

EXPLORING 'PLACE' IN PLANNING AND ZONING  
DEBATES ACROSS A RURAL-URBAN  
GRADIENT

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EXPLORING 'PLACE' IN PLANNING AND ZONING  
DEBATES ACROSS A RURAL-URBAN  
GRADIENT

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A Thesis  
Submitted to  
the Graduate Faculty of  
Auburn University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Degree of  
Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama  
August 7, 2006

EXPLORING 'PLACE' IN PLANNING AND ZONING  
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THESIS ABSTRACT  
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Master of Arts, August 7, 2006  
(B.A., University of Georgia, 2004)

100 Typed Pages

Directed by Kelly Alley

Land use policy and zoning are examined here as socio-political forms of landscape creation. This study examined the human-place perspective of rural residents experiencing demographic and physical changes due to the influx of new populations and residential growth. The study is based in the southern region of Harris County, a rural county growing at a rate of 33 percent, largely as a result of urban sprawl extending out from Columbus, Georgia. Data collection included 24 semi-structured interviews and observations from planning hearings. The face-to-face interviews, conducted during the fall of 2005 established historical and cultural values relating their sense of place and identity, while the observations of the planning hearings, between the years 2001 to 2006

reveal that rural residents understand growth to be inevitable and the process of identity formation through landscape change is best articulated in the zoning decisions at the planning hearings. The planning hearings and zoning ordinances provide vital insight into understanding the cultural and political practices associated with local ecology.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank the Center of Forest Sustainability, Auburn University for their assistance in funding the project and providing the opportunity for this type of research. Thanks are also due to family members Barbara and Ed for their support during the course of this investigation.

Style manual or journal used: American Sociological Association

Computer software used: Microsoft Word, SPSS, ANTHROPAC

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Planning hearings concerning issues of urban development are assuming increasing importance in many US communities, particularly in rural areas that fall across a rural-urban gradient. As a result, recent research focuses on these types of public debates that follow the direction and regulation of land use change and economic development. Increasing public participation in development conflicts suggests the need for research approach to human ecological interactions which can explore people's perceptions of the effects of urbanization and land use change on environmental quality and ecosystem relationships (McDaniel and Alley 2005). Interdisciplinary studies of land use change have acknowledged that cultural values, knowledge, and environmental perceptions are important drivers of land use practices (Agarwal et al. 2000; Brown et al. 2000; Evans et al. 2001; Moran and Brodizio 1998).

The exploration of local perceptions concerning growth due to new residential development in a historically rural town is the theme discussed in this study. It explores residents' views of land use policy in their community and perceptions of where their town will be in the future. Primary categories of rural land usage include cropland, grazing land (including pasture and range) and forestland (Platt 1992; 2004). The spatial growth of urban land is the mirror image of the loss of rural land to urban development. The primary goal of public policy toward rural land should be to preserve the productive

capacity or “sustainability” of such resources to meet future demands (Platt 2004). In particular, those lands deemed most or least suitable for specific uses are identified, designated, and used accordingly by public and private land managers defined through land use policy. Reversible conversion of rural land from one use to another is a normal response to changing economic circumstance; however, urbanization poses a potential threat to the irreversible transformation of productive rural land to degradation (soil erosion, salinization, or inundation) or to an urban or built-up condition. Thus, urbanization involves a spectrum of public issues at the center of many planning debates (table 1) and creates an opportunity for social research.

One way that this change can be seen is through the public values influencing decision-making concerning land use policy. Through research of planning hearings and the underlying cultural dimensions associated with socio-political debates of land use, this study finds that cultural identity to the land is a major topic of discussion; these discussions show how this identity becomes translated into public action and new topics of land use management are defined in a rural county in western Georgia.

## Research Question and Objectives

Land use policy is a major topic of local debates discussed among rural communities that fall along a rural-urban gradient. The question addressed in this study asks how these residents make sense of their changing landscape through land use policy. This directs inquiry to the local perceptions and ideologies rural residents express during debates over planning hearings and development procedures and their views of land use.

The research question directs attention to the way individuals identify themselves in the community and through their local history. In other words, what are their perceptions of their community as well as their beliefs for their community because of physical changes from land use policy?

Most of the research conducted on the rural-urban gradient use city planning frameworks, which involves the different stakeholders in community development. Theoretical frameworks of community change and capital examine the extent of community satisfaction and the livelihoods of communities experiencing major growth. However, this project examines the perceptions and values of community residents to compile information and analyze the perceived role local participation plays in policy approval. By understanding the expressions and beliefs underlying the issues addressed in planning meetings, the study may help community leaders in understanding the issues and their citizens' views. In order to accomplish these goals, qualitative methods are used to gather data pertaining to these questions.

To make a connection between human values and sense of identity and how these values become translated into action affecting land use policy, the study seeks to test four major hypotheses: 1) Cultural values are expressed and conceptualized in the cognitive domains of planning and development decisions, 2) Place identity is a process and not an outcome of inherited land ownership, 3) As place identity becomes articulated it can be translated into political debates concerning development, 4) Rural residents have negative attitudes of urbanization and approve of strict planning or zoning regulations. Many places with distinct natural and cultural significance have been the object of lengthy sometimes bitter efforts to protect them from change or loss of characteristics associated

with sense of place (Platt 2004). The analysis explores patterns of meaning to understand phenomenological and cognitive concepts of place/land identity, rural heritage, and the politics of place. In addition, the study explores one major aspect of the social/cultural fabric of the community through perceptions of race and place politics associated with increased residential development. The results of this study will be beneficial to other studies of a rural community in that the results help to show how land transcends its monetary value in society to become a more symbolic and dynamic description of human values and identity.

### Study Background

A review of the literature reveals that very often a humanistic perspective on space and place is an important one, yet many studies fail to incorporate the nature of land use policy in planning and its impact on the environment and a community's sense of place. Interest in zoning and land use restrictions are at the center of discussions and debates among residents, landowners, developers, government agency (planning) employees, policy makers and researchers. Analyses of zoning ordinances are therefore key windows into the ways social groups perceive and define ideal and actual uses of the land. Therefore, planning hearings and zoning ordinances can provide vital insight into understanding cultural and political practices and the ways power relations permeate the policy process and affect land use change and the environment.

Much of the research that references these types of interests is articulated in community development or city planning research and in cultural geography research.

Community development research shows how development achieves the social and economic goals for the community (Galston and Baehler 1995). Many define community development as meeting the basic needs of the community through economic growth, community sustainability and social equity. It is assumed that a truly democratic society, sensitive to the needs of the community, will lend itself to a satisfied community (Galston et al. 1995). However, much of the research using development frameworks focuses on stakeholders or frameworks for designing social and planning policy. Community development frameworks organize the characteristics of class, occupation, worldview, and life experiences as part of a formula to explore the transitions for groups to associate community with the political schema of city planning.

Robert Dahl (1961) questioned “Who governs?” His question investigated if politically active citizens of a city are split into diverse and competing interests groups or if they are coordinated and organized around an public issues, like education or zoning. His work sets the tone for studying the city. He explores the political power relations and schema of the city as public issues become the topics of debates. In researching west Georgia, political relations over public issues seem to be the product of cultural isolation and fear of irreversible change to the landscape thus threatening personal rights.

Research focused around city planning and community development use a concept known as citizenship rights. One component of citizenship rights, urban environmental rights are considered as expressions of citizenship in the form of active participation and the right of a citizen to control territory and manage the territory (Gilbert et al. 2003). Much of Gilbert and Phillips’ work identifies the problems associated with growth on a social level and attempts to quantify the level of intensity

that different community members feel toward common issues associated with urbanization that can affect their quality of life such as traffic, noise, environmental degradation, new roads, and crime. An examination of citizenship rights is a concept used in this study, but it is important to note that the testing of these rights includes how the participants of this study articulate their roles and the boundaries of their roles in their community. Data on public debates help to reveal the way participants express and practice their roles in the society and analysis of these public debates can help explain how they internalize their rights in the community.

In addition, community studies seek to examine not just the rights of citizens, but also explore the level of satisfaction held by community residents. The measure of community satisfaction, as a social indicator, is justified on the basis that knowledge and its distribution and change is important in the formation of social policy (Marans et al. 1975). Community satisfaction is defined as the level of contentment and overall happiness of the community members (Baldassare and Protash 1982). The knowledge component to this concept is important in exploring the relationship citizens have with policy makers. The role of policy makers is to implement growth controls dealing with the economic and social effects of community change. One attribute of community satisfaction is defined as local concern. Local concern relates to the values community members hold in relation to and in support of development and regulations to control development (Baldassare et al 1982). This concept attempts to explore the support and trust citizens hold for political actors creating development and land use policy.

City planning and community frameworks help to explain the different ways stakeholders interface with one another while exploring the dynamics of economic and

community issues associated with new types of development. The aim of community studies examines the dynamics of power relations among political decisions associated with land use. Still, one question remains overlooked in the literature and that is how to include the cultural. In other words, how do community planning issues over land use policy become expressed and realized and what do these issues say about the cultural values of the community?

One study that seems to incorporate cultural values with land use decisions includes Duncan's research experience with the Kandy environment. Duncan explored how landscapes are used to advance or retard the attainment of social and political goals (1990: 3). Duncan theorized that landscapes as a system hold social and political importance that communicates how social life and power relations are constituted, reproduced and contested. In a study of the Kandy environment, Duncan found that a set of religious or political texts have been transformed into the medium of the built environment and that this transformation has helped to foster political legitimacy encoded in the environment (1990: 154). Duncan successfully incorporates cultural values and landscape politics to examine a community experiencing major landscape change. He explores a socio-political sense of place through a cultural-geographical perspective. Therefore, I employ theory from cultural geography to explain the issues of local communities in their development and land use changes.

Landscapes are shaped by mental attitudes and inquiry of landscape change requires an approach to research that takes into consideration the intended and unintended consequences of human actions (Baker, 1992). Furthermore, it has been argued, "the geographical theory of landscape can provide the third component in a triad of action,



discourse and object, for a comprehensive dialectical understanding of social history.”  
(Kobayashi, 1989: 182)

In west Georgia, zoning debates reflect this dynamic when citizens and policy makers discuss land use policy and zoning changes. In this region, local conflicts over landscapes occur through the discussion and interplay of different people in society at the planning hearings. Walker and Fortman state that local conflicts over landscape can only be meaningfully understood in the context of structural processes that set the stage for certain environmental conflicts and play a central but not determining role in their outcomes. Conflicts emerge particularly in places where economic and cultural value is being placed not on individual natural resources but on aesthetic and environmental values, such as an overlook view or a perceived rural quality that derives from a totality of many individual landholdings (Walker and Fortman 2003: 471). This seems to be particularly true in the communities of Harris County. The tension between the desire for economic growth and the perceived need for environmental conservation and maintenance of high “quality of life” leads to political conflict at all levels of government (McDaniel and Alley, 2005). Therefore, these public representations of differing values and concerns compliments anthropological emphasis on the daily routines and lived experiences of a local population (Gupta and Ferguson, 2003).

As urbanization continues to change the landscape, the rural-urban gradient in West Georgia is an excellent site of research to study trends associated with human place relationships. The rural/urban opposition generates not only political and economic conflict but conflict in social identification as well. Given the pervasiveness of the rural/urban opposition and its related significance in the construction of identity it is

remarkable that the scholarly interest in identity politics has generally failed to address the rural/urban axis (Ching and Creed 1997). Moreover, there is a lack of literature on how this becomes translated into land use policy and how this type of study can provide insight into the exploration of the human-place relationship.

### Research Setting

The southern region of Harris County, Georgia is the chosen location to ask local residents how they make sense of their community and participation in the face of a rural-urban transition. Harris County was created in 1827 from lands from Muscogee and Troup County. Contained within its boundaries are the incorporated communities of Shiloh, Waverly Hall, Pine Mountain, and the county seat of Hamilton. Harris County is known for being the first Georgia County to adopt a commission form of government (Reinheimer 1990).

In addition, the county ranks among the top ten percent of Georgia's counties in terms of tourism dollars (Reinheimer 1990). The Franklin Delano Roosevelt State Park, Lake Harding (an impoundment on the Chattahoochee River), Pine Mountain, and the Cason Callaway Gardens are the major tourism sites and recreational facilities. Furthermore, the county is historically unique in that Franklin D. Roosevelt spent time in Harris County and it has been noted that the Pine Mountain Valley Farm Project located in Harris County was a forerunner to programs that were developed to address social problems during the Depression.

Currently, Harris County is growing at a rate of 33 percent per year. Columbus, Georgia, one source of Harris County's growth, is located about 30 miles from Harris County. Columbus is the third largest city in the state. Since the 1980's, Columbus' residential development has moved from the historic "uptown" area towards the Harris County line.

During these years, the number of births was greater than the number of deaths and resulted in a natural population increase (17.6 percent of the 34.2 percent total percent change in population). The remaining 82.4 percent was the result of net migration. At the time, the population estimates stated that the natural increase for the next ten years would be 26.8 percent while the net migration would be 73.2 percent. This information is vital to the planning process in that most communities can accommodate for population changes that occur from natural increase rather than from movement of families into the community. As the population continues to be influenced from in-migration, the expectation is that this will primarily impact Harris County in a multifaceted manner. Therefore, Harris County must provide long range planning to ensure orderly growth.

According to the 2000 Census, Harris County's population is 23,695. The population estimate for 2004 is 26,788. The county seat of Hamilton, Georgia has a population of 307 and the estimate for 2004 is 500. The 2000 census describes the race/ethnic composition of Hamilton Georgia as 68 percent European American and 30 percent African American. The land area in square miles for Harris County is 464 with a population density of 51 persons per square mile in 2000. The housing units for Harris

County include 10,915 compared to 144 housing units in Hamilton city limits of which 131 are occupied.

What was once an isolated rural county is now the site for changing populations and changing landscapes that are associated with new residential development. The current land use areas in Harris County are agricultural for farms or timber harvest and residential (with two-acre lots). However, the present land use proposals are to rezone more land for commercial and residential using one- or two-acre lots. Therefore, there are many physical changes occurring in the region. As a result, development has become a major political and social interest among community members.

Discussions of city planning and community development are held at the Harris County Courthouse in the county seat at Hamilton. Hamilton has a population of approximately 400 and is located in the southern region of the county, where much of the growth is observed. However, in comparison to the other town, Hamilton is one of the smallest in size and population, yet remains to hold position as the county seat. Currently, the local government is in the process of revising their Comprehensive Plan for the County. Their current Comprehensive Plan was printed in 1992, however the influx of growth that occurred during the years since then is not planned for in current land use regulations. The hearings held in Hamilton is at the county level to provide an opportunity for citizens to gather and participate in planning decisions affecting the physical changes of their community due to in-migration and natural population growth. The hearings also serve as a site to explore the manner in which citizen values and beliefs converge with the policy-making aspects of rural-urban change. In other words, these hearings are public spaces used to address the changing uses of land.

In summary, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the perceptions and values of Hamilton's residents and the surrounding unincorporated cities concerning the links between local perceptions and values associated with a rural-urban transition and the city planning procedures for land use policies and environmental quality. Through an examination of social practices, perceptions, and values, an exploration of the physical and social aspects of the planning hearings will generate conclusions about the local culture and community identity. These findings will explain reasons why certain issues are discussed in local debates and the cultural beliefs about the physical and social changes to the region.

## II. PLACE IN PERSPECTIVE

Place is the central concept of this project because it assumes that land embodies personal attachment. The analysis of a human-place relationship has evolved in literature as it has moved from a purely landscape perspective to an experimental perspective. As more interest in the human-place relationship grew, a humanistic/cultural geographical theoretical frame developed around the concept of place is a way to understand social identity and political organization. A review of the literature shows that the utilization of place in theoretical frameworks expresses landscape as an inscribed surface generated from socio-political forms of human society. Understanding the current transformation of a rural to urban landscape through land use policy can be seen as a major example of cultural appropriation as it reveals the process of inscribing cultural forms in a modernizing society.

First, a landscape perspective draws upon the insights of hermeneutic phenomenology and its rejection of the notion that the places where we live are purely external objects (Relph 1985). Relph suggests that 'to think about the world or the entities within it as abstract things is to render them subject to observation, to make them the object of casual curiosity and to distance oneself from them (ibid: 17). By applying phenomenological approaches, research of place explores the interpretation of deeper social and cultural meaning that exists between humans and their surrounding

environment. For example, Christopher Alexander sought to catalogue a comprehensive set of patterns from language that arises in the design of architecture and planning.

Alexander thought that by employing pattern language in the design process this would ensure the creation of 'quality' places that could be used by non-experts and experts; however, it proved to be an extremely articulate and evocative expression of the dangers in ignoring the relationship people have to places.

The second perspective is that of an experimental perspective, which explores place in a historical context. Heller (1984) demonstrates that the material conditions of human social life and the emphasis on the structures of knowledge which underlie the experience of place are conditions held by the subject. The process of landscape creation and reformation was captured tangentially in Marx's view of history as being specific to particular places. Marx explained that at every period of history there is 'a material outcome ... a historically created relationship to nature and of individuals towards each other', a sum of production forces 'that is transmitted to each generation by its predecessor' and becomes modified by new generations (Baker 1992). In whole, history becomes an underpinning of the individuality of a landscape. Therefore, landscape change allows for the consideration of intended and unintended consequences of actions, and of material and non-material motivations. Marx insisted that: 'a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of the natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical – in short ideological – forms in which people become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, we cannot judge such a period of

transformation by its own consciousness: on the contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production.’

Baker (1992) insists that historical studies of landscapes must be grounded in an analysis of material structures and their ideological context. In other words, the tangible, visible expressions of the production of space are changed due to the mental attitudes associated with the human understanding of landscapes recovered in their history. Although ideology is an imprecise term, ideologies involve systems and structures of signification and domination. Therefore, ideological representations become inscribed into the subject’s description of the landscape thereby requiring the researcher to seek a ‘thick description’ of the place identity associated with environment or ecology of the land.

A cultural-geographical analysis of landscape rests on the themes of subject/object, representation, identity, etc. Using this as a foundation, one sees that the emphasis is on metaphors and the social meaning that relates to the discursive use of spatial features in relations to power structures. By using an interpretative anthropological approach, this study attempts to analyze the cultural values and beliefs of community residents through shared meanings of their local geographical historical experience. Geertz (1973) explained that culture is public because meaning is and systems of meanings are what produce culture. They are the collective property of a particular group of people, and culture is a context that when thickly described produces the semiotic nature of culture. Symbols guide community behavior and obtain meaning from the role they play in the patterned behavior of social life. Hermeneutics is the



combination of empirical investigation and subsequent subjective understanding of human phenomena and helps to understand the ways people understand the aforementioned symbols and act in social, religious, and economic contexts. Turner (1967) employed the use of symbols as operators in social processes and believed that the symbolic expression of shared meanings lie at the center of human relationships. Symbols as operators instigate social action and exert determinable influences linking persons and groups to action by producing social transformation. Geertz believes that an analysis of culture should be an interpretive one in search of meaning. Transmitted patterns of meaning and symbolic forms of expression provide humans a system of communication that develops cognitive strategies passed through generations.

Meaning and patterns of meaning are an important aspect when studying the human-place relationship. Michel Foucault (1980) found that spatial metaphors allowed the expression of relations of power and knowledge. Foucault explored the connections between knowledge, power, and spatiality and maintained that the transition from temporal to spatial metaphors enabled a discursive shift from the realm of the individual consciousness to wider 'relations of power' as constitutive of social meaning. Foucault (1980: 69) wrote: "Once knowledge can be analyzed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transportation, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory." In this respect, Foucault saw each term as a form of power and knowledge. For example, *displacement*

is when something becomes displaced, like an army, a squadron, or a population and *domain* serves as a juridico-political notion. For Foucault, the exercise of social power through the state and other social institutions and the exercise of power inherent in social opposition modeled a spatial field described by spatial strategies and geo-strategic interests (Keith and Pile 1993: 72-73).

Landscape and experiential perspectives are the dominant avenues taken to explore place. People through their experiences and their engagement with the world that surrounds them create landscapes. As a result, landscape is a 'concept of high tension' (Inglis 1977) in that it operates at the juncture of history and politics, social relations, and cultural perceptions (Bender 1993). The task of articulating space and place can be difficult; however, the social sciences have attempted through many studies to express new ways to analyze and explore the question of space and the human-geographical relationship that exists. Relph (1976) argues that place is not just the where of something; rather place is a meaningful phenomenon. It follows that landscapes embody meanings. Such meanings vary according to the type of landscape and according to the individual. He argues that place is the essence of human intention and a fusion of meaning, act and context. He emphasizes that the identity of individuals have in connection with the experience of a place is important, and in particular whether they experience it as insiders or outsiders. He develops this interpretation of place focusing on an authentic-inauthentic dichotomy. An authentic experience is a direct and genuine experience of a place, which comes from a profound identity connection with it. In contrast, an inauthentic experience is stereotyped, artificial, planned by others and often expressed through the 'dictatorship of they'.

David Canter's *The Psychology of Place* draws on a broad array of empirically based research in the social sciences to propose a three-part definition of place. Place can be represented as the intersection and/or association among three constituent elements: actions, conceptions, and the physical environment. Canter writes (1977: 158-159): "It follows that we have not fully identified the place until we know (i) what behavior is associated with, or it is anticipated will be housed in, a given locus (ii) what the physical parameters of that setting are, and (iii) the descriptions, or conception which people hold of that behavior in that physical environment." Zoning meets the qualities of this definition in that zoning creates parameters of developing the setting of a place while defining the use and behavior of the land itself; however, the human-place perspective is rarely employed in studies associated with land use policy and zoning ordinances.

The following sections refer to three major concepts relating to place. The first outlined is place identity and is followed by political space where identity becomes expressed. Finally, cities as cultural categories demonstrate how politics of space and place identity come together in expressing a human-place relationship.

### Place Identity

First, place identity and identity itself is always an incomplete process. Keith and Pile (1993: 28) insist that in order to make sense of a particular moment or a particular place the process must be stopped to reveal an identity that is akin to a freeze-frame photograph of a racehorse at full gallop. It may be a 'true' representation of a moment but by the very act of freezing it denies the presence of movement. Likewise, with

identity, the very act of representing the ceaseless process of identity formation is based on a moment of arbitrary closure, which in the same fashion is both true and false.

Therefore, identity is always incomplete and is better understood as a process rather than an outcome.

For example, theorists of modernity from Hegel through G. H. Mead characterize identity in terms of mutual recognition. In this case, mutual recognition depends on the combination of social recognition and self-validation. However, identity shifts one's place boundary in the world as modernity expands the boundaries of new identities (Kellner 1992). As this occurs, identities begin to shift and change due to the influence of new forms of identities. Kellner (1992) expresses this shift in identity due to modern and consumer mass society in the form of image culture, like advertisements. From the postmodern perspective, as the pace, extension, and complexity of modern societies accelerates, identity becomes more and more unstable, more and more fragile. In all, identity becomes fragmented as social processes level individuality through rationalization, bureaucratization, and consumerism in mass society (Jameson 1983; 1984; Kellner 1989; 1992). The shifting nature of identities through different types of information and experience animates the process of identity formation. Through the consideration of modernity and the expanding mass consumerist society, a parallel can be drawn to urbanizing landscapes.

Zurkin (1992) explored the term 'postmodern urban landscape.' While modern and postmodern is not clearly separated, one can sense a difference in how humans organize what is seen. Zurkin questions how the visual consumption of space and time is speeded up and abstracted from the logic of industrial production, thus forcing

dissolution of traditional spatial identities and their reconstitution along new lines (1992: 221). In analysis of what Zurkin terms dreamscape landscapes, like Disney World, Zurkin concludes that the social process of constructing a postmodern landscape depends on an economic fragmentation of older urban solidarities and a reintegration that is heavily shaded by new modes of cultural appropriation. The specific locales of the modern city and of postmodern spaces mediate between nature and artifice, public use and private value, global market and local place. The genius of property investors, in this context, is to provide landscapes in society for visual consumption (ibid: 221-223).

However, a major trend in place identity is its nature to become opposed and in conflict with other identities. Identity takes form in cases of conflict between the political and the social. Laclau (1990) creates the process of *radical contextualization* that reveals how to articulate expressions of power in the moment that the political (that which is contested) and the social (the practices established in time and uncontested) come into opposition. This explores how objects become the source of conflict and the defining element in the creation of forms of opposition. As identity becomes associated with these objects in opposition, the antagonizing force denies one identity over another. Laclau (1990) insists that the presence of an inherent negativity associated with opposing forms of identity create a 'constitutive outside' and an 'inside'. The outside is that which the social never manages to fully articulate and constitute as an objective order thus it assumes a negative position, while the inside is in a positive position through the shared common object (Laclau 1990: 18-20; Keith and Pile 1993). Here the antagonistic nature of the object threatens the existence of one's identity and becomes articulated as forms of negative conditions. As such, if identities become threatened, they are the foundation on

which new identities are constituted. In this case, objects are formed through epistemological products of the social world and “objects that are formed through our attempts to make sense of ourselves and each other (identities) are subject to this process of radical contextualization” (Laclau 1990: 31). Therefore, social identity, once constituted, is an act of power and the identity is power. Furthermore, identity takes form in politics as the social, cultural and spatial changes occur in an urbanizing region.

### Politics of Space

Keith and Pile find that there are three key areas that identify spaces of politics: locations of struggle, communities of resistance, and political spaces (1993: 5). New spaces of resistance are being opened up where our ‘place’ (in all its meanings) is considered fundamentally important to our perspective, our location in the world, and our right and ability to challenge dominant discourses of power (Keith and Pile 1993: 6). “As a radical standpoint, ‘the politics of location’ necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision (Hooks 1990: 145).

Political space is a concept that recognizes an active constitutive component of hegemonic power: an element in fragmentation, dislocation, and the weakening of class power (Keith and Pile 1993: 37-38). In this case, space is political. Much of this concept focuses on social justice. As a result, identity must be assumed and called into question. This concept attempts to show the location, movement, and direction of changes in space because there is an asymmetrical relation of power between the (covert) medium and

(disguised) expression of power. One major question begged by this concept is how to create space for its future use and how to make political decisions to legislate future use of space. In order to answer this question it is important to find what kind of political spaces are being occupied and where there are points of resistance and which situations are priorities to the governing body.

Place identity and the politics of space are two major conceptual frames that explain community values and the way they are articulated into action while the focus is on place or land. Relating place and space to culture is best seen in categories of the city. Low claims that studies of the human-place relationship can be better explored by exploring the dimensions in which humans locate themselves, both physically and conceptually through their social relations and social practice in the social spaces of the city (Low 1999).

## The City

Cities as a cultural category demonstrate how the politics of space and place identity come together to express a human-place relationship. Henri Lefebvre (1991) found a distinction between the representation of space (the conceived) and the spaces of representation (the lived) and found insight into the production of space. Lefebvre further develops the term transparent landscapes. Transparency and the illusion of realism represent space as neutral and passive. In this case, transparent landscapes create a site where space is produced and reproduced through social, political and economic struggles. Lefebvre distinguishes the productions of different kinds of space: physical,

mental and social space. These different kinds of spaces allow for the reproduction of social relations and the relations of production. In his analysis of these types of different spaces and their influence in production, Lefebvre develops the notion of different forms of produced space. The city is one such example. The most notable contribution to studies of space and place is that Lefebvre's work created an analytical shift from 'things of space' to 'the production of space' (Keith and Pile 1993: 24).

In addition, Lash and Friedman (1992) found that social space opens up the way for the autonomous definition of identity', while drawing attention to the importance of spatial scale pointing out that Marshall Berman's (1982) analysis of modernity begins with the localism of place and citing Jane Jacobs' (1961) concern with the neighborhood in the life and death of cities. They then go on to draw an equivalence between notions of the public and the private, the universal and the local, and landscape and vernacular spaces (Lash and Friedman 1992: 19).

In her analysis of the cultural forms of contemporary capitalism, Zukin tends toward economic reductionism in an opposition between 'markets – the economic forces that detach people from established social institutions – and place – the spatial forms that anchor them to the social world, providing the basis of a stable identity' (Zukin 1992: 223). As mentioned earlier, urbanizing environments can be classified in modern and/or postmodern terms. For Zukin, this insight exemplifies the way in which the sense of place has succumbed to market forces thereby expanding the concept of produced space and its relations of production with the reproduction of social relations mentioned by Lefebvre. However, Zukin ascribed these concepts and shift to market forces as facilitating 'the erosion of locality – the erosion of the archetypal place-based community



by market forces' (Zurkin 1992: 240). Thus, stating that urban landscapes impose multiple perspectives that are bound to economic power and sustained through the political and social relations in society. Therefore, we find a shift in looking at consumership over citizenship. The argument does not lie directly in the spatiality of the postmodern or modern city, but rather suggests that place and space becomes produced landscapes loaded with ethical, epistemological and aestheticized meaning (Keith and Pile 1993).

### Interpretive Approach

By interpreting symbols as operators to explore community behavior and gather evidence for patterns of meaning along with many of the concepts discussed in the humanistic geographical perspective, one should be able to generate a human-place perspective that is rich in three major realms of society: legal/political, human/cultural, and the physical. This project attempts to answer the question of what are the roles and values toward the community and what are their perceptions of major land use change in the region. Hummon (1990) explains that the knowledge of communities is associated with particular places and takes social forms. Cultural beliefs about cities as places do reflect more than how a place is; they also portray community life as well as promoting or rejecting a place and not just describing it. Enculturation explains that an individual's beliefs are learned from others in the locale. Furthermore, Hummon argues that community perspectives understood in a cultural context provide cultural ideologies, which are systems of beliefs that legitimate the interests of the community residents.

Therefore, beliefs that are culturally normative also reflect a value. In addition, place framing reveals how a person positions the neighborhood in relation to other territorial structures (Larsen, 2004). The way in which one situates a neighborhood internally by arranging and politicizing selected geographic features expresses the values held for that place. Beliefs articulated about a place can help to explore the question of how rural residents make sense of their city during a rural to urban transformation.

Furthermore, Batteau (1990: 199) urges interpretive scientists to explore these mythical images and historical realities together with the “hard facts of economics and politics . . . not as competing views of reality but as different faces of common underlying processes.” We must continue to ask: How do rural people respond to the increasing peripheralization of rural culture as others appropriate their most significant political symbols of identity -- the landscape they inhabit? How do the views of competing constituencies with an interest in land management change over time, and how are they expressed and codified in social institutions, cultural practices and political movements?

In summary, the human-geographical relationship is a major emphasis in scholarship taken by social scientists to understand how culture becomes manifested in the environment. As the literature on this topic shows, this relationship is not fully developed, but is in constant transformation and development; however, the foundations of the literature are clear though. First, humans create landscapes. Second, space and land are economic forces in society and are therefore political. Finally, land and its relationship to human life is a major form of cultural and individual identity. Therefore, the human-space or human-land relationship is very important in understanding how the

environment plays a major role in shaping what it means to be human and how humans shape the environment to meet the needs (whatever they may be) of one society.

Land use policy provides a window to such forms of transformation in the economy as they demonstrate ideological forms. Soja (1989: 6) states that “we must be insistentlly aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology. Although the notions of the spatial and the political consequences are not fully comprehended or fleshed out in theory (Keith and Pile 1993: 35), land use policy is a valid form of a socio-political system designed to explore how a culture’s knowledge and understanding of its past and future becomes inscribed into the landscape thereby creating a human landscape.

### III. LAND USE POLICY IN PERSPECTIVE

Moving beyond cultural values and politics, this study is also an exploration of land management decisions and examines how these decisions become culturally manifested in the environment. Therefore, a review of literature concerning land use policy in theoretical perspective is central to this study. Land use policy is a system designed to appropriate land for human uses. As a result, it provides a lens to view human values of land and the community.

Low (1999; 2006) studies the anthropology of the city. In her analysis of the politics of public space, Low claims that the privatization of urban space reveals how the social production of space and the social construction of space create public space. Furthermore, public space can explain both semiotically encoded and interpreted forms of cultural reality (Low 1999; 2006). The process of applying zoning variances in the community creates different social and physical impacts in that it affects the physical use of space and the social production of space. For example, Low (2006) claims that zoning variances of gated communities create social and economic segregation within the entire community. Therefore, studies of city planning strategies and the community's perception of this process can give insight into how humans make sense of space.

The objectives of land use policy ask the question: what is the relationship between private objectives and public objectives for land uses (Jackson 1981). The

interconnected nature of all land use decisions necessitates the development of a set of criteria for evaluating all land use decisions so that individual needs can be met without the rights of society being abrogated. Analyses of zoning ordinances are therefore key windows into the ways social groups perceive and define ideal and actual uses of the land. Therefore, planning hearings and zoning ordinances can provide vital insight into understanding cultural and political practices and how power relations pervade the policy process.

The United States of America has a tradition of independence and at the center of that is the American ethic that centers on the right to an individual to own land. Historically, land in the United States has been viewed as both a resource and a commodity, something that can be bought and sold to the highest bidder, and limitless in supply (Jackson 1981; Platt 2004). As such, land has held economic values and has been considered a “factor of production.” Thus, land has been a part of the industrial process through agricultural production and through residential uses. It has been a focus of speculation. Central to the view of land as a commodity is the idea that benefits and costs associated with the production and use of that commodity are solely benefits to the individual or group who purchases and uses the land. Therefore, the impact of a new subdivision on surrounding residents is not considered when land is viewed as a commodity nor is there concern for the irreversible changes associated with certain types of land uses.

However, land is a resource. Land is not infinite in supply; rather, it must be apportioned. Since the parcel of land may have a variety of potential uses, its allocation as a resource must reflect the reward and cost not only to the individual but to the broader

society as a whole (Jackson 1981; Platt 1991; 2004). Therefore, fundamental to the concept of land as resource becomes public interest in how the resource is used.

Competition among land uses in recent years has heightened public awareness of the finite nature of the land resource and competition over this resource becomes a source of conflict in land use (Jackson 1981).

Since the growth of the suburbs, the rural countryside has been an attractive site for residential growth. As a result, the rural countryside is a place of changing landscape and changing societies due to the influx of new populations and the development of the *resource* market: land. For example, a developer may view a parcel of land as a potential source of revenue while the broader society views the same land as a potential “open space” reserved for recreation or aesthetic purposes. In this example, if the developer uses the land for homes, he gains profit at very little cost while the broader public loses the social value invested in the resource and feels that these changes are irreversible. Viewed as a resource, the land base is finite and embodies an intrinsic quality whose heritage belongs to the entire public rather than to the highest bidder. Recognition that land has uses and roles other than providing an economic return has resulted in efforts to regulate land. The attempts by rural towns to limit their growth through increasing development actions and regulations affecting land use including problems associated with urban and rural communities resulting from changing population patterns and land use practices are all indicative of the central role land use plays in the life of American citizens.

Moreover, the social contexts through which a land market pulls for how land is used and exchanged are fundamental attributes of such commodities, like land. Any piece of real

estate has both a *use value* and an *exchange value* (Logan and Molotch 1987). For example, a home for residents has a use value, while the generating of rent is the exchange value. Different people view land in between these values or in conflict with one or the other. Such struggles in the view for proper value of the commodity a challenge for city development and can become a major theme for land use policy. In other words, how the city manages the conflict between use and exchange values of land. An examination of these two types of values and how they are represented in the city can discover the inequalities of a place and the stratification of place and its individuals (Logan and Molotch 1987).

In addition, the ownership of land makes land a *social weapon* in that the difference between landowners and the landless is one of the key social divisions in American society (Popper 1981). As a result, land ownership implies a concept of property, which implies two kinds of rights: income rights and control rights (Pryor 1973: 6-8). Income rights use land to obtain money by means other than labor while control rights use the disposal of land in economic production and exchange. Control rights become illustrated through decision-making processes in the form of economic power, as in land use policy. Weber (1946: 182) says that property and the lack of property are the basic categories of all class situations; therefore, property rights imply unequal social relations. These concepts are the stepping off points of this study.

The traditional right of any individual or group to buy or sell land freely in any area is part of the American constitutional right to own land and to use it for economic benefit. To treat it as a resource in which those rights are restricted would eliminate a significant portion of our economy. On the other hand, those who view land only as a

commodity ignore the fact that our land resource is a finite commodity and that it must be managed for the good of the public. Therefore, land is both commodity and resource, but most interestingly, land arouses emotions: a vision of hope and faith, a source of wealth and social status, a subject of indignant political reform, and so on (Platt 2004). Still, despite how land is defined, the problem of protecting the interests of the public while not infringing on the rights guaranteed to the owner of the property remains. As a result, the creation of land use policy established a system to manage the land resource.

Land use and its allocation and resource managing processes in policy decisions represent culturally created categories for a major resource market in American society and history. The values held for land, as resource, commodity, or both are a social process with environmental and socio-economic implications illustrative of human cultural values that the political system maintains. In our case, the political system revolves around land use policy.

Land use policy is an interacting system that involves impacts on local residents and the input of the government to create new land use policy. Land use policy focuses on what should be controlled, who should be controlling, how costs should be borne, and what uses of land should be encouraged (Jackson 1981). The extent and nature of land use control at the state level varies and all states have regulations provided for zoning regulation. All states have some form of state agency or program, or have regulations dealing with land use activity. The major problem with state land use controls is their fragmented nature and incomplete or overlapping territorial jurisdiction. Problems related to the towns of rural America whether they are losing population, growing only slowly or suddenly expanding relate to the general categories of land use. The general



trend in land use involves shifting land from agricultural and forest uses to uses for urban related activities as a consequence of to the influx of new populations.

Studies on community development and community satisfaction have taken the forefront of much of the rural-urban debate over the past 20 years. Marans and Rodgers (1975) assumed that people and their response to residential environments experiencing urban development reflect many social indicators. In addition, Brown (1993) found that the physical and aesthetic environment function as important elements that influence community connectedness and satisfaction. This study hopes to understand the cultural values and attitudes residents hold for their city as it explains the dynamic interactions of land use policy in creating and developing space. Platt (2004) assumes that any place or tract of land may be analyzed in terms of the interaction of: 1) the physical characteristics of the site itself, 2) the institutions that collectively determine how that land may or may not be used, and 3) the resulting patterns of land and water usage (human landscape). The dynamics of land use policy in the creation of landscape and the cultural analysis of space can reveal thick description of the creation of the built environment and can address the underlying socio-political forces permeating the process of land use policy.

### The Concept of the Growth Machine

The concept of the growth machine, first developed by Molotch (1976), unites those who believe that the free market should determine the land use. It is seen to be a driving force in the urban development of US land. Central to this concept is the political elites are often engaged in promoting growth and a coalition of actors support growth as

well. These actors can include people who view land and other commodities with exchange values, like local entrepreneurs, banks, local newspaper businesses. In the entrepreneur's view, land-use regulation endangers both society at large and the specific localities favored as production sites in that markets should also be the invisible hand that determines where and how production should occur (Logan and Molotch 1987).

The concept of the 'growth machine' is an important concept when looking at rapid growth and land use change in a community that falls across a rural-urban gradient. Land use policy sets to pull members of society together to delegate the best possible uses for land and the future use for land. If the market is driving the growth and the political elites are in promotion of such growth, the question remains how do the other citizens relate to such economic pressures designing for their place? If the exchange value becomes the greater values of society, then how does the use value become situated in society?

This study seeks to examine such questions by exploring local perception of place and land use policy. By doing this perhaps we can understand the extent of one's cultural values in relation to land use debates through the conflict that builds as land assumes both use and exchange values.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The design of this study centered on the question of how citizens of rural Harris County make sense of development in their community. The methods chosen for this study attempt to explain social processes and patterns of meaning among the participants of this study. I used Platt's models of land use policy and interpretive methods to link action/interaction sequencing to demonstrate the cultural values and desired goals of community members in the face of changing social and environmental conditions. In addition, the study sought to explain how rural residents make sense of development by defining relevant cultural categories. The methods are described through the procedures used in data collection and the approaches used in data analysis.

##### Data Collection

Multiple sources of evidence are included to find corroborating patterns of meaning that strive to illustrate the models proposed by Platt. In order to obtain enough evidence, this study was conducted in two phases. Phase I included the attendance and

observation of the planning hearings and reading minutes of public hearings, while Phase II involved interviews of local participants in the study.

*Phase I.* Phase I concentrated on the observation and analysis of the planning hearings and public meetings of the community. First, the public hearing minutes from years 2001 to 2004 (N=43) were read as text to identify the issues discussed in the meetings when a zoning or development request was made. There are two types of minutes: *action minutes* and *narrative minutes*. The minutes of Harris County are *narrative minutes*. The minutes tell who the applicant is, the parcel to be rezoned in acres, its present land use to its proposed land use and what will specifically be built on the parcel of land. The remaining section of the minutes presents the views of participants of the hearing (chairpersons, applicant, residents, etc.) who express concern or opposition. This appears in the form of issues related to development such as traffic problems, sewage, etc. that may affect the outcome of the motion. Finally, the motion is carried and the request is either approved, denied, or tabled.

Second, I attended meetings in the summer and fall months of 2005 to provide insight and observations of the planning process and to record the responsiveness of officials to public concerns. I documented the manner in which board members and the public congregate and interact to observe if the board members are facilitators between the different interests groups or not. In addition, I noted how many people participated and how many people were just present and the type of social manners to observe the socio-political atmosphere of the public debates.

*Phase II.* Phase II involved the recruitment and interviewing of local residents. I stratified the sample using voting records, obtained from the county. This served as a call list to residents who were active voters for the recruitment of study participants. The sample area included the city of Hamilton and the surrounding area with a radius of five miles. Then, stratification of the sample began with active voters, ethnicity, gender, and age. Of the 70 residents contacted, there was a response rate of 34 percent leaving a total sample population of 24 (Male 54%, Female 46%, European American 67%, African American 33%). The 24 participants consented to face-to-face interviews that lasted about one and one-half hours. The median age of the sampled population was 57.5. The response rate of this study parallels the response rate of the county when county or state surveys are conducted (33 to 35 percent). In addition, some participants were contacted through the referral of contacted participants in the study who described these citizens as knowledgeable about local history and local government. These members proved to be active members involved in the community.

The face-to-face interviews are semi-structured interviews, given in similar format with the same questions focused including topics related to the three major categories in the model: physical, human/cultural, and legal/political. The literature review provides the foundations for category building used in the interpretative analysis of local heritage and identity associated with landscape and political space. In addition to the interviews, a short survey was given to obtain personal demographic information. The information included the participant's sex, level of education, annual income, religious denomination, whether a landowner or not, age, years lived in the county and ethnicity. Also, the survey included disagree/agree statements extracted from the hearing

minutes and observations at the public hearings. Due to the informal conduct of the planning hearings, I felt statements could be used and tested. (See appendix for survey statements)

### Independent Variables

The independent variables are drawn from the demographic data. These data include the participant's sex (male or female), level of education (high school degree or less, some college, college degree, post graduate degree), annual income (categories of \$20,000), political affiliation (independent, conservative, liberal, or other), age in years, years lived in the county, whether a landowner or not, number of children in the household, and ethnicity. In addition, the participant's religious denomination is a variable used and this followed up with the question regarding regular attendance at religious services (yes or no). Finally, variables were created to describe participation in politics and society. The respondent was asked if he or she attended planning hearings (yes or no) and if the respondent participated in local, social organizations (yes or no).

### Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were obtained through categories in relevant theory and interpreted from interview data. Statistical analysis involves the following variables: community satisfaction, attitude of planning and attitude of urbanization.

*Community satisfaction* is the sum of five main elements: crime satisfaction (Is this a safe place to live?), transportation satisfaction (Is it difficult to drive on the roads because there is too much traffic?), noise satisfaction (Is there too much noise?), preference to remain at the present residence, and personal well-being from overall happiness (Overall, is it a good place to live?) (Baldassare and Protash 1982). These are dichotomous variables and their sum is the total score of community satisfaction.

*Attitudes of planning* were developed from the disagree/agree statements concerning planning administered in the survey. The statements come from categories developed in the literature (Baldassare and Protash 1982) and from statements observed at the planning hearings during Phase I. Four major categories were discerned in data collection: support for zoning, the relative ease of participation, trust for the commissioners, and positive attitude for growth. Support for zoning includes three statements: 1) local government should limit growth, 2) Citizens support the use of regulations to control development and 3) Changes in our zoning codes weaken the official's position to developers. Planning participation includes four statements: 1) I don't understand the process of planning hearing, 2) It is very easy to participate in my planning meetings, 3) Citizens express concern over development and 4) It is not very easy to obtain information about the planning hearings. Trust of the Commissioners to work in the best interest of the residents include three statements: 1) The planning commissioners are very knowledgeable about how to develop, 2) My interests are represented in planning hearings, and 3) I trust my planning commissioners to make decisions in my interest. Finally, positive attitudes toward growth include two statements: 1) Economic growth has a positive effect on my community and 2) Growth is

a threat to my way of life. If the respondent agreed with the statement then the statement scored a one. Disagreement resulted in a score of zero. The sum of the scores is the total score for planning attitude.

*Attitudes of urbanization* are derived from six major questions that focus on urban-ecological and urban-social dimensions. Agreement of these questions scores a one and the sum of the scores gives a total score for attitudes of urbanization. A higher score reveals a positive attitude toward urbanization. The urban-ecological questions include five statements: 1) Rural appearance is increased with trees, 2) Green space is important to my quality of life, 3) Urbanization lowers the environmental quality of the land, 4) Urbanization lowers the environmental quality of the water, 5) Rural people have more knowledge about the environment than urban people, and 6) Urbanization causes the decline of neighborhood ties.

## Data Analysis

Three methods were used to analyze the data. The first included statistical analysis and employed the software SPSS and ANTHROPAC. The other included interpretive approaches to develop patterns of meaning. Finally, all patterns were summarized and then displayed in the Land Use and Society model to show interactions of the data.

First, the planning minutes provide issues on different planning requests. Open coding of these issues created a database of major and dominant issues that are addressed by either public officials or private citizens. The issues served as dichotomous variables



coded zero for not being addressed in a case and one for being addressed in a case. Two types of correlations were performed: Bi-variate and partial. Significance measures of less than .05 or .01 demonstrate a statistical correlation and enable the interpretation of the relationship between the strength of the issues and the approval of a case for development. In addition, the information extracted from these minutes provided a database of key issues that were used to illustrate the land use policy model.

Next, in order to draw cultural conclusions without being culturally relative, it was important to test for One Culture. One Culture assumes that there are no subcultures that have systematically different views on a given topic (Bogatti 1996b: 44). All variability is due to variations in amount of knowledge. ANTHROPAC consensus analysis tests whether this assumption holds or does not hold for the population tested. The One Culture assumption is inconsistent with the existence of more than one large eigenvalue. Two large eigenvalues are strong evidence that (at least) two truths (two systematically different patterns of responses) are governing the responses of informants. The program prints the ratio of the first eigenvalue to the second. The rule of thumb is that if the ratio is less than 3 to 1, the assumption of One Culture is indefensible. Therefore, a ratio of more than 3 to 1 supports the assumption of One Culture. Consensus analysis provides a way to uncover the culturally correct answers to a set of questions in the face of certain kinds of intra-cultural variability. At the same time, it enables the researcher to assess the extent of knowledge possessed by an informant about a given cultural domain. Essentially, it tests the assumption that there is only one right answer to each question even though in everyday life, cultural variability exists. The statements used in this study were developed from Phase I research and sought to ask if

shared cultural values exist among the populations on the subjects of planning and urbanization. These statements were not testing for the right or wrong answers, but measure consensus regarding the cognitive domain of planning. The aim is to discover if One Culture exists.

After cultural agreement is found, interview transcripts helped to find and describe relationships that when interpreted link social categories of place to demonstrate not just how rural residents make sense of development, but also how rural residents participate in action.

The second form of analysis uses an interpretive approach. Open coding of responses to questions aimed to break down the dimensions of the answers into their properties and into their category. Finally, these are described through their categorical process as described in the literature review. These include *place description*, *place identity* and *political space*. Other categories include the environmental impact of urbanization. The type values coded to place are described by Brown (2005) to categorize the type of cultural-ecological value residents hold for the physical landscape of the study region. These include aesthetic value, spiritual value, historical value, future value, and cultural value (Table 2).

Finally, the relationships described and patterns found through both types of analysis are inserted into the Land Use and Society Model (model 1). The model serves to explain the manner in which cultural linkages influence the perception of land use policy. Platt's Land Use and Society model represents the interaction of the three sets of spatial data: physical, human/cultural and legal/political.

Platt proposes that any place or tract of land may be analyzed in terms of the interaction between these three forms of spatial data. The model links the circles (data sets) with arrows (vectors). Platt argues that the most important vector is *resource management*, the process by which society organizes the use of land, water, and air. This vector represents the aggregate influence of both private-sector decisions (by owners, households, builders, financial institutions, etc.) as well as public authorities (local, state, federal, other) that jointly determine how land is used. The disputes that arise between the public and private members of society are submitted into the court system for decisions. The two vectors in the *legal* circle demonstrate member participation and thus influence, to some degree, the resource-management output.

Another important vector is *environmental perception*, a term used broadly to refer to the flow of information concerning the state of the physical resource, as modified by human activities. These can include the sustainability of particular land uses. Therefore, the arrow relates perception to the court system.

The vector labeled *hazard risk* parallels environmental perception. However, it occurs from the altered physical landscape influencing the cultural systems. Hazard risk seeks to describe the risks posed by natural or technological hazards

The *economic and social* vector represents feedback on the financial and social effects of a land use. The social impact of land use decisions facilitates the provision of affordable housing in the community and tends to occur in fees given to the commercial developers.

The *environmental impact* vector completes the interactive loop of the model. This vector represents the modification of the physical environment by human activities, at either the macro or the micro level.

Platt designed a model that depicts a dynamic feedback process whereby a particular land use activity in the human/cultural circle may be modified by a new set of resource-management decisions issued from the legal/political circle in response to new awareness of the environmental impacts of existing practices on the physical world.

## V. ASSESSMENT OF PLACE

To ask how rural residents make sense of development, it is important to define the identity of the place and of the population. Therefore, this question begs to answer how rural identity becomes translated in changing landscapes. By examining data to understand place, define identity, and describe political space, this chapter will provide the results of place analysis.

### Consensus Analysis

In order to find agreement of the population, consensus analysis was conducted on the answers from the survey. A ratio of 3.39 to 1.37 existed among the total population, N=24. Therefore, shared beliefs on the domain of planning exist among the total population (Table 3). However, the ratio is very small and therefore indicates that cultural variability is present in this population. Still, the assumption of one culture exists and therefore I can generalize from data observations, and the ratio is low enough to test for factors to describe cultural variation. However, the sample is too small to run statistical analysis to find underlying factors for variation.

## Place Analysis

According to Canter (1977), place cannot be fully understood until the behavior of the area is described, the physical parameters of the setting are described, and the ecological land uses are defined. Place in this perspective must be examined and described through the data.

All respondents agree that Harris County is a good place to live. Respondents describe the place with cultural and future values. The *cultural value* of place refers to the type of people who share the same history and passing of land traditions. Sixty-seven percent value the rural and country way of life in that the responses include an idyllic vision of small, agrarian lifestyle. The description of place reveals culturally related values. These values include the preservation of heritage and a 'way of life' that passes down a rural idyllic lifestyle. This has a subjective combination that includes the activities of the individual, family and larger social group, which has three major dimensions related to the historical and present conditions, activity, and consciousness (Silvasti 2003; Roos 1983). Concerning place, these three dimensions are key to understanding the strategies residents use to articulate their values in planning hearings that will be discussed further in the land use analysis.

The *future values* refer to the description of place as upholding their history through inherited land. Thirty-three percent apply *historical value*. For example, it was explained that Harris County is historically a rural county and was developed in that fashion by President Roosevelt in the Depression. Harris County was a part of Roosevelt's rural rehabilitation and development project for small farms. Of those who

responded addressed the valley project, they agreed that the President of the United States developed Harris County as a rural county and stated the new development is threatening the very nature of this community's established land use practice.

In this example, we find that there is a very particular description of place and description of land use. There is even the notion of political power in that the President of the United States first developed this land and now the local planning commission, a politically weaker body, is changing what has been decided historically and politically as rural.

When asked to describe local ecology, respondents described the landscape in terms of *aesthetic* and *spiritual values*. Fifty-four percent of the sample describes the scenery, particularly the southern valley region, as valued for its aesthetic properties, while forty-six percent of the population added that the land is physically beautiful because it was created by God and therefore land is sacred.

For example, one respondent described her *mission* in life to be a "steward of God and of His creation [the environment]." Another stated: "God created it [the environment] and it is our duty to protect it and not take more than we need." In addition, one very strong believer stated: "To me, and being a Christian and seeing the beauty that God has created for us, I think WOW, we serve an awesome God...to me it's being a good steward of what I'm around [nature] and be responsible for what we have, and I say your first mission field is wherever your feet are."

In general, residents hold a strong belief in Christianity and ninety-six percent of the sample agree that Christianity is an important part of the community. This reveals a Christian stewardship practice toward the land. An ecological-Christian influence was

first discussed by Lynn White (1967). White argued that Christian philosophy negatively impacted the environment. However, her first claim fueled a public reaction among different Christian denominations (Fowler 1995). Two major perspectives developed out of Christian faith in reaction to this article. The first is a fundamental philosophy and the other is a liberal philosophy. We are concerned with the liberal philosophy in this study. Liberal Christians follow a Christian stewardship philosophy that defines humans as the earth-keepers or guardians over God's creation (Fowler 1995). Such a philosophy has an influence on environmental practices (Greeley 1993; Guth, Kellstedt, Schmidt and Green 1993; Fowler 1995; Silvasti 2003). There were no claims of dominion over the environment as granted by God, rather that the respondent interpret Biblical readings to be missionaries and stewards to service God. God is considered to be awesome and nature is the "handy-work of God" and "He has the power," not humans.

However, the fact remains that Harris County is growing at a rate of thirty-three percent. The total sample agrees that Harris County is becoming a "bedroom community" of Columbus. The sample defines a "bedroom community" in this case as Columbus residents moving to Harris County, as they continue to work in Columbus. There is the opinion that Harris County is being absorbed by Muscogee County. Residents view this as a catalyst of change affecting their sense of place. Levels of community satisfaction reveal an average of 3.92 on a scale ranging from zero to five. In general, the results show high levels of community satisfaction.

The total sample agreed that Harris County is a safe place to live and overall the respondents are happy with their community. Places with high levels of community satisfaction that are aesthetically and socially pleasing are a major draw for new residents



and expose the manner in which different stakeholders of the community apply growth controls in public policy to maintain a satisfied community (Baldassare and Protash 1982). Forty-two percent of participants believe that residents move to Harris County in pursuit of the rural idyllic lifestyle, and its aesthetic beauty and rural culture attracts people who are tired of the city. This view shares the same properties given in the description of place. Therefore, residents believe people are moving to Harris County for the same reasons that they live there. Although this may seem obvious, the level of satisfaction combined with a sense of place opens up a cultural category in the perception of urbanization and change associated with new residential development.

Community satisfaction incorporates five measures of satisfaction: crime, traffic, noise, willingness to stay, and overall happiness. It is justified on the assumption that its measures express perception of a community's growth and is an influencing factor in the formation of policy. Baldassare and Protash (1982) tested community satisfaction in areas undergoing urbanization. They examined the implementation of growth controls relating to the categories of community satisfaction and found that growth controls correlate with levels of community satisfaction. They found that growth controls do not reduce the growth rate, but do affect the overall level of satisfaction. In other words, growth itself is not affected, but the social atmosphere and level of community satisfaction is affected. This trend resonates with the local population in their views on growth associated with effects on traffic and noise.

Traffic is the second most common issue discussed in the Harris County planning hearings. Concerning the measures of community satisfaction, sixty-three percent are

dissatisfied with the current transportation trends. This issue is the key measure lowering the overall level of community satisfaction.

Many of the roads are still country roads not designed to handle the influx of new populations. Currently highway 27, the major route from the southern part of Harris County to Columbus, is being expanded from two lanes to four lanes. The transportation infrastructure is commonly invoked by residents to describe the physical and social changes occurring along the rural-urban gradient. For the community, an increase in traffic is the key indicator of new growth and therefore a visual and negative indicator of the changing rural atmosphere as country roads are lost in the creation of new roads. Traffic is only one indicator of a process modifying the rural ideal.

#### Analysis of Place Identity

Laclau proposed that identity is best articulated in cases of conflict, especially when there is an *outside* and an *inside*. As explained earlier, the data described here is articulated by the local residents. The respondents of the study consider themselves to be residents of Harris County who share the same values and contrast themselves with the new comers. They feel new residents have a different identity from the established local community. Thus in this case, we have an outside and an inside. The inside group assumes that the local residents share the same values, which differs from the values shared by the outside group, the new comers. This study is concerned with the inside group. Therefore, any description of the outside group is described by the opinions and perceptions made by the inside.

Place identity considered here is a process and not an outcome. Participants of this study describe their land showing insight into how they construct and articulate their identity. A common phenomenon among residents of Harris County is the inheritance of land. In a historical context, land translates into a sense of place and self. Findings explain that ancestral connections to one's sense of place are the key description of place identity. For example, seventy-five percent of the sample live on inherited land and share these categories associated with the meaning of one's 'home place.' Home place is described as a space created to nurture the family and its children throughout generations. For some, they live in the house that their parents lived in and built themselves. One's 'home place' is the place created by the parents and sustained through the children.

In addition, fifty-six percent of the sample state that their extended family inhabits the surrounding land. Therefore, their neighbors are their family. This provides a sense of stability and safety concerning the preservation of land. The respondents who live surrounded by family stated that they are less concerned about development of their place because any decision to sell land would be discussed by the entire family. Half of the population who inherited land plan to keep the land in the family. The other half would like to keep it in the family but cannot make that decision due to potential financial burden from an increase in property taxes.

Property taxes in Harris County continue to be raised and are a major issue among the residents tested. Over half the population views land as a source of wealth. However, twenty-five percent of the population has a negative attitude towards the increase in property taxes because they are concerned that it is hurting the elderly. In addition, twenty-nine percent of the sample are concerned that increased property values

could burden new generations who recently inherited land, forcing some to sell off their family property. Currently, county residents pay 9.59 per \$1000 of fair market value and a millage rate of 24.71.

Through examination of these properties, place identity is found through the description of family land history. A person's identity becomes personified through the ownership of land, and in my cases the inherited ownership of land. However, data reveals that race is a factor in describing the motivations underlying their perception of land management.

The African Americans of Harris County have a painful history associated with land. The institution of slavery forced a hardship of land onto African Americans. Therefore, obtaining ownership of land for African Americans was a hardship in itself, but owning land was a way to advance African American and their families into a higher social class. Thus, holding onto the land is economically and symbolically significant. Land is an investment for the family, passed through generations to provide stability for the family and an investment that appreciates in value. Land ownership is a product of historical sacrifice and a product of symbolic and physical property of wealth.

By contrast, European American hardship with the land only occurs through financial burdens. In addition, many stated that they wished to be grandfathered into the taxes because "you can't hold on to that much property." It may be inferred that taxes apply to the best use of the land and for European Americans sampled here view their land with use value, rather than exchange value, and the quantity of the taxes is too high. Still, it is important to note that the European Americans in this sample have an average of 53.53 acres of land, versus the African Americans sampled who have an average of

6.06 acres. European Americans indeed to bear a more financial hardship as taxes increase because they have more land to tax. However, African Americans regard land as an investment that appreciates, whereas European Americans see tax increases as payment for their family name. For European Americans, place identity is maintained through holding the land and living out a family legacy versus African-Americans who associate such legacy with socio-economical dimensions.

The African American relationship with land is complex and multidimensional; however it is also very flexible. It is a relationship that translates into a process of change in that land appreciates, so as the economic system shifts, the value of their land shifts. Although both races identify their self with place, and in this case, inherited land is their identifying factor. It is the physical articulation of the family name. However, for African Americans, land ownership has been more of a process versus the stagnate view that land is what establishes a life-time residency.

Harris County residents express identity and sense of place through the description of their physical setting. The description of this expresses the emotional and symbolic power land encompasses for influencing cultural values. This study shows that as place identity becomes articulated it can be translated into political debates concerning development.

### Analysis of Political Space

Political space has three main components: locations of struggle (the particular environmental space in question), communities of resistance (the opening of place to its

alternate meanings), and the space must be political (expression of political power and identity of the place) (Keith and Pile 1993:5). Political space can be read through the planning minutes or observed in the planning hearings.

In planning hearings, residents and policy makers discuss the types of uses for land and plan to zone land according to its best use for the survival of the community. The tracts of land become the political space. They are the locations of struggle and become spaces opened for defining the descriptions of its use. These hearings are political meetings set up to regulate the purposes for land. Thus, the hearings provide the opportunity for different stakeholders to discuss land use thereby politicizing the space and fulfilling all three major components of political space. To conclude, the political space is not the hearings, but the parcel or tract of land discussed in these hearings. The purpose of political space as a concept is to show what kind of space is political. In other words, this analysis reveals what makes a place controversial and socially and politically significant.

For example, the Harris County Planning Commission met for a public hearing January 18, 2006 that became a major case of controversy among the local population. The request petitioned to rezone 70.46 acres in Pine Mountain Valley from agricultural use to residential use for homes ranging from USD 150,000 to 200,000 on two or more acre lots. In this case, the political space is the 70.46 acres of land in Pine Mountain Valley. The resistance concerning the land occurs between the contrasting views of how to zone a tract of land, in particular deciding whether to keep the tract zoned agriculture or change the tract to residential. The expressions of political power are seen in the cases given by the political stakeholders to either approve or oppose the request.

In general, the hearing follows a formal agenda and applies formal procedures; however, when the public participates through stating their case to oppose a request, the public voices opinions with informal jargon and regards citizens, including commission members, by nicknames. By creating an informal political atmosphere in the hearing, the public is creating a constitutive inside. In this case, there is a population with a strong sense of place identity that is being threatened. Analysis reveals much of the socio-political insight of planning hearings through the application of procedure, which allots time for the debate of the political space.

The procedure, in this case, began with the commissioner questioning the petitioner. The questions regarded the developer's plans to extend water services and the potential total environmental impact (water, soil, and forest). Over the years from 2001 to 2004, the issues related to water accounted for 40 percent of the cases, while the issues related to the environment account for 30 percent of the cases. Water issues and environmental impact related issues are frequent and bi-variate correlations show that these are significant indicators of issues in the hearing sample. Seventy-seven percent of the time, issues related to water and the environment will occur in the hearings. However, further analysis on the hearing and zoning cases did not generate a statistically strong relationship and therefore the issues could not predict the approval status of any requests heard at the public hearings.

After the commissioners question the petitioner, they open the debate to the public. In the Pine Mountain Valley case, there were over 100 people present and only one citizen spoke on behalf of the request to rezone. The speaker, a real estate broker, spoke in favor stating that there is no inventory of homes in this area in this price range

for families and that there is a demand for them. His appeal related to growth and planning for growth; however, the remaining public opposed the request and residents were granted the floor to speak their case.

The public opposed the request on many different issues. The speakers reiterated the issues discussed by the commissioners, but the major theme in their opposition appealed to cultural and social impacts as well. Nine people were chosen to speak on behalf of the total present public against the request even though the room was full. The cultural opposition revealed issues related to historical and spiritual value. Citizens opposed the request on the basis that the valley is historically significant because it was the site of Roosevelt's rural rehabilitation project. One speaker stated in opposition or rather, "on behalf of the Pine Mountain Community" that the Valley "should be valued for its historical significance, in its origination, most lived for stability and the rural character, it was designed that way for a reason. It was designed to be rural."

In addition, it is a sacred site because it is a part of God's creation. One speaker stated, "God made it [the valley] and He was on a roll that day." Residents in the room showed signs of agreement at these cultural statements. Agreement was either verbal or non-verbal. Residents would nod their heads, applaud, or speak out 'yes' or 'that's right.'

Analysis from the hearings during the years 2001 to 2004 reveals that only seven percent of the cases appealed to these types of cultural issues. This is a low frequency because public participation is rare; only twenty percent of the population admitted to attending meetings because they have some association with the planning board that is beyond public citizenship. In other words, their job requires them to attend on occasion. The sample did admit that they would attend if planning decisions would affect their



personal land area. Therefore, participation is issue based regarding place identity and not place in general. The public is less opposed to development in general and more opposed to development in their neighborhood. A resident offered a metaphor to describe the local reaction of development by neighborhoods: “Everybody just did like a rattlesnake; they grew back and just say stay out of my territory.”

The January hearing concerning the Pine Mountain Valley area is an excellent illustration of the rattlesnake metaphor. Residents presented their cases to oppose development in the name of preserving local heritage. To explain, the residents organized with fellow neighbors who lived in “valley homes,” or homes built during the Pine Mountain Valley Project. The inhabitants of this valley desire to maintain the heritage of the region by preventing residential subdivisions into the neighborhood. The “valley homes” are built on larger plots and the residents believe that dividing the large plots into two-acre plots with individual neighborhoods will destroy the small farmer atmosphere. Therefore, they came together to petition the zoning request asking the board members to keep the development out of their territory, like a rattlesnake.

In conclusion, residents identify political spaces when the land use decisions concern their neighboring space and when these decisions affect the citizen’s personal lifestyle or ‘way of life’. As a result, participation is not politically motivated but socially motivated. The threat posed by new development may be considered political action, but residents interpret public participation as a social action. The threat of new development is toward the local identity or the rural atmosphere and may thereby lead to loss of a culturally valued place.

## VI. LOCAL PERCEPTION OF LAND USE POLICY

Now, we can answer how rural residents make sense of development by examining land use policy. Land use policy articulates place culture into land policy. Land use policy describes the behavior and use of the land and defines the physical parameters of the setting. These are the main objectives of examining cultural places. Therefore, by inserting data into the model one can see how the respondents of this project interpret and explain land use policy (Model 2).

The *physical* data or the biosphere has been altered by human activities. In this study, the southern part of Harris County is the physical biosphere experiencing the most development. This is the physical landscape or the place analyzed.

Local residents view *environmental perception* in religious context. As discussed earlier, residents view the local ecology through a Liberal Christian philosophy.

As the model demonstrates, environmental perception leads to decision-making in the courts. As noted earlier, religion influences environmental perception. Thereby, it is important to include data on potential religious influences in making political decisions. Seventy-one percent of the population believes it is important to ask what Jesus would do in making political decisions. In the process of the hearings, commissioners pray before the hearings and eighty-three percent of the population believes this is okay and does not hurt anyone. As a result, religion is only discussed in terms relating to stewardship of the

land and description of place. The articulation of religion is not found in planning decisions or any major data set; rather religion is a driving force in creating perception and not action. Therefore, religion defines the general contours of personal values to land influencing the cognitive processes for decision making, but is not verbally articulated in the actual decision.

The *legal* data reveals the perception local residents hold for their court system. Sixty-three percent of the population believes developers do not respect local residents' land rights, and twenty-one percent of the population believes that developers have more influence over the local government than the residents do because developers have more money than the local residents do. The accuracy of this statement is not founded in any other data form, it is only found through perception.

Thirty-three percent of the population believes that the local government system has become a business rather than a legal system designed to protect the rights of the community. Although this is a highly negative perception, the participants of this study believe that the planning commission is doing the best that they can. The total sample agrees that residential development is inevitable and therefore the commission must accept development requests. It is explained that the planning commission will apply special conditions to the zoning request if the motion is approved. The special conditions tend to require developers to create the infrastructure on their own.

For example, if there is not a line from county water to the proposed site of development, then the county will approve the request with special conditions that the developer build a line to the county water at the cost to the developer and not to the public. Therefore, it raises the cost of development and thereby raises the cost of the

houses. The housing cost is too high to accommodate for middle and lower class families. As a result, the community feels economically and socially alienated from the new populations. The median household income of Hamilton residents given by the census is \$32,143. Fifty percent of the sample used here has an annual income of less than 40,000 dollars and eighty percent of the sample population has an annual income less than 80,000 dollars.

The *resource management* vector, as described by the local population includes zoning regulations. The major resource described by residents is land. Therefore, the land regulations as perceived by the community members are zoning regulations. Two local institutions are the planning board (plan commission) and the zoning board of appeals. The Standard Zoning Enabling Act helped to design the land use/zoning legal system. The zoning board assimilates the opinions of the community and the planning staff to formulate zoning recommendations to the local elected body. Then, the planning board is authorized to approve or deny any zoning recommendation. Residents view this regulatory process as the tool for resource management.

One local example of a zoning ordinance particular to Harris County is the two-acre lot rule. Residents explain that the local government zoned residential property at two acres instead of using the common one acre rule to attempt to maintain the rural quality of a suburb. Fifty-eight percent of the population approve of this proposal, but are still concerned that it is not enough. It is believed that poor zoning will cause the county to lose its luster (characteristics described in the cultural data).

The *cultural* data presents the land use system for Harris County. As mentioned earlier, residents describe Harris County as a “bedroom community” for Muscogee

County. The data here reveal the perception of land use systems as Muscogee absorbs Harris County by reshaping the landscape and the social fabric of the community. Since place is so symbolic and represented in the ownership of land, land use systems affect the dynamics of the landscape, the very source of place identity. Therefore, the expressions in the data that describe their neighborhood as a “bedroom community” indicate that newer residents do not assimilate into the rural “inside” community. Furthermore, twenty-five percent of the sample feel that they are paying for the new comers through their taxes. Residents believe that the new comers are reaping the social services and educational benefits bought and paid for by the property taxes of the old timers. Property taxes are based on the assessed value of the site as set by the tax assessor’s office. The sample states that their property taxes have increased dramatically over the last few years and have paid for the very services that the new residents are moving for, i.e. better schools, roads, water/sewage services, etc. This assumes position as the *economic and social* vector linking the cultural data and translated into the legal data as it is an issue raised by different stakeholders in public hearings (Table 4).

The *environmental impacts* associated with the changes in the land use system are described as loss of land quality that degrades the surrounding water, soil, and forest resources of the environment. As mentioned earlier, water issues are the most common issues discussed in the planning hearings. Seventy-percent of the respondents discuss water as the main environmental impact associated with the current growth. Many of Harris County’s residents are on well water. As a result, water seems to be the defining ecological resource. In other words, as one resident put it, ‘it all comes back to the water and you can’t live without water.’ The responses in the interviews relate development to

degradation of the water resource. First, residents believe that the current infrastructure is not ready to handle the carrying capacity from the influx. Furthermore, building the infrastructure could have damaging effects on individual well water sources. Second, residents fear that the clear cutting of the trees for residential development is taking too much top soil. One male stated that the developers are taking all of the topsoil and leaving only the Georgia clay. He insisted that this can only destroy the water reserves in the ground. In addition, residents fear that as families use more and more yard fertilizers and flush other household toxics then the soil will become contaminated and ultimately contaminate the well sources. Currently, residents describe their water as pure, clear and clean. 'It's the best water in the world,' and they fear it will be too overused and recycled that the water will be completely degraded. One respondent stated: "I'm not an engineer, but I think it's amazing that we will get crystal clear water here and when we go to Atlanta, it don't taste right." He is expressing what seventy percent of my sample expressed: developing land for residential property and growth in general will cause the decline of water quality.

Finally, local residents do not feel that Harris County is at risk for bio-hazards because the major development and change to their landscape is residential. Therefore, the *hazard risk* is the loss of the local culture. What they are physically losing is the rural landscape that is idyllic and what they are culturally losing is the rural identity.

Therefore, the hazard risk is equally symbolic; it refers to cultural loss.

Land use policy describes the physical parameters, key components in defining place. The presentation of this data exposes high regard for cultural and historical values that are threatened by human ecological change. By examining how rural residents make

sense of land use systems and new development, the data reveal that rural residents see a loss in the definition of place and therefore a loss in their way of life. The model holds both historical and cultural values, but it is also symbolic because it explains that different zoning is a key component in defining one's sense of place and sense of self.

Landscape is a concept of high tension in that history, politics and social relations are at the center of this tension. By applying a sense of place to a landscape, cultural values reveal the deep cultural-ecological connections that are embedded in all human existence. Place identity is a process and not an outcome. Local residents perceive their identity in terms of potential loss; but in fact, they too are a part of a cycle that requires cultural assimilation and adaptation. Harris County residents are being pulled into assimilation with the 'outside' due to the spread of urbanization. This assimilation affects the human ecological structure through the alteration of the physical landscape and the socio-economic status of the community.

Although these changes are described as a 'loss of identity', I wish to call this a change in identity in so far as place changes through the process of urbanization, and so will identity. Zoning is the key factor creating this change and the key window into understanding underlying social phenomena related to sense of place.

### Linking Land Use with Race and Class

Zoning has two functions. The first is the category, while the other is the characteristic. The category defines the land use type and the characteristic specifies restrictions of the property, like a minimum lot size (Ihlanfeldt 2004; Munroe, Croissant,

York 2005). For Harris County, the current zoning trends include residential categories with the characteristics of two-acre lots, and this trend is the quintessential example given to describe exclusionary zoning.

Exclusionary zoning or “snob” zoning sets a minimum on the size of lots within the community (Harvard Law Review 1971: 1645). This type of zoning inflates the cost of entry into the land market, which leads to more wealthy families settling into the community (Harvard Law Review 1971). The courts require due process of any right. In the case of this study, the open court hearings sustain all varieties of zoning requests to discuss the citizenship rights of the local population with participation of any member of society. In response to questions regarding the justice of this type of zoning, two major justifications are drawn. Setting a minimum lot size maintains the property values and preserves open space or maintains the character and beauty of the land (Harvard Law Review 1971). This is the current trend for Harris County.

For local residents, zoning assumes the position of resource management strategies because it determines how to use land and thereby affects the social dynamics of the model (Platt 2004). In testing for attitudes of the planning commission, zoning board, and urbanization, fifty-eight percent of the population offered the two-acre zoning regulation as a positive ruling given by the planning commission. The justification for approving this ruling is that it is perceived to preserve the natural beauty and rural atmosphere by reducing the possibility of housing population density.

However, literature reveals that zoning for two-acre lots increases the property values, which increases property taxes (Pogodzinski and Sass 1994; Ihlanfeldt 2004). Specifically, Pogodzinski and Sass (1994) found that opening space to residential



categories does not show strong defects on the property values; however, zoning characteristics do generate stronger and consistent increases on property prices and taxes. The data presented earlier reveal that residents criticize the developers for this increase due the competition for undeveloped land, which is the result of creating the categorical space for residential properties. Residents assume the developers have the financial means to enter from outside the community and create a different landscape and different identity due to the new open use of the land. Furthermore, the financial means to enter into the land market of the region is translated into political power. This burden of blame is misplaced. Residents fail to associate the social implications of land use policy. Zoning is more than land use strategies; zoning zones for the social as well as physical. The process of landscape creation through land use policy and zoning creates the transformation of one's sense of place. For Harris County, growth is inevitable thus generating a process of landscape change.

Zoning is a socially accepted political strategy for the county; residents assume the stance to approve exclusionary zoning by continuing to support the two-acre rule because they rely on the justification given that this type of zoning will preserve the rural atmosphere. Ironically, a closer investigation of the Rural Rehabilitation Project so revered by the community exposes an earlier incident of exclusionary practices.

The official name of the project was the Georgia Pine Mountain Valley Corporation under the supervision of the Rural Rehabilitation section of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. It was located in the Valley, three miles from Hamilton and comprised 13,000 acres. Construction began in 1935 and the first settlers arrived on February 4, 1935. Families *were chosen* to move into the valley. Families

aged from 25 to 50 years old with an educational attainment of at least sixth grade and were financially stable before the Depression (Bishop 1941). The project was designed to provide work relief projects during the depression while creating sustainable farming communities. Harry Brown, the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture 1937, discussed the Valley and stated: “It is believed that the development of this plan will continue to produce an interesting and representative culture, or manner of living, growing out of the appreciation and use of natural resources and products of the region, indigenous architecture, arts, crafts, folk expressions, and native foods.”

The pamphlet for the “Valley” project stated: “The project was established to rehabilitate families who were on relief or eligible for relief. These families, all of them white and most with a farming background, came from state industrial centers such as LaGrange, Atlanta, Newnan, Griffin and Macon, where curtailed mill production had caused unemployment. Plans were formulated to give them an opportunity to gain independence and own a home and farm.” The point being, Harris County has a history of developing for a certain type of person or family.

### Subtle Racism

The example above parallels the current zoning trend to develop for a certain race and class. Race theorists argue that three centuries of slavery and legalized racial segregation created structural, cultural and psychological barriers between African Americans and European Americans (Jones 1972; Pettigrew 1985). Much of the discussion relates class and race as the root of racial conflict and discrimination and such

discrimination is the product of class forces (Bonacich 1980). Subtle racism is considered here because it relates to contemporary theory that suggests that legal and activist interventions have reduced overt racisms; however, subtle racism continues to expose prejudice through subtle forms of discrimination with economic and social competition and exclusionary practices (Guerin 2003; Feagin 1991). In other words, people do not openly discuss their prejudice; yet they do use prejudicial language and discriminatory actions within their social networks and political strategies.

Interviews revealed properties of subtle racism. One stated “Well, we’re integrated, but I think people still have prejudice. It just won’t go away. There’s nothing outstanding you know, like that would be in the newspaper, but its there.”

In general, regardless of race, residents agree that there is no blatant racism; however, the European American residents state that there have been no problems because the African Americans keep to themselves and the European Americans keep to themselves. Another respondent remarked, “I don’t see the, open hostilities, you still have people that want to make a snide joke, but you don’t hear that much anymore...It would be nice if there was more intermingling, but I think a lot of that maybe by choice.”

This is not to assume that all participants believe this social segregation to be positive. Residents involved with the integrated, non-denominational Christian Volunteer Organization make this claim but add that they wish to integrate more of the African American Churches into the organization, but that it has been difficult to ‘bridge the gap.’ For example, one respondent stated, “On Sunday, we go to our own separate churches, we still have the same faith and it’s beautiful. I just wish we could go one step farther and get over the color barrier.”

However, the fact remains that there is a built-in structural social segregation in this society. For example, one European American told a story being stranded on the side of the road and one of the participant's African American friends explained that he had seen her on the side of the road and asked if she was okay the next day. The participant explained that the black man couldn't help her because "if a cop had come by it would have been an issue that I was a white girl by myself and here are these two black guys on the side of the road." In this case, there is an understanding that there are times and places appropriate for 'intermingling.'

At this point, I wish to claim that those with less to lose socially and economically are more embrative of the new development. In general, African Americans score higher in their attitudes of urbanization (Table 5). In addition, African Americans score higher than the European American population on the indicators of growth and overall planning attitudes. In other words, African Americans want increased development, whereas the European Americans do not want increased development. The interviews reveal that African Americans assume greater job opportunities and social diversity with the urbanization of their community. However, European Americans view urbanization as a negative change because of the growth of potential commercial activity and social diversity. Therefore, findings reveal that African Americans are more positive and embrative of planning for growth than the European Americans. As discussed in Chapter 5, African Americans view land as an investment that appreciates. Therefore, the increase in property taxes is not a negative aspect of new growth, but rather a financially and socially positive affect of the process of change.

On the other hand, European Americans held a very negative attitude toward the increase in property value and taxes. They view their taxes as the source for financing social and public services. The major example given was the financing of the public school system. Harris County is very proud of their schools. The public high school is ranked 94 out of a total of 345 for the state of Georgia. The view is that the newcomers are reaping the benefits of the educational system bought and paid for by the old-timers. For example, one respondent explained, "Say a young family with two kids moves into this county, they'll be, 25-30 years, of paying taxes before they pay *their* way for those kids to go to school. So, how many can we tote at one time?" Although many say that they do not begrudge a family moving here to provide a better life for their children, they do add that these families are not going to contribute to the community. In other words, the migration of new families would be better accepted if the residents believed that these families would assimilate into the built social structure. However, the generally view is that this will not be the case. However, this concern is unreasonable because the Georgia Tax Codes specify that all real and personal property belonging to a public utility are subject to taxation by the school district, and not real and personal property belonging to local residents (GA 48-5-402).

The significance of the school issue example is not whether the residents are correct in their knowledge of county and state tax codes, rather the issue is an illustration of discrimination. The belief that children are being admitted into the school system without paying their dues can be translated as a form of segregation where people are categorized by deserving of an education and not deserving of an education. In other words, the local residents are worthy of a public education, whereas the new residents are

not. For example, one respondent stated, “You know a couple who are born and raised here, that’s not an issue for me, their kids in school, but the ones moving in, we can’t handle...our taxes just keep going up and up.”

In summary, the populations who throughout history have maintained a race structure with subtle forms of racism are experiencing a socio-economic shift. This shift is moving from racial discrimination to class discrimination within the political system. By supporting exclusionary zoning, the residents are supporting class discrimination. Exclusionary zoning perpetuates a trend to introduce new residents into the community who are of a higher class status. Therefore, those who have historically been the discriminators are experiencing discrimination as the socio-economic status shifts with the creation of new space for different class citizens and fear a loss of their ‘way of life.’

The respondents of the study who oppose new growth regulations and view the in-migration population as a constitutive outside culture of people, desire to maintain the current socio-economic status for the community. Such a phenomenon does not relate to race, rather it relates to class. The historical context of racism in the community reveals the level of isolation between the urbanizing world and the rural place idealized by the community, a place that maintains the historical and aesthetic value of the community. Those who favor the introduction of new populations and an increase in property values are people who lack economic means to better their socio-economic status. These subgroups of the population happen to be African Americans, but moreover they are people who desire greater economic advantages offered by growth and development.

## The City as a Growth Machine

The data collected for this study is concerned with the local perception of land use policy and change in a small region of Harris County. The actual power struggles are not analyzed here through collection, but the logic of the growth machine is an important concept that relates to the issues of growth and development for Harris County.

Respondents of this study believe people are migrating into Harris County because they desire a country life style; however, migration can also be justified as the opening of a land market for property that will appreciate in value and provide an economic bargaining tool in personal financial and symbolic power.

The increase in zoning for residential land is a response to a consumer need for developing for an influx of people. Such a shift in populations occurs not just on a cultural level, which is the perception of the sample tested here, but also a shift in the economic and political levels of the society. Growth is inevitable for this place. Linking the growth goals of the community with their cultural institutions are two features that play a large role in building and zoning for a locality.

Logan and Molotch (1987) assume that people who invest time and money into the local affairs of land-use decisions become the dominant or politically more powerful in the public hearings. These participants can hold more power than the residents who have the most to gain or lose by such land-use decisions. As discussed earlier, residents participate when development invades their own personal territory, but do not participate when development occurs outside their own territory. By being an inconsistent participant, in that participation occurs issue-based and not against general development,

residents are assuming the position of fragmentation of land and a fragmentation of society. Moreover, residents are assuming a politically weak position thus granting power to the 'growth machine.'

In addition, by contrasting the growth machine with the data collected in this study, it is revealed how communities struggle against the growth machine. Respondents of this study who fall in a lower class level are embracive of growth because of the opportunities in the market that growth can offer. However, those who are in a higher class reject the increased support of growth because their place identity and 'way of life' is changing.



## VII. CONCLUSION

Human-place relationships reveal how culture becomes manifested through the environment and land use policy, and provides the formation of such perspectives into the creation of space. This project explored the possibility of examining land use policy and zoning ordinances to establish the cultural underpinnings of landscape and community development.

Local residents agree that Harris County is a good place to live for its historical and cultural value. They also agree that its rural beauty is intrinsic to its value and should be preserved. However, the influx of growth is creating a division among the population of people who favor and oppose such change. The growth is not affecting change of the landscape but also change of the community. As a result, the human-place associations made by the residents reveal a community with a cultural investment that encompasses the environment.

The opening of space for residential properties is the current trend in planning hearings at the county level. Therefore, residents interpret the preservation of Harris County's rural idyllic quality with participation in the planning hearings. As discussed, Harris County's growth is inevitable and residents only participate if their neighborhood could be affected, while other residents favor multiple forms of new growth. This division concerning planning seems to be rooted in historical conditions of the

community, which is one of the reasons given to value the place. Therefore, a human-place relationship can provide vital insight to the local perception of land use policy and zoning ordinances.

As humans settle into any region and develop the physical place, a cultural ‘sense of place’ also develops. Many community or land development research addresses the power relations of different stakeholders invested in land use decisions. However, this study set to explore what drives one set of stakeholders’ views of land use policy. In other words, how residents make sense of land use policy in a changing environment. By doing this one can explore the base level of cultural values influencing strategies that become articulated in local debates.

The employment of place perspectives articulated into planning discussions addresses the opportunity to represent cultural and historical values that become the source of articulating the historical and future uses of land. This is important research because one can relate cultural clashes with environmental changes, while understanding the deeper set of values imbedded in cultural ecological clashes and political struggles. Land use policy and zoning debates is not just an avenue for discussing power relationships, but are key insights to human-place relationships as well.

Place identity can be a driving force in articulating cases against or in favor of certain uses of land. Place identity is a process in that identity formation depends on the shifting and expanding of place boundaries. In the case of Harris County, we find that the sample population creates an ‘inside’ group who share the same type of place identity. The ‘outside’ is a separate identity, one that is generating a shift in land use as well as expanding the boundaries of new identities with the growth of new populations.

Political space examines how space becomes political through the location of the struggle and the communities in resistance to this struggle. Planning debates address the properties of the concept of political space. Discussions of land use policy address the location of the land, which has become a topic of political and social debate thus revealing the location of struggle for space that is politicized. The communities of resistance are the different stakeholders who unite to speak in favor of which land use regulation is most appropriate for the community and for the land itself.

Batteau urges the interpretation of political debates not as the sources of competing views but as the expression of underlying cultural processes. Land use policy is a valid form of a political system designed to reconcile the competing uses for land in order to determine the best and most productive use for the future use of land. Within that statement, one can't help but realize that it is a completely cultural statement in that determining the best use involves the subjective valuing of a piece of land and this study examines the source of those values.

These relationships and strategies associated with land use decision making affects the local ecosystem processes of the community. Land use policy addresses what land should be controlled, who should control the land, how costs should be borne to develop and manage land, and what uses should be encouraged as the best use for the land. Planning boards become cultural-political institutions that adapt to external factors associated with growth, like in-migration, climate change, economic market, etc. depending on the local ecology. These external factors indicate the design land use policy takes while affecting the local ecosystem.

For example, in-migration involves the movement of new populations into one area while driving other species out. In the case of Harris County, human migration patterns are driving the construction of new residential property, which results in the reduction of land cover through the loss of trees and forest habitats.

However, land use seems to be more concerned with topographical and spatial issues rather than ecosystem issues. Flood plains, water sources, and density are focused in an anthropocentric way in that managing patterns of human growth, managing water resources and contamination result in the increase of one species at the expense of others altering the local ecology. Therefore, as the market demands community planning and development, a cultural place is not just in transition, but an ecological place is in transition.

As urbanization continues to spread into rural America, it is important to examine such spread through the cultural foundations of land use policy to better examine not just the trends of growth, but the meanings and perspectives associated with such growth. Future research should continue to evaluate cultural forms in urbanization and ecological change because they are important features and characteristics of policy creation. In other words, planning hearings and zoning ordinances provide vital insight to the underlying cultural-political strategies associated with local ecology.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1. Policy Issues Related to Land Use**

Type of Policy Issue	Type of Land Use Issue
Inefficient Use of Land	Development of prime agricultural land Loss or pollution of wetlands Overextension of public services Visual Blight
Energy Waste	Traffic congestion Decline of public transportation Heating and air conditioning of small structures
Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment	Adequate quantity and quality of drinking water Conservation and protection of existing water sources Efficient irrigation practices Relating development to available infrastructure
Loss of Biodiversity and Species Extinction	Habitat conservation plan
Affordable Housing	Exclusionary zoning Inadequate public financing Conversion of rental units to condominiums Deterioration of older housing
Public Recreation and Open Space	Spatial imbalance of supply and demand Multiple functions and constituencies Deterioration of older facilities
Solid Wastes	Rising volume of wastes Shortage of landfill capacity Siting of new landfills and Incinerators
Natural Hazards	Urban flooding Seismic risk Soil and Slope instability Coastal storm hazards

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Source: Platt 2004: 24

**Table 2. Properties of Cultural-ecological Values**

Value	Definition
Aesthetic Value	Area is valued for the scenery--mountains, forests, valleys
Spiritual Value	Area is valued because it is seen as sacred, religious, or spiritually special
Historical Value	Area is valued because it is regarded as a place and/or thing of natural and human history
Future Value	Area is valued because it allows for future generations to know and experience the areas as they are now
Cultural Value	Area is valued because people can continue to pass down wisdom, traditions, and a way of life

**Table 3. Cultural Consensus Reporting for the Total Population**

Statements (Culturally Correct Statements in <b>Bold</b> )	Disagree %(N)	Agree %(N)
City Planning is the most important issue in our community	54(13)	46(11)
<b>Local government should limit growth</b>	25(6)	<b>75(18)</b>
The business sector supports the use of regulations to control development	50(12)	50(12)
<b>Economic growth has a positive effect on my community</b>	21(5)	<b>79(19)</b>
<b>Citizens express concern over development</b>	8(2)	<b>92(22)</b>
<b>Citizens support the use of regulations to control development</b>	12(3)	<b>88(21)</b>
<b>Urbanization causes the decline of neighborhood ties</b>	37(9)	<b>63(15)</b>
<b>Growth is a threat to my way of life</b>	42(10)	<b>58(14)</b>
<b>Rural appearance is increased with trees</b>	13(3)	<b>87(21)</b>
<b>Green space is important to my quality of life</b>	4(1)	<b>96(23)</b>
<b>Urbanization lowers the environmental quality of the land</b>	33(8)	<b>67(16)</b>
<b>Urbanization lowers the environmental quality of the water</b>	29(7)	<b>71(17)</b>
<b>Rural people have more knowledge about the environment than urban people</b>	42(10)	<b>58(14)</b>
<b>Harris county is a good place to live</b>	0(0)	<b>100(24)</b>
<b>Christianity is an important part of our community</b>	4(1)	<b>96(23)</b>
<b>I trust my planning commissioners to make decisions in my interest</b>	<b>50(12)</b>	<b>50(12)</b>
<b>Planning hearings should always have a prayer before every meeting</b>	17(4)	<b>83(20)</b>
<b>Its okay for the planning director to say the prayer</b>	13(3)	<b>87(21)</b>
<b>It is important to ask what Jesus would do in making political decisions</b>	29(7)	<b>71(17)</b>
<b>Developers don't respect my land rights</b>	37(9)	<b>63(15)</b>
Changes in our zoning codes weaken the officials' position to developers	67(16)	33(8)
<b>My interests are represented in planning hearings</b>	37(9)	<b>63(15)</b>
<b>It is very easy to participate in my planning meetings</b>	37(9)	<b>63(15)</b>
It is not very easy to obtain information about the planning hearings	83(20)	17(4)
The planning commissioners are very knowledgeable about how to develop	50(12)	50(12)
I don't understand the process of planning hearing	63(15)	37(9)

**Table 4. Harris County Planning Issues Raised in Public Hearings, 2001 to 2004**

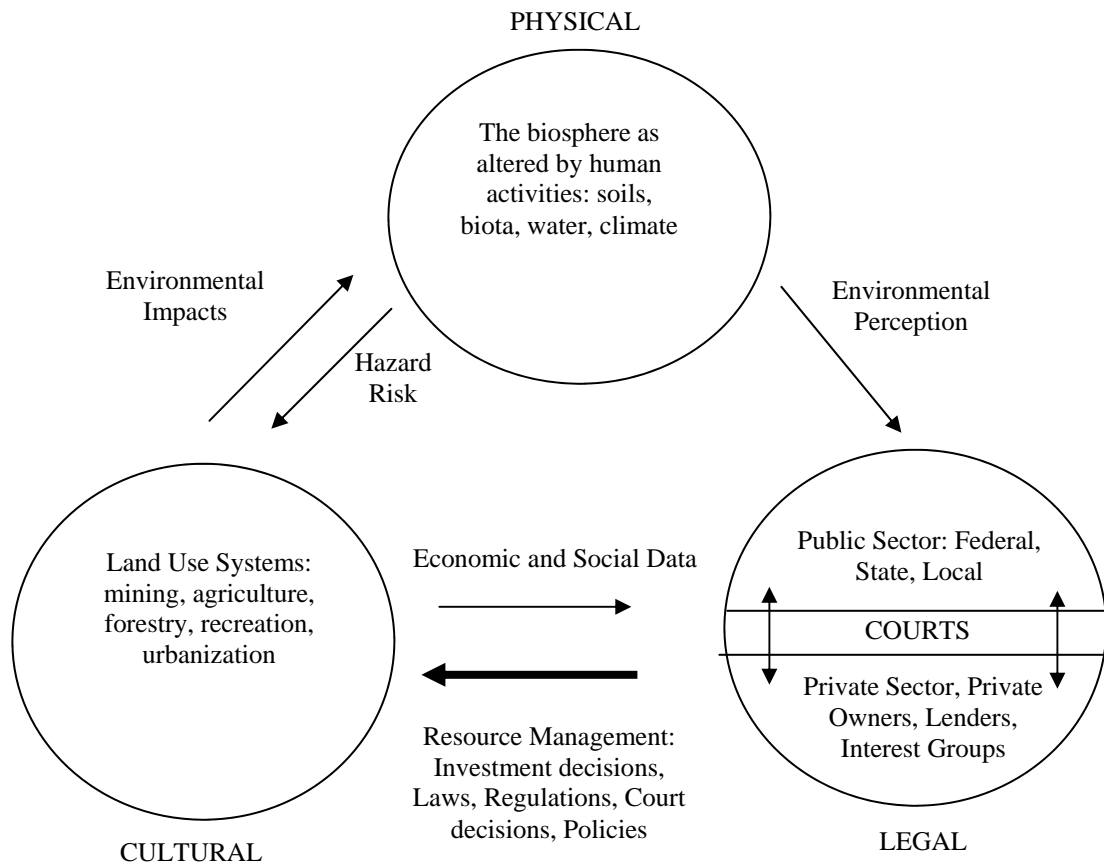
Key Issue	Properties of Issue	Frequency
Rural		
Appearance	desire to maintain the rural appearance of the place	7%
Land Use	the development is not consistent with current land use plans	7%
Roads	changing or constructing new road systems	7%
Soil		
Degradation	includes environmental concerns related to soil, like soil erosion	9%
Schools	concerns that the schools will bear to heavy a burden from new development	12%
Neighborhood	concerns that development will negatively impact the neighborhood	16%
Lot Size	concerns that the lot size will need to be changed	21%
Traffic	concerns that traffic will increase beyond the current carrying capacity	23%
Water	includes environmental concerns related to water, like effects on dams, runoff, etc.	26%
Degradation		
Sewer and		
Septic	includes concerns about septic tanks or sewage problems	26%



**Table 5. Table of Means for Attitudes with Ethnicity and Sex**

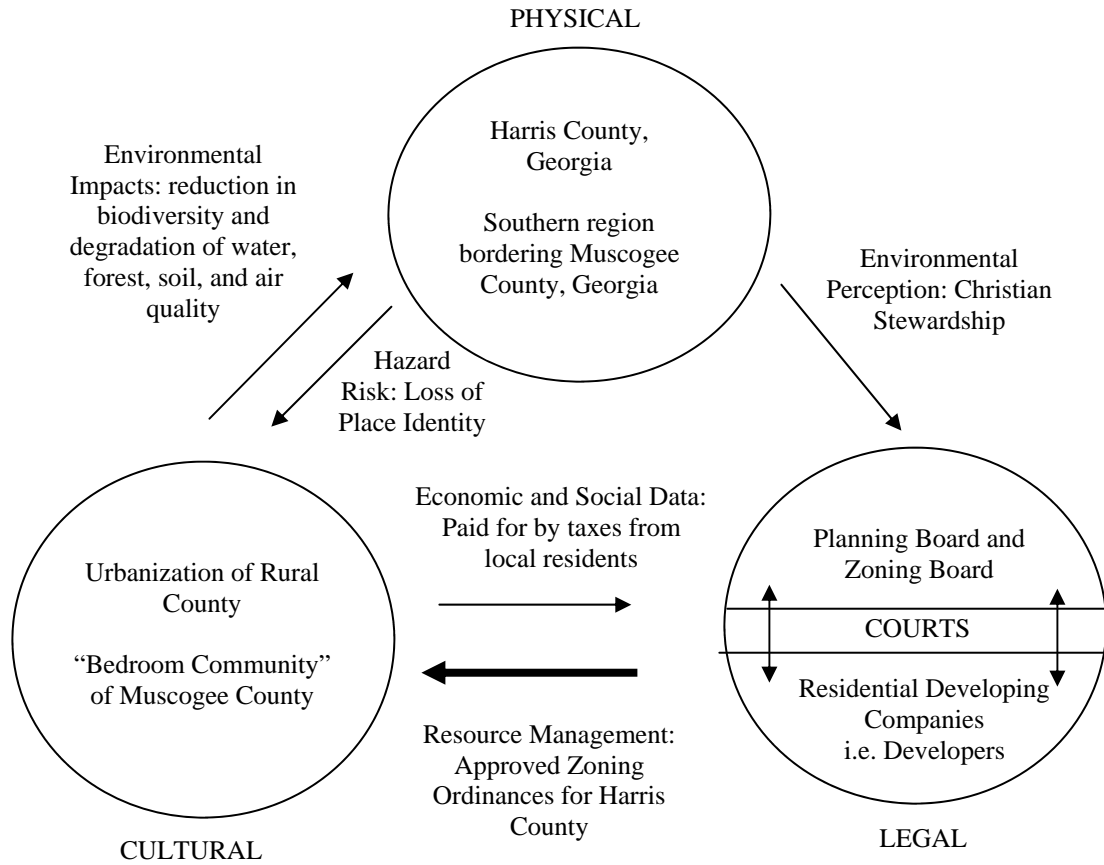
scale	Urban	Planning	Growth	Participation	Trust	Support
	Attitude	Attitude			Political	Zoning
	0-6	0-12	0-2	0-4	Leaders	0-3
Total Population	1.58	7.29	1.21	2.17	1.63	2.29
Men	1.08	7.46	1.08	2.38	1.69	2.31
Women	2.18	7.09	1.36	1.91	1.55	2.27
European American	0.94	7.06	1.00	2.19	1.44	2.44
Men	0.56	7.78	1.00	2.67	1.56	2.56
Women	1.43	6.14	1.00	1.57	1.29	2.29
African American	2.88	7.75	1.63	2.13	2.00	2.00
Men	2.25	6.75	1.25	1.75	2.00	1.75
Women	3.50	8.75	2.00	2.50	2.00	2.25

**Model 1. The Land Use and Society Model: dynamic interaction of the three sets of spatial data.**



Source: Platt 2004: 58.

**Model 2. Harris County, Georgia Land Use and Society Model, Explained by Local Residents.**



## Interview Script

1. What are three words you would use to describe your community?
2. How long have you lived on your land?
3. What are some changes you have seen in your community?
4. What are some of the changes you think will occur with increased growth?
5. Why do you think people are moving to Harris County?
6. Do you feel that Harris County is growing too fast?
7. Do you attend planning meetings regularly?
8. What would motivate you to attend meetings?
9. Where do you get information about planning hearings?
10. What is your opinion of the way requests are handled in the meetings?
11. Do you feel the commissioners are sensitive to your opinions?
12. What are your concerns for the environment during development?
13. Do you discuss community development with any of your neighbors or friends in the community?
14. If your neighbor wanted to sell his/her land to a developer and you have concerns, would you talk to him or let him sell without discussing the issue?
15. What are some effects of urbanization?
16. What do you think the changes will be for kids growing up in this community?
17. Is this a safe place to live?
18. Do you feel that you live in a Christian community?