local events they were more likely to attend. Although there was overlap in each of these realms, many of the places and events that the Keepers tended to frequent were those which have been a part of River Town for generations, while the Changers tended to

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<sup>5</sup> The board of trustees has shifted slightly more toward the Changers since I conducted my initial field research. In the April 2014 election, the town trustee that most represented views of the Keepers was replaced with a trustee with more Changer inclinations.

frequent the newer restaurants and shops, attend recently created events, and participate in trending recreational activities (e.g., stand-up paddle boarding, bouldering, kayaking). Certain long-standing community events were also a greater draw for the Keepers. A middle-aged couple, who is more closely aligned with the Changers, noted what happens when they go to an event dominated by Keepers:

I mean just go to the rodeo, that's where we usually see it most extremely. We don't recognize anybody. Do you see how many people we said hi to just now [in a coffee shop]? Okay, so this is like, you know, the group that we know. But then you go to the rodeo and you don't recognize anybody and it's a fantastic thing. It is all these ranchers that come out and they do their thing and they bring their kids and they do mutton busting.

Like the Keepers, there were certain places where you are more likely to find the Changers. As a young newcomer described:

I'd say there is a divide between the people that are here because they value outdoor activities—whether that be mountain biking or whatever—and then the people who are just here because this is all they have ever known. It's where they grew up and it's where their parents grew up. Those people that are here for nature are, maybe not cliquey, but they generally frequent the same places. They'll go to the health food store, and the coffee shop, and the brewery, and a couple of other places like that. That's where you'll see them.

In my observations, I similarly found that while there were places in town that you could see all types of residents, there were also spaces that were almost completely dominated by one group or the other.

The ties or connections between the two groups, or bridging social capital, was also limited. For instance, despite its presence in the community for nearly a decade, when I did my research, many still did not see New-Old Project and its residents as part of the rest of the town. Instead they saw it as a community largely separate from the rest of River Town. As one resident mentioned: “It has a restaurant, and it is kind of fun to take your visitors down there and listen to some music, but it is still apart from town, not a part of town.” Some considered it to be its own ‘community within a community’ where the same people tended to hang out together, go to the same events, and have the same lifestyles. In other words, they thought that bonding social capital was high in New-Old Project, but that there was superficial bridging social capital between the groups. Along this line, according to my own and community members’ observations, although the New-Old Project events were open to the public, it was often the same type of people who tended to go to them. So, the New-Old Project events were part of community making in the town, but typically only for the Changers. As reflected by a Changer: “A lot of our peers, our friends, our probably similar income bracket, that's who we see at New-Old Project events. But who do I see at the 4th of July Parade or at [local festival]? Everyone.”

Additionally, New-Old Project was actually physically separated from the original and main downtown by a few empty blocks, further adding to the feeling that it was a separate community and even one that was in competition for business with the historical downtown.

Residents often made assumptions about people, and their views on various development projects, who they didn't know personally or interact with based upon certain characteristics (e.g., where they live, how long they have been in town, where they shop, etc.). On the same note, residents often used overgeneralizations when talking about people they rarely interacted with. As one resident put it:

The old school people for sure they were very threatened by it [New-Old Project]. They probably still are. 'Change, oh God, change!' And some people agree with what they are doing in New-Old Project and some people are so against it. I have never spoken to anybody who is actually against it. I have just heard through the grapevine.

As can be seen above, a person who has never interacted with people who are against New-Old Project—at least to her knowledge—has formed an opinion that the ‘other’ group is completely against New-Old Project and sees no positives to it.

#### ***5.4 Impacts of Community Making on Community Development Efforts***

Residents’ perceptions that there were simply two groups of people in town and that they had different community interests had real and important consequences for how the community worked and some community development efforts. These negative perceptions fostered misunderstandings, prevented cooperation, and repressed the building of social capital, all of which inhibited community development efforts. More specifically, community development efforts were impacted by community making processes in that (a) they were sometimes less likely to be integrated, or perceived to be integrated, and (b) they prevented development efforts from happening at all. Both shifts were increasingly true from the perspective of residents. Put another way, both Changers and Keepers often felt like existing development projects did not have their support or input or that changes they wanted to see were not being implemented or allowed by community developers or local politicians.

Each group tended to interpret the fairness and the integrated nature of local decision-making processes in starkly different ways and thus whether some community development efforts were integrated. As a case in point, issues that arose with the large and controversial New-Old Project development were often interpreted very differently by residents of the two groups. For instance, those involved with the initial development planning—aligned with Changers—said there was very little pushback to their efforts: “We kind of came in and broke all the rules but doing our own, writing our own zoning code. But the town was extremely flexible. They let us build narrower than typical street and do narrower than typical lots.” However, others thought that they used—and continue to use—their political and financial resources to get what they want. As noted by a Keeper: “that’s another thing that came in and was pushed”. In other words, there is a perception that they have been using their economic and new political capital to work around existing town formal and informal rules. Interestingly, as negative perceptions and frustrations about

processes for integrated development have continued to build in town, resistance has also started to increase. As reflected by a Changer:

The resistance really didn't even come to much later after we had already started and it was just different people. I think the more that is going on it probably calls more people into politics. When there is nothing happening why would I even participate and so now that more and more things are happening I am watching it kind of transition into more like a Durango style of environment. And it's becoming harder to do things generally, although here it is still much easier than most other places.

The extreme divide that residents perceived has also prevented or stalled efforts on seemingly noncontroversial issues such as putting in sidewalks and trees in some parts of town. As a business owner in New-Old Project described:

We had someone here in town say to us once, 'can you believe they are thinking of putting sidewalks down this one street?' We said, 'yeah.' So that is one of the attitudes, not wanting to see any kind of change, and they are concerned that the younger people in town, but that the young people in town, particularly this development, are trying to turn it into Aspen, is one of their concerns. A lot of controversy in this town last year was how close to plant the trees along the streets and the street plans, you know, and trying to beautify the place. We are trying to make it too pretty.

Related to this, even if someone proposed an idea that seemingly would benefit the entire community, residents said what often happened was, "rather than people getting behind someone else's idea they want to have their own idea." This means that getting anything meaningful done in a timely manner can be challenging. Change, Changers think, is slow to come. As stated by one Changer: "But you look back and you think it has taken 10 years, whereas it's like, shouldn't it be faster than that?" Along with slow progress and disagreement about what to do with existing built capital or developments, some think that the lack of cohesion has prevented other outside businesses from coming in at all:

The town won't even let clean business come in here. I mean when Cabela's wanted to be here, Budweiser wanted to be here, and the old guys had land set aside for that, and they won't, the town won't work with them. And I am going, 'what better industry than a clean industry to be here?' Jobs for people, something other than a prison.

This statement by a Keeper is reflective of his belief that the Changers who are increasingly in charge, do not want certain types of businesses to move in that conflict with their more gentrified vision of the town.

As a final note, a relatively cohesive community identity is something that can be important for community development efforts and for people to feel like their community is a reflection of themselves. As noted by a Changer whose job is related to community development:

There is so much of this fear of not wanting to be like somebody else. All we know is that we don't want to be like someone else. But we have it out. We are River Town—let's figure out what that is! Just because we have a little bit of Aspen here, and a little bit of Breckenridge here, doesn't make us those places. It makes us R.T. But people are afraid to put all those things together and say, 'This is who we are'. I think that the biggest challenge is coming up with our identity and running with it.

The above statement is in contrast to a Keeper who does think that Changers want to turn River Town into another Aspen or Vail: "And when people that want to keep this quiet little valley instead of turning it into Eagle Valley, because that's what it has been termed. I have heard in town that this is going to be the next Eagle Valley". In sum, the othering that is occurring in River Town as a result of amenity migration is increasingly leading people in town to feel like there are different groups who have different values which is leading to less social interaction and community development efforts that are controversial because they are not seen as benefitting everyone.

## 6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This paper provides sociological insights into the links between amenity migration, community making, and community development. I have described how amenity migration can lead to the perception of distinct social groups existing in town based on views regarding change and development, the way that boundaries are created and maintained, as well as some of the outcomes of community-making on community development efforts. In this case, I find that residents perceive that only two views towards development and change exist in the community. One that favors development that is economically-focused and doesn't alter what residents see as traditional community character, and another that prioritizes development that is perceived as socially- and environmentally-friendly. Furthermore, I find that these diverging views on development are key to community making—or lack thereof—in River Town.

For some residents, new forms of development such as New-Old Project actually made them feel like they had a *stronger* community, while for others these types of changes were seen as a *threat* to the strong sense of community they currently feel. For example, some residents saw new development like New-Old Project as an additional location for community making, a tool for improving to their quality of life, and a boost to many forms of community capital. These residents see it as adding various types of capital to the community with the types of people it brings in, the built public spaces for social interaction it has created, the community events it sponsors, and the values of socially- and environmentally-conscious development it represents. Conversely, others saw various development projects driven by amenity migration as detracting from the traditional character of the town, threatening their quality of life, and diminishing their sense of community. Thus, my findings indicate that using the 'community lost' framework in the amenity growth

context is not entirely accurate. While some residents fear that their conception of community is being lost or threatened as their small-town transitions to a rural amenity destination, others perceive it to be flourishing. Specificity then regarding what type of residents in the community view certain types of development as threatening or not and why is more a more accurate portrayal of community life.

Social interaction is a key element in creating community (Hillery, 1955; Lyon, 1989; Wilkinson, 1991), and population growth has been shown to change local interactional patterns (Freudenberg, 1986; Greider & Krannich, 1984; Greider, Krannich, & Berry, 1991). Like Macgregor (2010) found in her analysis of a rural community in Wisconsin undergoing social change and Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017) found in their study of an amenity destination in Chile, I found limited interaction between members of the two social groups and evidence that this limited interaction was based sometimes on negative perceptions of others' views on development and change. Residents in River Town often engaged in what Monti (1999) called 'parallel play'. Put another way, bonding, or within-group, social capital occurs in River Town, but not a lot of bridging, or between-group (see Dillon, 2011). People tend to interact more with those who have similar viewpoints about change and development in their community. Given the importance of social interaction for community life, these findings point to the importance of facilitating bridging social capital between groups. Community leaders of amenity growth areas should ensure that there are plenty of well-advertised, free events in multiple locations and times throughout the community for residents to interact informally but also constructively discuss community issues and community development efforts. Although all community members may not agree or have the same interests, they should at least have ample opportunities to interact face-to-face to help dispel misperceptions they might have about the intentions of the other group and facilitate open communication. Leaders also need to help residents realize that they do have common interests. For instance, the need for well-paying year-round jobs, maintenance of their already relatively high-quality schools, the importance of maintaining longstanding community traditions as well as embracing the new ones, and ensuring they don't become an overly gentrified place like Aspen are all issues that residents generally agree on. Additionally, residents for the most part have high levels of attachment to the natural environment and community.

Importantly, residents typically want a compromise between development *and* preservation. There are differences in opinions on specific development issues, but they are not usually black–white, development–no development, newcomer–oldtimer as is presumed. As discussed, it is more accurate to see views towards development on a continuum. Small town residents need to remember that not all newcomers are trying to Aspenize these places, they often like the small town feel and community, and not all oldtimers are stuck in their old ways and unwilling to accept all forms of development. Furthermore, focusing too much on the outliers can mean communities will not embrace the changes they need to make to promote community growth and preservation that benefits all residents.

One problem the community is likely facing for building social capital is the relatively high population turnover, particularly among young adults (Winkler 2010). If people do not live in a place for a long time it makes it difficult for them to build broad social networks and become fully integrated within a community. It also creates the perception that all newcomers and second-home owners are transients and not invested in the community, which like Brown and Glasgow (2008)

find in rural retirement communities, is not true. Although a more thorough quantitative analysis could provide more conclusive evidence, interviewees alluded to high turnover rates. People often talked about others who had to move or felt that they might have to leave River Town themselves because of the lack of non-seasonal, well-paying employment. Many commented that the population of River Town would be much larger if there were more well-paying year-round jobs to sustain people there and a lower cost of living.

Another potential barrier to the building of bridging social capital is the residential segregation that can occur in rural amenity destinations (Winkler, 2010). If people from different social and economic backgrounds do not live near each other, it makes it more difficult to interact and form meaningful relationships. There is some evidence that town leaders are aware of this as a problem in River Town and that they are starting to address it. For instance, New-Old Project developers have plans to diversify their price points by providing more housing alternatives. Additionally, in their work to address the lack of affordable housing in River Town, elected officials are prioritizing incentives for developers to build more affordable housing in existing neighborhoods rather than creating segregated workforce housing on town-owned land on the edge of town. Although this was just talk at the time I did my research, I see both of these examples as signs that the community is working to address the growing concerns about the potential for increased economic segregation.

Although the job market throughout much of the U.S. remains weaker than in urban places, companies and entrepreneurs are often interested in high amenity areas like River Town for quality of life reasons. As high-speed internet becomes more accessible and reliable in places like this, more businesses might be willing to relocate or start up there. Leaders of River Town did appear to be well aware of these needs. For instance, the a county economic development corporation, has prioritized high speed internet access in the area and is working with elected leaders to make the original main street a more attractive area for businesses and more accessible from the highway that runs through town. Leaders of other rural destination areas should also assess the educational opportunities and business environment in their communities and come up with plans to meet growing demands. The lack of affordable housing also makes it difficult for people to stay in River Town, and this issue is just starting to be addressed by community leaders. Other rural amenity destination communities should also take stock of the availability of affordable housing in their towns for both new and long-term residents.

Much of the existing research focusing on community well-being in amenity growth areas uses survey methods or secondary data. Like a few more recent studies (e.g., Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017; Sherman, 2018) I use qualitative methods and interview residents to get a more nuanced understanding about their thoughts on how community making has been impacted by amenity growth. More qualitative research in different types of amenity growth communities will continue to deepen our understanding of what amenity development means for the social well-being of such rural destinations and how social boundaries are created and maintained. Longitudinal data is also important to collect to understand the long-term impacts of these demographic trends. For example, do intracommunity divisions over development become amplified as a place becomes more developed or do they die down as people with dissenting views leave or give up on the process? When does a place become ‘too gentrified’ or different enough from the original community that residents feel they want to leave or they do actually leave? To what extent, for

example, have residents in Aspen, Vail, or Telluride been forced out by rising prices or chosen to leave because the character of the community changed too much? In communities where there is not a large-scale development like New-Old Project, is development as contentious and as impactful on community making? In sum, qualitative research is an important tool in better understanding how community life in rural areas is changing in the context of amenity growth and how these processes shape current and future community development efforts. It can also provide evidence that a continuum of attitudes towards development and change exists rather than simply a dichotomy. This study provides important insights into *how* community making is affected by a divide over development that is common in rural amenity destinations (Ulrich-Schad & Qin, 2018) and like Matarria-Cascante et al. (2017), that these socially constructed divides matter in integrated community development efforts. Future research should continue to examine various aspects of community well-being both quantitatively and qualitatively, and as suggested by Lekies et al (2015), interdisciplinarily, and with an eye towards both the impacts on and the impacts of policy at various scales.

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