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**CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY
DURING AMENITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT:
THE CASE OF GREAT BARRINGTON, MA**

A Thesis in
Geography
by
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ABSTRACT

Bucolic landscapes, quaint towns, and affordable land have made many rural areas prime locations for amenity-based development. In the case of Great Barrington, MA, such development has brought with it increased tourism as well as new full- and part-time residents. The subsequent growth has complicated ideas about *who* are “real” members of this community. In this paper, I investigate the ways in which the concept of community interacts with amenity-based development using Great Barrington as a case study. Working in collaboration with The Alliance for a Healthier Great Barrington, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a wide ranging sample of full- and part-time residents. Combining this information with town planning documents and local newspaper and magazine articles, I analyze the many ways in which community is defined and invoked during discussions about growth development in the town. I then look at how conceptions of community from my research relate to community and justice in liberal, communitarian and feminist theories. Situating local discourses within these theoretical frameworks allows for a greater understanding of the conflicts that arise during town planning. Whether it is managing the landscape through the Scenic Mountains Act or mixed-use zoning of downtown sites, there is a constant struggle in Great Barrington to prioritize needs based on conceptions of the community and ideas of justice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	vi
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	15
Community	16
Definitions.....	16
Critiques.....	17
Philosophical Perspectives.....	20
Liberal/Communitarian Debate.....	21
Varieties of Communitarianism.....	23
Feminist Critiques.....	25
Amenity-Based Development.....	28
Community Members.....	29
Community Identities.....	32
Spatial Systems of Inclusion and Exclusion.....	35
Place Creation.....	36
Aesthetics.....	37
Economics.....	38
Conclusion.....	40
Chapter 3. COMMUNITY IDENTITY.....	41
Historical Identities.....	44
The ‘Real’ Great Barrington.....	44
Counter-narratives.....	48
Contemporary Identities.....	50
‘Sophistication at a country pace’.....	50
‘It’s not Great Barrington anymore’.....	54
Counter-narratives.....	56
Future.....	58
Conclusion.....	59

Chapter 4: PEOPLE.....	62
Stereotypes.....	64
Residency: Layers of Sediment.....	67
Natives.....	67
Transplants.....	68
Second Home Owners.....	69
Occupation/Class.....	70
Religion.....	73
Age.....	75
Race and Ethnicity.....	77
Political Orientation.....	79
Conclusion.....	79
Chapter 5: LANDSCAPE.....	82
Open Spaces in Great Barrington.....	84
Conclusion.....	96
Chapter 6: MAIN STREET.....	97
Main Street as Amenity.....	99
The loss of the ‘real’ Main Street.....	102
Controlling Social Relations Through Main Street.....	107
Current Development Debates.....	112
Chapter 7: CONCLUSION.....	114
Community in the discourses of social philosophies.....	117
Future Direction.....	125
Works Cited.....	128

List of Figures*

Figure 1: View from Monument Mountain..... 95
Figure 2: Second view from Monument Mountain..... 95
Figure 3: Rolling farmlands..... 97
Figure 4: Railroad Street..... 110
Figure 5: Main Street sidewalk..... 110
Figure 6: Main Street pedestrian cross-walk..... 110
Figure 7: Gatsby’s on Railroad Street..... 115
Figure 8: Second view of Gatsby’s on Railroad Street..... 115
Figure 9: Carr Hardware on Main Street..... 116

*all figures are photos taken by the author

Chapter 1: Introduction

I first came to Great Barrington in the winter of 1993. Like so many visitors before and after me, I was taken in by the beauty of the Berkshire Hills in western Massachusetts. I remember when we first got off the highway and began winding our way through the forest covered hills on roads that occasionally brought us through small villages that were little more than populated cross-roads. Having grown up in a Chicago suburb where cement and people outnumbered open space and trees, I was particularly attracted to this new landscape. I, like many visitors to the Berkshires, reveled in the mix of small-towns, pastoral landscapes and wilderness that represented a way of life very different from what I had known. I originally came to the area for my undergraduate studies but have continued to live and work in the area on and off ever since. It is a beautiful place to live, and I have grown to appreciate the social and physical landscapes in a variety of ways.

During my time in Great Barrington, I have seen many changes to the town and the people in it. New homes, restaurants and art galleries proliferated as the tourists and weekenders from New York City came more frequently to enjoy the country living that provided an escape from their urban lifestyles. Traffic jams that had previously only been a nuisance on summer weekends spread into summer weekdays and then into the fall for the autumn colors, the winter for skiing, and eventually the spring as well. People would complain about the influx of outsiders while simultaneously acknowledging their contributions to the health and viability of the town.

When I arrived in Great Barrington, it was in the midst of changing over its economic base. It had previously relied upon agriculture and manufacturing, such as

paper mills, to support the local economy. As paper mills closed and agriculture became less lucrative, Great Barrington began to look for alternative sources of income.

Following the lead of other towns in the area, influential people in Great Barrington began to repackage the town as a tourist destination in the late 1970's. They focused on developing and selling the amenities that the town had to offer: beautiful landscapes, slower paced country lifestyles, and access to cultural events such as music at Tanglewood in Lenox, dance at Jacob's Pillow in Becket, and a multitude of theater companies that came to the Berkshires for their summer season. This amenity-based development was primarily, although not exclusively, targeted at New Yorkers. Great Barrington was constructing itself as an escape from the city; a country retreat where one could enjoy the natural amenities of the Berkshire Hills while still having access to the cultural amenities of an active arts community.

Great Barrington, however, had long been the service-center of the Southern Berkshires. It was not the elite home of the wealthy that Lenox and Stockbridge, nearby Berkshire communities, were known for being. In its push for amenity-based development, Great Barrington has had to negotiate the pulls of constructing a high-end resort town while maintaining the productive, working-class community identity that is important to many people in the town. In many ways, it is this mix that makes the town attractive to people coming to visit. It is a mix, however, that is difficult to maintain.

This struggle, between creating a version of the town that caters to the needs and wants of 'outsiders' and maintaining the aspects of the community identity that are salient to the 'locals,' is characteristic of amenity-based development (Johnson, Snepenger et al. 1994; Lankford 1994; Smith and Krannich 1998; Petrzela and Krannich

2006). Great Barrington's success in transitioning to an amenity-based economy has helped accentuate the difficulties this type of development is known for. It is common to hear conversations in town about the ways in which new home construction is destroying the landscape, rising property values are pushing locals out and the changing nature of the stores and services are catering to a new clientele. As in other locales undergoing amenity-based development, lines are drawn between original residents and newcomers (Stedman 2006; Gallent 2007). Whether a person is a full-time resident, second home owner or tourist as well as the length of time they have lived in or been visiting the area become important distinctions in the ways people are perceived to be connected to the town. These differences are used to construct various conceptions of community creating systems and inclusion and exclusion that are replicated and reinforced in the landscape. The concept of community in Great Barrington, however, is often invoked without a concise definition of its meaning. At times it is used to differentiate between the 'real' Great Barrington community and the outsiders. At other points, it's used as a rallying cry to bring people together across lines of difference. An analysis of the flexibility of the idea of community provides the opportunity to study the variety of purposes and discourses each incarnation is meant to serve. My experience living in Great Barrington has led to my interest in the ways in which the processes of amenity-based development could be understood through the multiple conceptions of community in this particular place. In other words, how do conceptions of community and place inform our understanding of amenity-based development? What are the multiple conceptions of community created or invoked during amenity-based development, and how do these conceptions interact? What are the symbols of the various community identities, and

how are they associated with place? How are places constructed and controlled during amenity-based development, and what types of transgressions typically complicate the meanings of these places?

In this thesis I will explore the mutually constitutive processes of community and place creation during amenity-based development. Given the high rates of change to both the social and physical landscapes during this type of development as well as the efforts to control such changes, amenity-based development provides an excellent opportunity to understand how these processes – community and place – are negotiated and constructed in complimentary ways. I will begin by examining how people define community in this type of dynamic environment. What are the characteristics of the community's identity that are most important for them? What are the categories they use to distinguish 'insiders' from 'outsiders' of the community? I will argue that these questions are intimately connected to issues of place creation and land-use patterns. If one understands places to be social relations – networks of interrelations, identities, and power structures that are dynamic and flexible (Massey 1994; Cresswell 2004), then the importance of understanding how places are created and the ways in which they shape and are shaped by social relations becomes apparent. How places are used, who has access to them and control over them, and the specific meanings and community identities they support all contribute to the construction of social relations and, through extension, community.

In Chapter Two, I situate my research in the diverse literatures on community and amenity-based development. I begin my discussion of community by establishing that is not a static entity, but, rather, a process that is always already being negotiated in evolving socio-political situations. It is, by its very nature, an exclusionary process

through which lines are drawn between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’ Investigating how and why certain lines are drawn in the construction of community allows for a better understanding of what exactly is being invoked when people talk about community. I move from these theorizations of community to the ways in which it is understood and used in political theory. I make the point that community is not an innocent entity exploited by various political agendas. It is conceived of, and thereby created, by political philosophies to address specific world views. Critical investigation into conceptions of community allows for a better understanding of the values and assumptions behind a particular conception – be it lay or academic.

Chapter Two continues with an exploration of research on amenity-based development. I begin with an analysis of type and length of residency in connection to place attachment because it is a pivotal means of categorizing people both in the literature and in Great Barrington. There has long been an assumption that locals have a more ‘authentic’ sense of place and place attachment, but recent research shows how this might not be the case. The construction of community identities during amenity-based development relies heavily on the symbols of the past as well as the present. The ways in which multiple community identities interact during amenity-based development, often through conflict, is also explored. Finally, I look at how issues of place creation, aesthetics, and economy relate to amenity-based development.

In Chapters Three and Four, I explore the ways in which community is defined and described in Great Barrington. Chapter Three enters into this discussion through the broad strokes of community identity. What are the symbols used to create a feeling of ‘us’ that defines the community. What are the symbols associated with the ‘outsiders’?

Based upon my research, I examine multiple community identities in historic and contemporary Great Barrington. I identify those that have positions of power within the discourses of their time as well as those that act as counter-narratives to challenge the normative values of the dominate community identities.

Chapter Four looks at how the community identities from the previous chapter are connected with individuals. How are people classified to rationalize their positions as insiders or outsiders to the lines that inscribe community? How do the characteristics of individuals relate to symbols of community? Within this chapter I identify key stereotypes that are salient within contemporary discourses in Great Barrington and explore the ways in which these stereotypes are used to reinforce conceptions of community. I show how these stereotypes do not represent the experiences of people in Great Barrington by comparing them with the people they are meant to describe. This deconstruction of the stereotypes helps reinforce the contrived nature of the communities that rely upon stereotypical characteristics to define ‘insiders’ from ‘outsiders.’

The next two chapters take the previous analysis of community and show how it relates to the creation of place in Great Barrington. Although there are a variety of types of places that could be analyzed, I have focused on the two that were the most prevalent in my interviews: open spaces and the downtown area. Both of these have significant symbolic value for a variety of community identities, and I examine how they have been constructed by the conceptions of community as well as the ways in which they are used to construct, maintain and challenge those very same conceptions of community.

I begin with an analysis of landscape and open spaces in Chapter Five. As one of the key amenities in the region, landscape is a vital component of the current

development plan. The town has created an open spaces plan and significant amounts of land are currently owned by governmental and private preservation organizations.

Efforts to preserve the mix of wilderness and pastoral open spaces have been a priority for both locals and newcomers. For some it is a question of maintaining historic land-use patterns, for others it is a question of environmental health, but questions of aesthetics underlie all of these arguments. In an area valued for its natural beauty, defining and protecting that beauty is a main concern. In this chapter, I explore the productive and consumptive uses of open space in Great Barrington that simultaneously construct and are constructed by the community.

Chapter Six moves from the open landscape to Great Barrington's downtown. Main Street is infused with symbolic meaning for all community identities explored in Chapter Three. For some it represents an exciting mixture of people and activities that is the benefit of amenity-based development. For others it is the icon of a new system of exclusion that is the result of the same development strategy. As working-class stores move to the edges of town, Main Street has become more upscale and recreationally based. Attempts to control this process, either through ownership and property rights or by the use of places, belie multiple conceptions of community and the ways in which place creation is instrumental in the creation of those communities.

The theme of individual rights versus the needs of the community in regards to land-use is repeated in both Chapters Five and Six. These discourses rely upon social and political theories that conceptualize community in various ways. In the conclusion, Chapter Seven, I explore the ways in which these theories and their associated conceptions of community work to either hide or expose the exclusionary processes of

community. I begin with liberal and communitarian theories that were present in the discourses of Great Barrington. I then turn to feminist theory for critiques of liberal and communitarian theories as well as alternative conceptions of community and place. Alternatives that acknowledge the exclusionary nature of these processes while providing opportunities for more inclusive social relations.

The trend towards amenity-based development is increasing in the United States as small-town economies that were previously dependent on agriculture and manufacturing must find new economic bases. Areas that offer beautiful landscapes and are accessible to urban centers are finding themselves prime targets for a type of amenity-based development that constructs them as rural escapes from hectic urban lifestyles. While research has been done on the economic impacts of this type of development (Wagner 1997; Marcouiller, Kim et al. 2004) as well as the social stratification that is often associated with it (Jordan 1980; Spain 1993; Stedman 2006), it is the goal of this study to provide insight not only into how the process that create community and place are affected by such a shift, but also how these two sets of processes are interconnected. By examining the ways individuals relate to community identities and the means by which these relations play out in different places, it will be possible to understand the effects of amenity-based development on the social relations of a town such as Great Barrington, including the systems of inclusion and exclusion created through this process. Connecting these insights to larger philosophical debates about the nature of self, community and justice will not only explain some of the rationale behind established social relations, it will also provide the opportunity to explore feminist theories about and alternatives to these social relations. The rapidly changing nature of social relations

during amenity-based development provides a prime opportunity for the application of feminist theory in the practice of social organizing as shall be explored in the conclusion of this thesis.

Methodology

Throughout the course of this project, I have followed a feminist methodology that focused on a collaborative and participatory approach to research. Although feminist methods vary greatly between disciplines and approaches, DeVault (1996) has identified common characteristics that unify them as a methodology such as focusing on the perspectives of women, minimizing harm and control in the research process, and conducting research that leads to social change beneficial to women. Building upon these fundamentals, I have constructed my methodology to address the following concerns in the research process:

- the social relations and power structures within the research process
- the political nature of research, and, in particular, its implications for those involved in the process
- tensions between dualisms often found in research such as object/subject, theory/praxis, and concrete/abstract

I do not contend to have avoided any of the above concerns, but, rather, I see them as tensions in the research process that must be acknowledged and negotiated in a critical manner in order to create an ethical and productive methodology.

To address the potential for exploitation during research, I believe that a collaborative process with open communication between participants and researchers is fundamental. Ideally, a participatory methodology that blurred the lines between

researcher as subject and participant as object would provide the means to deconstruct the positivist dualism of subject/object as well as restructure the power relations in a more equitable manner during the research process. Although there is no single definition of participatory methodology, Chambers (2005) offers us a point of entry with the following description:

‘a growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes and behaviors to enable and empower people to share, analyze and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect’ (p. 2).

As participatory methods have become more common, their limitations have come under greater scrutiny. This has been particularly strong in relation to their use in development (see Cooke 2001). The concepts of ‘empowerment,’ ‘local knowledge,’ and ‘community’ are often invoked without clear definition or problematization (Kesby 1999). Due to their amorphous nature, these concepts are often manipulated to serve a wide range of goals (Cooke 2001; Joseph 2002). Often associated with resisting hegemonic power, the employment of participatory methods by the World Bank is a classic example of this approach being used for the opposite, the subjugation of the participants (Henkel and Stirrat 2001).

Participatory methods do not create utopian spaces free of all power structures. This, however, does not mean that they should be abandoned. As Kesby (2005) points out, “...even emancipatory discourses are systems of power with the capacity to dominate, but it is important to recognize that some things are more dangerous than others” (p.2043). Determining one system less dangerous than another is obviously a subjective process, but it is a necessary pragmatic step towards social justice. I agree

with Kesby's (2005) claim that all power cannot be avoided and that approaches such as participation can be used "to outmaneuver more domineering forms of power" (p. 2038). Participatory methods, therefore, must not be used blindly but with a critical eye towards the ways in which it is enabling various power structures while challenging others. For these reasons, I come to participatory methods not with an idealist's view but with a critical, if optimistic, approach.

In addition to this focus on participatory research, I incorporate feminist methodologies that stress the importance of combining theory and praxis. I believe that these two aspects of research are not opposites but interconnected aspects of a whole that can be used to inform the research process in multiple ways. In order to deconstruction the abstract/concrete dualism, the establishment of a research question, the process of obtaining information, and the analysis of that information should all be informed by both theory and praxis. My goal is to conduct research that will ask theoretical questions based on lived-experience that will, then, through the research process, facilitate not only a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, but also provide ways of facilitating increased inclusion and social justice. It is for this reason that I employ a participatory feminist methodology.

Methods

My research questions and methods were designed through an ongoing dialogue with various community organizations in Great Barrington. Although it was not my initial contact, I eventually came to work closely with the Alliance for a Healthier Great Barrington due to the similarity of our research interests and approaches. They had already begun a research agenda focusing on community health and were in a data

gathering stage. Due to this, we decided that my time would be best used by conducting in-depth interviews with community members that would compliment the focus groups and open forums being organized by the Alliance. Through this process I was able to connect with a variety of other organizations as well as individuals to learn about their projects and concerns.

My research is a combination of observer-participation and semi-structured interviews. The questions for my interviews changed during the course of my research. The initial interviews focused specifically on the use of spaces in Great Barrington, but after establishing my connection with the Alliance, I modified my questions to compliment their research. The following are a sample of the questions I used for 40 of the 43 interviews I conducted:

- How would you describe Great Barrington to someone who had never been here?
- What do you consider to be the strengths of the town?
- What are its weaknesses?
- Looking into the future, what would be the worst case scenario for Great Barrington?
- The best case?

The general nature of these questions allowed my respondents to express their views of the town, including its social and physical landscapes, without a significant imposition of content on my part as the interviewer. To ensure that I was representing the views of my respondents accurately and to provide them more investment in the research process, I provided each respondent with a list of the quotes I have used in this thesis and a general idea of the context in which these quotes were used. I asked for their confirmation that I represented their ideas correctly and any other comments they might

have. Many people expressed appreciation for the interview process because it gave them the opportunity to think about their town in new ways. As part of my collaboration with the Alliance, I would offer people the opportunity to continue this process through involvement in a variety of Alliance activities.

My selection of respondents was based upon a snowball sampling technique. I began with a list of recommendations from one of the community organizers I was working with and then I asked each respondent for recommendations of other people to speak with. I did control my sample to a degree by ensuring that I had a minimal number of locals, transplants (newcomers), and second home owners as well as representatives of the Latino and African-American communities. Additionally, I sought out a wide range of ages and political involvement.

My interview data was coded using an axial method and then combined with my personal observations as well as town documents and local advertisement materials. In regards to town documents, I relied heavily on two town plans: one from 1973 and the other from 1997. I do not argue that these town plans represent an actual plan of development for Great Barrington. Instead, I find their usefulness in their articulation of values and interpretations of both the social and physical landscapes.

It was my goal to construct a research process where theoretical and empirical insights are mutually-informative. For this reason, I have been in communication with the director of the Alliance for a Healthier Great Barrington throughout the course of both the data gathering and the writing phases of this thesis. We discussed the ways in which various theoretical frameworks provided new perspectives and insights into the conditions in Great Barrington. The analysis that follows is a product of these

conversations as well as a dialogue with contemporary research into community, place and amenity-based development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to use Great Barrington as a case study of the interactions between the concept of community and amenity-based development, I have chosen to situate my research in theories from geography, sociology, social psychology and philosophy. I have focused my review of this varied literature at the intersection of two major themes: community and amenity-based development.

I start this analysis with various definitions of community and follow this with critiques of the idealization of community. This literature leads into a discussion of community in relation to larger processes such as globalization. To understand how this relationship operates, I move into the philosophical debates between liberals and communitarians about self, identity, community, power and justice. Finally, I conclude my discussion about community with a feminist critique of the liberal-communitarian debate.

At this point the analysis will be followed by research informed by the above theoretical framework that sheds light onto the socio-spatial processes of amenity-based development. I enter this discussion with a look at 'who' is considered part of a community that is transitioning to an economy based on the production and commodification of landscape. Lastly, I explore the community identities that have been found to be active in towns experiencing amenity-based development. As part of this analysis, I demonstrate how social relations are mutually constitutive with spatial relations. This leads to a brief discussion of the ways in which spatial relations during amenity-based development reinforce systems of inclusion and exclusion.

Community

‘Community’ is a powerful label that is often used to define a group, and, in so doing, bring people together. Invariably it is used in a positive sense (Joseph 2002). Popular media invokes the notion of community: from community-based tourism projects in Nigeria to the homosexual community being libeled on conservative radio to the creation of the largest Wi-Fi community in the UK. It is not realistic, however, to assume a common working knowledge of the idea of community. Many feminists, geographers and sociologists have challenged the popular and idealist understanding of community and have sought to show how it interacts with concepts of power and justice. In this section I will examine the ways in which community has been defined as well as how it has been critiqued.

Definitions

I will begin with sociology and a common historical definition of community. In an attempt to operationalize the concept of community (primarily for research purposes), community was defined as a stable social structure consisting of dense networks of multiplex relations, and a relatively high boundary to the outside that allowed it to be studied as a closed system (Bell and Newby 1971 in Frazer 1999). Facing empirical and theoretical challenges, this definition was revised within community studies in sociology to try to address more of the complexities of community. It has been proposed that communities entail some combination of the following:

- a bounded geographical area
- a dense network of non-contractual relations including those of kinship, friendship and cultural membership
- a network, dense or otherwise, of multiplex relations

- a particular quality of identification on the part of members with place, or culture, or way of life, or tradition – usually involving emotional attachment, loyalty, solidarity or unity, and/or a sense that the community makes the person what they are
- shared symbols, meanings, values, language, norms; shared interests such as occupational interests (as in a ‘fishing community’) or political and cultural interests (as in ‘the gay community’). (Bell and Newby 1971 in(Frazer 1999)).

There is much debate among theorists about how these and additional factors interact in defining a community (see Stacey 1969; Day and Murdoch 1993). Distinctions have been made to identify “communities of place,” “communities of interest,” and “communities of identity” following from territory-based and interactional theories of community, but these separations appear artificial during empirical study (Pigg 1992; Dalby and Mackenzie 1997; Brown 2001). It is evident that the ambiguity of ‘community’ makes it a very difficult unit of social analysis (Kesby 1999; Joseph 2002; McCarthy 2006).

Communities are often placed in a nested hierarchy between the individual and society and are often viewed as an interface between environment and society (Wilkinson 1991). This position allows communities to provide context for experiencing and negotiating problems and crises (Flint 2004). It is the exploration of this position rather than the demarcation of boundaries that will lead my conceptualization of community throughout this research. I will approach communities as fluid and as always already under construction.

Critiques

Critics of this traditional notion of community have shown that community is often used to invoke a coherent entity that is homogenous and egalitarian (Li 1996; Agarwal and Gibson 1999) that attempts to “enact and produce identity, unity, communion, and purity” through social practices including but not limited to genocidal violence (Joseph 2002). This utopian image is, in fact, covering inequalities and struggles that run through all scales of community (McCarthy 2006). Furthermore, the idealization of consensus as a decision-making technique in communities, which has a diverse support base ranging from Habermas to Taylor to community activists, reinforces this model of homogeneity for a successful community (Samantrai 2002).

Frazer (1999) identified the following common normative principles associated with the idea of community: communities should have authority, the individual should participate in the community where they are rooted and that shaped them, and that communities can produce and distribute goods that neither the commodity market more the government can. In discussions of amenity-based development, all three of these factors are invoked at various times, but the theme of participation becomes a major issue when new full- and part-time residents do not fulfill traditional responsibilities and obligations associated with membership in the community.

Communities are almost always constructed by the identification of insiders/outside with outsiders (sometimes conceived as enemies) being actively marginalized and repressed (Frazer 1999; Joseph 2002). For this reason, there is much power in the ability to define who and what a community is. It is through this process that certain struggles come to the fore while others are suppressed. We shall see examples of how this plays out later in the discussion of amenity-based development.

Moving to the idea of identity and the construction of community identities, it has been found that single-identity based communities deny and repress the differences between members (Joseph 2002). This is clearly true among communities of identity but can also be found in any community that is creating an insider/outsider dynamic, something I've argued is almost inevitable in the construction of community.

Why is it that even with the acknowledgment of the 'ontological impossibility of identity' inherent in community, people are still motivated to act through the construction of community (Joseph 2002)? Why do people often lament the loss of community and wonder about what can be done to get it back (a common theme in amenity-based development)? Why is it that we are so focused on this idea of community which Frazer (1999) refers to as "a vague concept and an elusive ideal"?

Some would say that it is the very vagueness of the idea of community that is its strength. As Frazer (1999) points out, this vagueness "allows for a coalition to stay together since it can mean different things to different people." This connects with the findings that community is a useful organizing tool if employed strategically (Joseph 2002). At the same time, Frazer argues that the word community should be replaced with more specific terminology to reflect what is being described (eg. association, network, society, group, etc.).

But we are still left facing the questions about community's powerful draw as a concept. To answer these questions, Joseph (2002) moves from the study of the internal workings of communities to understanding how the concept of community works is both produced and consumed within other discourses. She argues that fundamental practices of modernity (eg. liberalism, the nation-state, identity political emancipatory movements,

capitalism) all “depend upon and generate community.” In this sense, community is part of other powerful contemporary discourses, yet it is often positioned in opposition to them. The idea of community is romanticized, representing all that has been lost in our modern individualistic era. Often used as a site of resistance against global forces, the local depends upon a spatial imaginary where it is effectively closed and self-constitutive (Massey 2005). In other words, the ways in which the local constructs the global is not commonly acknowledged. Instead, as Duncan and Duncan (2003) so succinctly point out, “globalization leads to small town nostalgia.” This is reinforced in Joseph’s observation that community is distinguished from society spatially – it exists in the local face-to-face relations that are seen as absent in abstract global capitalism. From this perspective, according to McCarthy’s (2006) reading of Joseph, “the perennial romantic appeal of ‘community’ as the locus of pre-modern sensibilities and potential for resistance is entirely understandable.”

Philosophical Perspectives

To understand why it is that the ‘local community’ is so often juxtaposed with the power of hegemonic global discourses and practices, it is useful to investigate how community is conceptualized in relation to issues such as identity, power, and justice. To accomplish this, I have chosen to focus on the debate between liberal and communitarian theorists and the feminist critiques of both positions. This debate is particularly useful to the argument I am constructing due to the strength and prevalence of liberal theory in today’s world and the fact that the communitarian critique of liberalism is based on concepts of the community. In later chapters, I shall show how these various positions are manifested in local debates about community in Great Barrington.

Liberal/Communitarian Debates

Since the 1980's, a significant number of books and articles have been devoted to the debate between liberal and communitarian social philosophies (eg. Kymlicka 1988; Sandel 1998; Suhl 1998). Liberalism and communitarianism are often put at odds along very simplistic lines. Liberals (following Kant) believe that priority should be placed on ensuring individual rights rather than communal 'goods.' This is not to say that liberal philosophies do not acknowledge the importance of communal 'goods,' but, rather, that they believe that equal rights are the means through which to achieve justice and realize communal 'goods.' Identity, in this argument, comes from individual choices rather than social relations. Communities are seen as nothing more than an aggregate of individuals. Because everything is based on an ideal of a rational individual, liberals are critiqued for metaphysical abstraction and a universalism which does not take into consideration the importance of context and existing social relations (Sandel 1998).

Communitarians, on the other hand, view society and community as the basis for the self. Whereas the liberal would ask the question "Who should I be?" the communitarian asks "Who am I?" One's identity is rooted in membership in a community; it is through membership in social groups that the individuals identify themselves and come to understand their place in society (MacIntyre 1981). Additionally, the good of the community is valued over the rights of individuals. Communitarians are critiqued for the assumption that there can be a monolithic and authoritatively determined 'good' characterizing each society, and, furthermore, that this good can unjustly supercede the rights of individuals (Dworkin 1978).

According to Kymlicka (1988), the communitarian critique of the liberal position, which assumes an abstract individualism and moral skepticism, misrepresents the liberal theory of modern liberals from J.S. Mills to Rawls and Dworkin. Kymlicka argues that liberalism's strength is its incorporation of moral independence that allows for revision and improvement of the individual's understanding of the good life and associated goals. Instead of assuming some commonly accepted 'good', liberalism allows the individual, and therefore society, to constantly strive for a better moral life (Kymlicka 1988). The focus remains, however, on individual free choice.

In his analysis of both Rawls' and Kymlicka's responses to the communitarian critique, Suhl (1998) finds that:

...the relevant distinction between communitarians and liberals is not that liberals deny all shared social relations while communitarians affirm them, but that for liberals these relations are only contingently related to identity, while communitarians see them as essentially related.

The debate is more a matter of degree than of opposition. For the purposes of my argument, it is the different weights accorded to the concept of community that most interests me. For liberals, community is peripheral to the individual. There is not much attention given to the goals of community within liberal theory, and, as Suhl (1998) points out, the subsequent flawed understanding of what it takes to create community has led to policies that damage communal ties.

Communitarians clearly prioritize the concept of community and its role in creating the good life, but they also leave room for individual rights and freedoms within communities. Individuals, however, are not separate from their community. Limits on

individuals' choices are enacted by the situation and context that constructs individuals in the first place. According to Sandel (1998), this does not mean that individuals' choices are determined by their situation, rather, the subject is framed by its situation and "empowered to participate in the constitution of its identity." This comes close to Kymlicka's statement that "individual autonomy cannot exist outside a social environment that provides meaningful choices and that supports the development of the capacity to choose amongst them" (Kymlicka 1990) p. 216. Again, we have a matter of emphasis rather than distinct conceptualizations of the individual and community.

Varieties of Communitarianism

Unlike liberalism, communitarianism has not been developed through clear philosophical lineages. In fact, it is often acknowledged that most key communitarians, including Alasdair MacIntyre, Michal Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer, only hesitantly accept the label (Suhl 1998; Frazer 1999). They are each critical of rights-oriented liberalism in their own manner, but their shared focus on community has led them to be used to construct a 'communitarian' position.

Without doing a thorough analysis of variations in the communitarian argument, there are a few differences I'd like to draw attention to. I begin with MacIntyre because he has become the image of extreme communitarianism. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre makes the claim that the ills of our modern society are based on our loss of clear community-based identities for individuals. In other words, people no longer know what their 'place' is in society and therefore no longer know who they are as individuals. As quoted in Weiss (1998), MacIntyre sees our moral decline in our "'complacency' with 'moral pluralism,' when what we really have is 'an unharmonious mélange of ill-assorted

fragments' of view-points." There is no longer a single moral agreement in our society, something that MacIntyre laments as he idealizes the Aristotelian polis. As we shall see, this position leads to politics that tend towards conservatism.

Sandel takes issue with some of MacIntyre's arguments and assumptions made about all communitarian theories. In his preface to the second edition of *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Sandel (1998) makes clear that he does not agree with the conception of communitarianism that says the community, and therefore the majority, should always prevail and that there is no basis for determining human rights because it varies from place to place. For Sandel, the fundamental issue at stake in the liberal-communitarian debates is whether the right is prior to the good. In his view, the good comes first and justice is relative to, not independent of, it. Unlike liberalism, Sandel does not believe justice can be content-neutral, however, he stands apart from communitarians that say community goods are established and should not be challenged by some other conception of 'goods'. For this reason, Sandel challenges MacIntyre's idea that an ideal community should have clearly established roles for its members.

Charles Taylor's (1989) major critique of liberalism is with its abstraction of the individual and individual identity. His concern is that without the social context, without a grounding in one's relations with others, life choices and life's meaning tend towards nihilism. All choices are apparently equal, and, therefore, apparently meaningless. In his opinion, shared meanings are the basis of community and therefore constitutive of social identities and our relations with others (Frazer 1999).

It is in Michael Walzer's work that we see a grounding of idealized communities in a locality. He argues for a strengthening of local government to create a "republic of

republics” (Walzer 1990) that builds off of the republican tradition of the needs and possibilities of small homogeneous communities where civil society is relatively undifferentiated (Frazer 1999). The assumption of bounded, coherent communities is implicit in this definition.

So far I’ve focused on what Frazer (1999) refers to as the philosophical communitarianisms, but it is important to note that there are also vernacular and political communitarianisms. Following Frazer’s (1999) analysis, vernacular communitarianism is the use by activists and political actors of a concept of community that is key to their political efforts. Examples include the current discourse of ‘care in the community’, ‘community policing’, and ‘community activism.’ Political communitarianism, although at times connected to the arguments of the philosophical communitarians, varies greatly from conservative to progressive politics. As we shall see later, it is this very morphability of communitarianism that some feminists find fault with.

Feminist Critiques

Initial critiques of liberalist ideas of the individual, identity, community and justice by feminists and communitarians resonate closely. They both take issue with the atomistic conception of the individual that is ahistorical and acts in a rational way independent of social contexts. Both groups respond to this by emphasizing context, care and community (Weiss 1998). From that point forward, however, feminism and communitarianism start to diverge. I will focus this next section on the feminist critiques of communitarianism and then move into feminist conceptions and debates about community.¹

¹ The critiques of liberalism and communitarianism discussed in this chapter are not all unique to feminism. Many political theories, ranging from anarchism to liberalism itself, have questioned liberalism in similar

As Frazer (1999) so succinctly puts it, the major feminist critique of communitarianism is that it “overlooks precisely the *politics* of ‘community’.” As previously noted, communitarianism acknowledges that the liberal individual with rights is not sufficient and proposes that social context is crucial to understandings of identity and justice. But the conception of social context employed by communitarians, based on nested hierarchies such as family, neighborhood, community, nation (MacIntyre 1981; Sandel 1998), does not account for practices of racism, sexism or other forms of oppression. As such, communitarians do not address major feminist concerns and have thereby been criticized for supporting inegalitarian ideas within their so-called equalitarian theories (Weiss 1998). Furthermore, there is an assumption within the communitarian discourses that community is connected to the local and is place specific. Current research in the geographies of care by feminist geographers is challenging this assumption and arguing that we have a responsibility not only for those in our immediate vicinity but also those we are connected to through the structural processes in which we live our daily lives (eg. Massey 2005; Lawson 2007). These conceptions of community open up questions of international processes and responsibilities that are ignored if the focus stays on the local place-based definitions of community.

The communitarian critique of liberalism focuses on the isolation of the individual, and their response is a search for connection. Community offers just such an answer to fragmentation, and tradition and mores are often championed (see especially MacIntyre 1981) because they offer “place, security, coherence and stability” (Weiss 1998). The Aristotelian model of self and community (which McIntyre pulls on

ways. I have chosen to focus on feminist perspectives as a means of constructing the argument for alternatives based upon feminist discourses.

frequently) provides stability – you know your place, roles and obligations in society. Although some communitarians deny a nostalgia for old rigid forms of community, the idea of locality and bounded communities keeps recurring in communitarian politics (Frazer 1999).

One's connection to neighborhood, alongside family and membership in other institutions, is a key source of meaning and identity for individuals following the communitarian theory of locality (Frazer 1999). There is no questioning, however, of the power relations within those very structures that are meant to provide meaning to one's life. As discussed previously, Communitarianism values goods before rights, but, when combined with a lack of critical awareness of social relations, this can lead to nothing more than the maintenance of the status quo and perpetuation of oppression. How is the power to define the 'good' for a community distributed? Who's voices are heard? The importance of recognizing the heterogeneity of communities and the uneven power dynamics that constitute them seems to be neglected in communitarian theory (Weiss 1998).

Feminists question the costs of the very boundaries and roles that provide stability to the communitarian framework. And although both groups employ a social constructivist approach to understanding the self and community, feminists don't take the social constructions for granted. They are instead interested in "how social selves are constituted, towards what ends, and at what costs for various groups and individuals" (Weiss 1998). For this reason, the feminist critique of communitarianism finds that it has merely replaced the liberal universalism and a new universalism that assumes shared meanings based on the communitarian interpretation (Weiss 1998; Frazer 1999).

In establishing the differing views of liberalism between feminists and communitarians, Weiss (1998) argues that communitarians believe liberalism is good at doing what it set out to do, but that it just didn't set out to do the right things. Feminism, on the other hand, doesn't believe that liberalism is succeeding at doing what it set out to do, and that its application and practice vary according to race, sex, etc. Liberalism's supposed neutrality is, in effect, supporting the more powerful agents and institutions in society. The fact that communitarianism doesn't question these assumptions may explain why some (see Joseph 2002) consider it to be yet another strand of liberalism.

The vagueness inherent in the theoretical arguments (due in part to the lack of agreement among so-called communitarian theorists) has led to its application in a wide range of political agendas, from progressive to conservative. The fact that communitarianism doesn't take a stand on the key issues of feminism has led it to be compared to the oppressive 'neutrality' of the rational actor in liberalism. Weiss (1998) sums this up well when she says:

Liberalism's ideal is criticized for encouraging people to think of themselves first, for fostering egoism and rewarding selfishness, and for drawing a picture of the self that is incomplete where it is not inaccurate. But the complacent communitarian reliance on 'place' and inattention to the *problems* of social identity are also rejected for failing to address, and therefore solve, the issues at the heart of feminism.

Amenity-Based Development

So far I have discussed definitions of community, the way community creates systems of inclusion and exclusion, and how the idea of community connects to contemporary debates about the self, identity, justice and power. Having established this

context, I move now to the interactions between ‘community’ and research on amenity-based development. The invocation of ‘community’ is paramount to the commodification of landscape and lifestyle inherent in amenity-based development.

Rural towns attempt to create and sell a package attractive to people from other places (predominately cities). Beautiful ‘natural’ landscapes, escape from day-to-day worries, and the intimacy of small-town lifestyles all play predominant roles in the construction of community and community identity during amenity-based development. In this section, I will explore in more detail the ways in which definitions of community (including community identity) interact with amenity-based development. I will concentrate on the geography and sociology literatures with supplements from social psychology and anthropology to accomplish this goal.

Community Members

There are four general categories of people that appear in the literature on amenity-based development. Although they are labeled various things by different authors, I have chosen to use the labels common in Great Barrington. I will be referring to them as natives, transplants, second home owners and tourists. There is extensive overlap between these categories and divisions within these categories, but it is important to note their general existence in order to understand the following discussions. Length and type of residency are often primary indicators of one’s connection to and status in the local ‘community.’

In their foundational works on sense of place and place attachment, both Tuan (1977) and Relph (1976) articulate an important difference between those who have lived in a place for a long time and those who are new to it. Tuan argues that a visitor or

transient has a superficial sense of a place as opposed to the more complex and informed connection of a local. For Relph this is the difference between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' senses of place. As Burnett (1998) shows in her discussion of rural development in Scotland, the construction of the incomer as the 'other' of 'local' keeps these categories separate and makes it difficult for an incomer to move into the community position and social status associated with 'local.' These labels and their meanings clearly create a hierarchy of experience that has continued in both the literature (see Hay 1998; Salamon 2003) and in popular conceptions of tourists and new comers (see Buller and Hoggart 1994).

The role of second-home owners complicates these relations even further. As mobile individuals, do they have less attachment and undermine local distinctiveness (Relph 1976)? Or do they bring a greater appreciation for a place they choose to be in due to a greater understanding of options (Tuan 1980)?

Based on his work in northern Wisconsin, Stedman (2006) found that "counter to popular assumptions, seasonal residents exhibit higher levels of attachment..." to the place. The basis of those attachments, however, was different based on type of residency. "Year-rounder attachment is rooted in social networks and community meanings, whereas seasonal attachment is fostered through meanings of environmental quality and escape from day-to-day cares." Length of time in an area should not be assumed to create a stronger place attachment. This is not to imply the differences are not important, but one type of experience should not be held more legitimate over another.

The concept of home is integral to many understandings of community. A few key definitions of home include an 'irreplaceable center of significance' (Relph 1976), a

place 'to which one withdraws and from which one ventures forth' (Tuan 1971), a place where identity is grounded, and a special relationship with place that helps people make sense of their world (Dovey 1985). The assumption that home is 'a' place, that there is a singular home for each individual does not correspond with the experience of second-home owners. Bell hooks offers insight into a new conception of home when she says:

Home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place...that reveals more fully what we are, who we can become...." (bell hooks in Massey 1994)

Gallent's (2007) analysis of dwellings (homes) compliments hooks' interpretation of home and Stedman's findings discussed above. He suggests that the traditional normative definition of dwelling assumes a particular type of engagement with the social environment, dwelling as a process of participation in the community. However, in his discussion of second home ownership, Gallent applies King's (2004) notion of 'private dwelling' to show how dwelling can also work to create self-identity and orientation even when it is not directly linked to community-creation.

Understanding how different residential patterns are assumed to connect to place attachments and social interactions is key to unraveling the significance behind the categories of native, transplant, second home owner and tourist. Who has a 'legitimate' claim to the community is based on one's definition of that community. Whichever definition is chosen, the ability to call a place 'home' can privilege and legitimize certain claims in public discourses. This is particularly important in communities with such diverse residential and community participation patterns as Great Barrington.

Finally, with so much focus on length of residency and full- and part-time status, other ways of describing and characterizing members of the community are often

overlooked. As Cloke (1997) so eloquently states, in rural communities “there is a rich tapestry of myth and symbolism capable of hiding or excluding othered identities.”

Ethnic, racial, age and religious communities of identity inform the creation of the territorially based ‘community’ in amenity-based development. Although I will not go into the extensive literature on how these types of identity politics interconnect with community, it is imperative to keep in mind the other ways in which people identify themselves within the larger community to fully understand ‘who’ is the community.

Community Identities

Community identity is an often invoked but inconsistently theorized concept. It is simultaneously assumed to capture some essence or interpretation of a community as well as an individual’s relation to that community. I will start with a brief summary of community identity theory coming from social psychology and then move on to research in geography and sociology. There are some major differences in approach, but I hope to show the ways in which these various conceptions of community identity inform each other.

Within the field of social psychology, the functionalist definition of community identity assumes it to be something that exists and can be studied through an objectivist epistemology. In this way, it is very similar to the initial sociological definition of community quoted above. There are two main strains of this approach – one based on the territorial definition of community and the other on social-network relationships. In both of these approaches, community identity is associated with an individual’s identification with a community. Puddifoot (2003) has expanded this understanding to include “the context included by the views of others.” Now not only is it the ‘personal’ aspects of an

individual's relation to the community that is important, it's also the 'shared' aspects – the way others are perceived to relate to the community. This approach is critiqued by Colombo and Senatore (2005) who point out that the “main theoretical difficulty is...that of distinguishing between community identity and other forms of social identity.” What is the interplay between community identity and social identity, gender identity, cultural identity, racial identity, etc.? (Cuba and Hummon 1993). This remains unclear.

The discursive approach, still within social psychology, follows a more post-structuralist approach by saying that community identity is socially constructed and is intended to lend meaning to experience. Colombo and Seatore (2005) express the goal of a discursive approach to community identity as understanding how community members collectively construct a sense of 'who we are.' They go on to reiterate Wiesenfeld's (1996) caution that we “be on guard against a potential reification of the community as an entity independent of its components.” Due to its resonations with feminist community theory, it is this approach to understanding community identity as a dynamic force that I find the most useful. As Massey (2005) points out, “there can be no assumption of pre-given coherence, or of community or collective identity. Rather the throwntogetherness of place demands negotiation.”

In the literature on amenity-based development, community identity is invoked in multiple and interconnected ways. To begin, upon deciding to develop an amenity-based economy, the town must create an identity in order to 'sell' the area. As towns transition from “landscapes of production to landscapes of consumption” (Cloke, Goodwin et al. 1998), images are created to promote these towns as commodities (Tauxe 1998; Floy sand and Jakobsen 2007). The challenge of constructing this type of identity is in creating

something that aligns with the pre-existing expectations of consumers of the commodity – in this case, consumers of the landscape (Floysand and Jakobsen 2007).

This type of transition can be very difficult for a community and some communities have resisted developing touristic economies (Lankford 1994; Smith and Krannich 1998). In order to understand why this is happening, some researchers have proposed that areas with strong resource-based occupational identities may find tourism development inconsistent with their identity as farmers, miners, loggers, etc. (Johnson, Snepenger et al. 1994; Mason and Cheyne 2000). Through their work in Western U.S. communities, Petrzalka et al. (2006) challenge this assumption, claiming that perceptions of local economic conditions are a stronger predictor of attitudes towards tourism than resource-based occupational identities.

While the identity creation meant to commodify the landscape and community is done by and for both natives and newcomers, it can lead to a second wave of community identity construction that is more derisive. In her comparative study of inner-city gentrification and rural development, Spain (1993) argues that when “the number of new residents reaches a critical mass, and when resources are reallocated and subsequently privatized, conflict over values and definitions of community eventually ensue between been-heres and come-heres.” This animosity can become aggravated as the come-heres (in Spain’s parlance) utilize their “greater political acumen” and access to resources to realize their vision for the future of the town.

This type of political maneuvering, as seen in Great Barrington and other towns experiencing significant amenity-based development, is often viewed as a threat to the ‘original’ community. In response to these types of threats, Dalby and Mackenzie (1997)

assert that “the past becomes a ‘resource’ which may be selectively mined in creation of new boundaries of a community whose social and geographical boundaries are threatened.” Idealized historically-based identities become a mask over past conflicts and complexities within the community in an attempt to present a united front to the newcomers. This type of community identity plays upon the widespread belief that particular groups of people and their culture belong, as if by nature, to a particular place (Cresswell 1996). Locals often draw upon this type of place-based community identity when asserting that: ‘We were here first. We are the community.’

When identity is grounded in a place, it is important to remember that that place is “constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that ‘beyond’ (Massey 2005). For example, Great Barrington should not be defined against New York City, but, rather, it should be defined (in part) by its connections and relationships to New York City. The country and the city are constructed in relation to each other (Williams 1973). They are not opposites; they are part of the same system. As Williams (1973) argues, the differences are enmeshed in symbolic systems that connect the country to the past and the city to the future. As I shall discuss in the next section, place-based identity creation during amenity-based development is connected with this relation between the city and the country.

Spatial Systems of Inclusion and Exclusion

As explored previously, the very definition of community is based on the designation of insiders and outsiders. In this section, I will explore how definitions of

community create and are reinforced by spatial systems of inclusion and exclusion. Following the literature, I will focus on place creation, aesthetics, and economics.

Place Creation

It is a commonly held in human geography that place is a social relation that is created through social meaning and practice, and, as such, it is open to multiple interpretations and interactions (see Massey 1994; Cresswell 2004; Massey 2005). Within these possibilities of place, there are often a few that take on a normative role. They tell us what is acceptable in what places; our behaviors and social relations are shaped by our interactions with the meanings these places hold. How do they accomplish this? Sibley (1995) suggests that, “In the routines of daily life, most people are not conscious of domination and the socio-spatial system is reproduced with little challenge” (p.76). Cresswell (1996) goes into more detail with a summary of the ways in which place contributes to ideological strategies and beliefs. He identifies the following four functions of place:

- 1) Place is fundamental form of classification. Classification is a basic ideological mechanism. The classification of things by place structures our judgment of those things (objects, actions).
- 2) We differentiate through place between “us” and “them,” “in” and “out,” “high” and “low,” “central” and “marginal.” The process of differentiation through which “others” are created is a basic ideological mechanism.
- 3) Ideological beliefs, to be effective, must connect thought to action, theory to practice, the abstract to the concrete. Place, insofar as it is the material context of our lives, forces us to make interpretations and act accordingly. Place thus contributes to the creation and reproduction of action-oriented (ideological) beliefs.

- 4) Ideologies involve the removal of beliefs and actions from their social roots and their placement in the realm of “nature.” The materiality of place gives it the aura of “nature.” The “nature of place can thus be offered as justification for particular views of what is good, just, and appropriate.” (p.161)

Given this understanding of place and its connection to ideology, the ability to control the creation of place meaning and how place is performed is inherently a power play. In Chapter 4, I will show how place creation becomes a central point of contention during the struggle to define community in Great Barrington. For the moment, I will move onto discussion about aesthetics because it is here that we see the most visible creation of place in amenity-based development. As I shall show, the ability to control landscapes is integral to constructing community.

Aesthetics

The commodification of landscape inherent in amenity-based development leads to a discourse of aesthetics that often covers the systems of exclusion that it constructs. My discussion of this phenomenon draws heavily from Duncan and Duncan’s (2003) study of Bedford, NY. Their thorough analysis of the politics of aesthetics are particularly applicable to Great Barrington as Bedford has constructed its identity as an escape from New York City. They argue that

...material and sensual aspects of place and place-based identity lead to an aestheticization of exclusion. A seemingly innocent appreciation of landscapes and desire to protect local history and nature can act as subtle but highly effective mechanisms of exclusion and reaffirmation of class identity, [however]... exclusion itself is not the goal, but the means for preserving the ‘look of the

landscape'. The aim is not to intentionally exclude types of people, but to prevent an overall increase in the number of people and houses in town. (p.29)

To explain some of the mechanisms through which this occurs, Duncan and Duncan cite Constance Perin's (1977) analysis of the ways in which land-use planning, zoning, and development practices function as the short-hand of rules governing correct social relations. As residents invoke the ideas of historic and community preservation, previously assumed politically weak romantic notions of sense of place and associated aesthetic criteria are given political and legal strength (Duncan and Duncan 2003).

During amenity-based development, as noted by Duncan and Duncan, people worry about the changing look of a town, the landscape. They are concerned that it is losing its bucolic appearance – the thing that made it an attractive commodity initially. With that lost is the concern that it will lose its marketable edge. This leads to further attempts to control the landscape through preserves and zoning.

Economics

Amenity-based development is often touted as an economic alternative in transitional rural economies (see Power 1996; Puijk 1996; Petrzelka and Bell 2000). It is simultaneously critiqued, however, for a predominance of low-wage jobs and the unequal distribution of benefits (Roback 1982; Roback 1988; Wagner 1997; Leatherman and Marcouiller 1999). For some, this leads to concerns about the exploitation of the poor by the rich (Ashworth 1992; Marcouiller 1997). Duncan and Duncan (2003) argue that 'wilderness' in this context is in fact "part as the alienated product of urban-industrial and financial market-generated wealth that banishes from view the modern economic landscape sustaining it. This includes importantly a very uneven and inequitable

geography of housing and related resources.” Kwang-Koo et al. (2005) argue that amenity research must take into consideration the distribution and spatial organization of income in order to understand how this type of economic development affects an area.

The spatial organization of the use of income augments concerns about its initial distribution. As more and more of the ‘community’ is commodified, boundaries between consumptive and non-consumptive activities are strengthened (Sibley 1995). This leads to “non-consumption being constructed as a form of deviance at the same time as spaces of consumption eliminate public spaces in city centres” (Sibley 1995 p. xii). Here we see again the application of normative place meanings to ensure particular social relations.

The push for local economic self-sufficiency in Great Barrington and other amenity-based economies is paradoxical given their reliance on urban income (Duncan and Duncan 2003). Bounded definitions of community are invoked to hide the connections between various scales of economic relations. If the small-town is to be sold as the alternative to the big city, then the interrelations must be downplayed.

Second home owners are often blamed for rising property values because of their ability to pay higher prices. Gallent et al. (2007) argue that the assumption that second home owners are buying up housing and thereby forcing young people to move away is used to divert attention from local factors that might distort housing markets such as lack of diversity in the job market or educational opportunities. It’s easier to blame the outsiders with less legitimate claims to place than to examine local decisions and policies.

Although I will not be doing an economic analysis of Great Barrington, it is important to understand the current discourses, both academic and popular, about amenity-based development. As previously mentioned, Petzelka et al. (2006) found that

local economic conditions were a strong predictor of attitudes towards tourism during amenity-based development. Local perceptions of economic well-being, therefore, are integral to understanding conceptions of community during amenity-based development.

Conclusion

With advertisements emphasizing small-town lifestyles in bucolic landscapes, many towns trying to market themselves as high-amenity areas play upon assumed conceptions of community. Small-town life is often positioned opposite the frantic-paced and anonymous lifestyle of the city. Use of the term ‘community,’ with its positive connotations, is used to create the image that is trying to be sold.

Following the general critiques of community, a closer look at how social relations are understood during the changes brought on by amenity-based development shows the systems of inclusion and exclusion that the concept of community supports. It is this interaction, and its socio-spatial implications, that I shall explore in the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter 3: Community Identity

It has been well-documented in political geography and development studies that community identity can be used to mobilize people against a threat. The possible location of hazardous facilities or otherwise undesirable development near a community is just the type of threat that leads to the construction of a community identity that aids in the mobilization of that community (eg. Routledge 1996; Dalby and Mackenzie 1997). People call upon the symbols of their community to create a solidarity that can be used to fight the potential danger. Although not a threat in the sense of a hazardous facility, proposed touristic development has faced similar resistance in diverse communities (Lankford 1994; Smith and Krannich 1998). In order to understand why this was happening, some researchers have proposed that areas with strong resource-based occupational identities may find tourism development inconsistent with their identity as farmers, miners, loggers, etc. (Johnson, Snepenger et al. 1994; Mason and Cheyne 2000). Petrzelka et al. (2006), however, argue that this is not the case. According to their findings, perceptions of local economic conditions are a stronger predictor of attitudes towards tourism than resource-based occupational identities.

In the case of Great Barrington, Petrzelka et al.'s findings explain some, but not all, of the local responses to amenity-based development. This development is seen locally as both an opportunity and a threat; it is the proverbial double-edged sword, simultaneously supporting the local economy and threatening the local community. The debate about development is often framed qualitatively: How much is too much? At what point does the amenity-based development destroy the local community? How one answers these questions is based upon one's interpretation and valuation of various

symbols of community identity. If someone perceives the point of destruction to be imminent or already achieved, then lines are drawn to articulate what has been lost and whose responsibility it is.

Perceiving amenity-based development as a threat requires that there is a conception of a historical community that is being threatened. Dalby and Mackenzie (1997) discuss the process by which this conception of community is created. According to their analysis (which builds upon Cohen 1985), community identity is created as a form of resistance to a perceived external threat. This created community identity is manufactured by selectively calling upon historical symbols that can create “new boundaries [for] a community whose social or geographical boundaries are threatened” (p.102). It is important to note, as do Dalby and Mackenzie, that symbols of community identity can present a collective front against an exterior threat by constructing an internal homogeneity. This constructed homogeneity can conceal and silence alternate community identities leading to systems of exclusion within the very community that is being constructed as a singular collectivity facing an external threat.

In order to understand how this process occurs, it is important to remember that communities are not static entities. They are exclusionary processes through which the identities of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ are constantly negotiated (Frazer 1999; Joseph 2002). The boundaries that allow for this fundamental division between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ are contested processes in the same way that the identity of the very community being bounded is a contested process. In fact, the boundaries and the identity of a given community are mutually constitutive. Understanding ‘who we are,’ the primary role of community identities (Colombo and Senatore 2005), includes an

implicit 'them' and an assumed understanding of who 'they' are. Community identities constructed by 'insiders' are as much characterized by the attributes of the 'outsiders' as they are by those of the 'insiders' themselves. According to Cohen (1985), community identities are based upon ambiguous symbols that do not so much express specific meanings of the community as they provide a way by which people can 'make meaning.' The malleability of these symbols can serve diverse ends as the identity of a community and the boundaries that define it change and adjust to the needs of those invoking the idea of community.

Using the idea of community as process allows us to analyze the construction of specific community identities as social and spatial relations at specific historical moments. It is not a question of defending an established entity against an external threat. Rather, the threat and the community are constructed through their positioning opposite one another. Given this, when analyzing a community facing a perceived threat, it is imperative to ask: What symbols are being invoked? How are they being interpreted? Where are the boundaries being drawn between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'? What are the counter-narratives that are being silenced by the call for solidarity in the face of threat?

In this chapter, I shall use these questions as a means of analyzing the variety of community identities that became apparent as people described their images of what Great Barrington had been, what it was now, and fears/hopes about what it would become. While there are some commonalities between these identities, their differences reveal not only diverse perceptions of threat but also variations on the use of community symbols. With each identity came a set of boundaries, at times implicit and at times

explicit. I have used the boundaries and a few key symbols as a means of organizing the community identities. Although I do not presume to delineate exactly where the line between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ falls for each community identity, I do believe the boundaries I have identified provide a structure to the variations in defining Great Barrington as a community. Additionally, the themes identified below do not represent discreet community identities; rather, people tended to use the symbols of the community in a variety of ways, moving between interpretations depending upon the story they were telling. At times these identities were mutually supportive and at other times they were contradictory. It is within the spaces of contradiction and conflict that the constructed nature of the community becomes most apparent. It is within these spaces that I hope to identify the flexible use of symbols and the existence of counter-narratives. By examining the construction of community boundaries and the silencing of counter-narratives, I will investigate systems of exclusion inherent in the construction of community identities in Great Barrington.

Historical Identities:

The ‘Real’ Great Barrington

“Historically, agriculture and manufacturing have prominently shaped the economy, populations and land use in Berkshire County.”

-Great Barrington Town Plan, 1997

In response to my questions about how they would describe Great Barrington, over half of the people I interviewed spoke at length about what Great Barrington used to be. It seemed important for my respondents to position the town today in relation to what it was ‘before’. In most cases, the historical identity represented something that was being threatened, something that was in danger of being lost. This ‘something’ is the

'real' town; a working-class, self-reliant, productive community. This 'real' town is being threatened by contemporary amenity-based development through the consumptive use of the landscape and the arrival of the upper-classes. They are 'outsiders' both in terms of the symbols of the community and the historical time period when those symbols were dominant. They do not have access to this 'real' Great Barrington.

Although the specific line separating what Great Barrington was to what it has become varies, there are a few consistent symbols of this 'real' Great Barrington. Ralph, a native, William, a transplant, and Rebecca, a second home owner, all echoed the idea that Great Barrington used to be a 'real' town, with things you needed, like hardware stores, grocery stores, and working-class (affordable) restaurants. These types of stores differentiated Great Barrington from other nearby towns that were already experiencing amenity-based development. As Lori said, "it used to be that Lenox and Stockbridge were the towns for the tourists and Great Barrington was the town for the locals." Great Barrington was a town of and for the working-class.

Part of the image of the real, local town rested on the small-business base. Stores in the area were known for being family run, where everyone knew you when you walked in. As Rosalie, who has lived in town for 60 years, said, "I want to go back to old Great Barrington. I knew everybody; everybody spoke to you." Sheila, who has lived in town a similar length of time, seconded this when she said, "Going into a store used to be like going home, not all businesslike like it is now." Claire, 25 years old, described her father's frustration that when he went into stores now he was not given special treatment because he was so-and-so's son. It used to mean something that you were recognized as an integral part of the community.

Supporting this idea of a ‘real’ town was the focus on its rural nature and agricultural use of the land. Emily, a farmer, put it simply when she said, “200 years ago there were more sheep than cows. 100 years ago there were more cows than people. Today, well, just look around.” With a sarcastic laugh, Ralph commented that, “When I was growing up, working-men drove real tractors on farms. Now they drive lawnmowers for a living on all the second home estates.” Frank remembered a time when you used to have to stop for cows moving across the road, and John reminisced about farmers driving into town in their pick-ups with guns hanging in the back windows. One of the largest annual events in Great Barrington until it was destroyed by a tornado in the early 90’s was the Barrington Fair. It was a large agricultural fair that the town was well known for in the region. Emily brought it up as an example of an agriculturally-based event that brought people together and created a sense of community.

Self-sufficiency was another important aspect of identity in Great Barrington. Although not often discussed explicitly, the entrepreneurial and self-reliant ‘nature’ of people in Great Barrington can be gleaned from personal and family histories. For example, Geane talked about the various businesses started and successfully run by multiple generations of her family. Robert spoke about starting his own farm stand before he was old enough to count the money for change (requiring him to run inside for help from a family member whenever someone bought something). Susan spoke about an African-American woman who, at various points in her life, opened a tea room, an employment agency, and an inn for honeymoon couples in Great Barrington. There were constant references to the locally-owned and family-owned businesses that were the pride of the area.

For Agatha, having worked on economic alternatives in the area, these ideas were paramount. She began with them when I asked her to describe the area:

“It’s a rich history of self-reliance, that’s a history. So there’s still an active memory of producing a number of goods that are consumed in the region.

Multiple skills. There’s also a rich culture history. So there’s a love of big ideas.

Strong combination of intellectual curiosity and what are normally thought of as blue-collar skills that are joined together, and they are not seen as separate.

That’s traditional here....that memory of being intellectually curious plus hands on producers is huge here. “

There was also an amount of self-sufficiency that kept people from accepting help. Philip talked about how the people were very poor, but they didn’t want government help. They didn’t want handouts. Instead, the role of the churches was championed, with the idea that they would “take care of their own.”

All of these images and relations reinforced the idea of a self-sufficient, rural, agriculturally based community. This was the ‘real’ Great Barrington. Beginning in the 80’s and increasing during the 90’s, however, things changed. As the economy shifted and new people came into town, changes occurred in the social as well as economic and physical environments. Markers of the ‘old’ community began to disappear, signally a threat to the ‘real’ Great Barrington.

When this change occurred, however, is not definite. People have different opinions about when they saw the transition happen and where they draw the boundary between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’ In most cases, lines were drawn as close to the arrival of the speaker (or the family in the case of some natives) as possible. This gave the

speaker a degree of authority in defining the identity of Great Barrington. This means that someone whose family has lived in the area for generations and someone who moved to town five years ago could both consider themselves ‘insiders,’ although it is unlikely that the former would consider the latter an ‘insider.’

These variations, and the conflicting images of the ‘real’ Great Barrington they create, belie the constructed nature of this identity. It reflects a process where particular symbols are associated with an idealized past. For some, this idealized past is based on Great Barrington’s own history, for others, particularly new arrivals, it is based on the idealization of country living in general. Any changes to this identity are seen as the responsibility of ‘outsiders,’ people who do not appreciate and value the ‘true’ nature of country life in general and Great Barrington in particular. The historically contested nature of Great Barrington’s community is hidden by the need of those invoking this idealized image to create a clear ‘us’ and ‘them.’

Counter-narratives

Susan’s description of the community’s historical identity was strikingly different. She began her interview with the following statement: “Great Barrington is more of a welcoming community than it was in the past.” Having grown up as one of only a few African-Americans in Great Barrington, Susan’s descriptions of the town varied greatly from the previous construction. She focused on discrimination in employment and housing as well as a lack of social integration. Susan talked about her participation in the civil rights movement of the 1960’s:

“there was a small effort by a few of us when the civil rights movement was begun in the south and of course it eventually reached GB, there were so few of

us that were activists, we weren't welcomed here, although we were here. I can remember a few of us, we participated in vigils, walks and the candle lighting ceremonies and things like that. We'd be downtown and both sides of the street would be lined with people watching us."

Emily, also having grown up in the area, echoed this in her memories of childhood. "When I was younger, there was still, kind of, well, everyone was gracious, but anti-Semitism and so on was not rampant, but it was there." In her opinion, there was a lot of social snobbery, but she qualified that statement by acknowledging that that was probably true throughout the entire country. She also described the area as isolating. Lots of people were hungry and there weren't good medical services. If you weren't connected to resources, material or social, it was a hard place to live.

The dominant community identity described in the previous section relayed a nostalgic sense of quaint, small-town harmony. The pride in this 'real' Great Barrington at times obscures historical systems of exclusion and the reason for the move to amenity-based development: poverty and the loss of jobs as mills closed. Generally no mention is made of the class divisions that created the upstairs/downstairs world described by respondents at the senior center². Furthermore, the very same symbols that were used to create the positive image of the 'real' Great Barrington were read by some as negative images. John, who moved to the area in the 60's, describes that Great Barrington as "a really different town. It was much more blue collar. It was very backwards in terms of a whole range of issues; the police were really scary and in your face, and the town government was really conservative, and there was nothing going on."

² This is of particular interest since there is so much complaint about the growing class divisions in Great Barrington.

Contemporary Identities:

“Sophistication at a country pace”

The Chamber of Commerce sells Great Barrington by combining the historical symbols mentioned above with symbols of cultural sophistication. It’s a very attractive mix given Great Barrington’s popularity as a destination. This is the heart of the amenity-based development in the area: a plethora of cultural amenities (eg. restaurants, theater, music, etc.) in the midst of beautiful natural amenities (eg. landscape). Paul calls it “upscale country living.” For Frank “it’s an interesting combo of...scenic beauty and the culture of the big city.” Emily went even further to describe it as a cultural oasis where physical beauty inspires spiritual and intellectual phenomenon.

It’s certainly part of what drew Melody to the area. She says it’s like living in Manhattan, except it’s the country. She finds it different from the culture of Long Island in that it’s “more artistic, more intellectual, and less materialistic.” Michael, also a second home owner, appreciates access to what he calls the “imported NY culture.” Sharon compared Great Barrington to her hometown which was also a tourist destination. She prefers Great Barrington because it is nice, laid back, and not too isolated. The increased amenity development has also increased the hours that the downtown is alive, and many people commented on the fact that the restaurants no longer close at 8pm.

Much of the ‘sophistication’ advertised by the Chamber of Commerce comes from the influx of urbanites to the area. These waves of new-comers have had other positive effects. As Susan says,

“Great Barrington has become quite a cultural community, you know, so many people come here from everywhere. I think they brought some of their own

attitudes, ideas and thoughts with them. The old guard is gone, you know, they're gone."

As Susan mentioned, the influx of new people has led to a shift in politics. Many people feel that there is now a much stronger liberal/progressive leaning in the town, but it is certainly not exclusively so. The move towards a more progressive social atmosphere, however, can be noted in a few specific situations. For example, Philip, who has been working in the area for 40 years, spoke appreciatively of the new reformed synagogue in town that has a gay rabbi. This was very significant for him since previously there had only been an orthodox synagogue.

Sharon Palma, Director of the Chamber of Commerce, was very proud when she spoke about the make-up of the Chamber and its board.

"I have a strong sense that our chamber, because of the make up of the employees and the board and a lot of the members, has a less chamber-of-commerce approach to life than most Chambers of Commerce. When I go to Chamber conferences, I find that most Chambers are staunchly Republican and very staunchly pro-big business. And I'm the exact opposite and so is much of the board, and I think that has a lot to do with the southern Berkshire attitude."

Lori and Astrid both appreciate the fact that people are very involved in the community and are community-work oriented. Michael was surprised upon buying his second home in the area to learn how open-minded people were. People were more aware of political and social issues than he had been expecting in a rural setting. He did

note, however, that while people were liberal socially, there were ways in which they were conservative.³

Although it has been lamented that Great Barrington is losing touch with its rural, small-town nature, some people still see that as part of its defining characteristics. The old-style main street has a charm which is still, as Patrick says, “not too cutsey.” Frank considers the downtown key to the character of Great Barrington. And while many of the stores have changed, John appreciates the fact that the same folks are working at the hardware store, something that helps maintain that small town feel. The lack of chain stores in the area adds to the small-town identity.⁴ Robert calls it ‘dumb luck’ that the area doesn’t have the demographic that attracts small chains like Gap, YSL, etc. Others argue that it’s not just dumb luck, but, rather, it’s the entrepreneurial spirit of the area that favors the local businesses. In any case, the uniqueness of the town, especially commercially, is seen as an asset to many.

The landscape is clearly a defining characteristic, as is how people relate to it. Emily, a farmer, felt that Great Barrington tends to attract “solid tied-to-the-land people.” It used to be farmers, but now it’s second home owners who are very appreciative of the landscape. People like Astrid come to the area looking for that rural landscape and a low-population area. In comparison to New York City, Great Barrington still has that. Paul, who moved back to the area after many years in LA, revels in the fact he can back out of his driveway without looking.

³ In Chapters 5 and 6, I will show how these different stances support each other.

⁴ The fascinating and notable exception to this is Carr’s Hardware on Main Street. It is part of the True Value chain, but because it is associated with a working downtown, it is highly valued as a marker of community identity.

Ten years ago, Robert and his partner were looking to relocate and traveled all over the country looking at potential new home bases. As Robert says, “I wanted to live someplace less stressful, I wanted to have a job that was less stressful. I wanted to live someplace small and beautiful where I could have some sort of an impact.” They found what they were looking for in Great Barrington. Frank supported this when he said that the area was small enough that people knew and cared about each other, but it was just big enough to get things done.

For many second home owners, Great Barrington offers an escape from the stress of their other lives. Words such as idyllic, safe haven, and good vibes were used to describe their homes. Beth found this quality of escape to be powerfully meaningful on September 11, 2001. She was driving up from her home in New York City to the Berkshires during the attacks on the World Trade Towers. When she arrived, she kissed the ground. “This is my safe haven, my safe place away from the world. I didn’t turn the TV on for days after 9/11 because I just couldn’t...I knew this was a safe place. I want it to remain that way...I can still do the New York thing when I want to, I can choose.”

Bob called me back a few days after we had originally spoke wanting to share some additional thoughts that came up during a conversation with a friend. When he thought about what it was about Great Barrington that had drawn him to it as a second home owner, he couldn’t stop talking about the friendliness and civility of the people. He described multiple incidents where shop owners had gone the extra mile – helping him get what he needed even when they weren’t the ones selling it to him. He also felt that the crosswalks for pedestrians captured an important essence of the town. Pedestrians

always have right of way on crosswalks in the downtown area, and this change of priorities makes things move at a slower pace, something that Bob appreciates.

This community identity is based on symbols of inclusion. It thrives on the population's mix of rural and urban backgrounds; it's accepting of racial and religious diversity. It grounds itself in the 'wholesome' symbols of the country (eg. nearness to nature, community, and safety) while importing symbols of 'sophistication' from the city (eg. diversity, culture, progress). However, this is still a community. It has to have 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' Unlike definitions of the 'real' Great Barrington, the proponents of this identity are not explicit about the boundaries. It is necessary to turn to the counter-narratives in today's Great Barrington to understand how the "sophistication at a country pace" is drawing boundaries and constructing community.

"It's not Great Barrington anymore"

For those who felt connected to community identities grounded in Great Barrington's past, the current changes can be difficult to accept. As historical identities lose prominence, so, too, do the definitions of 'insiders' that made many people feel connected to the community. Similarly, those who came looking for a particular image of Great Barrington may have difficulties when those expectations aren't fulfilled. 'Sophistication' and the 'country' are not compatible for all people. There is a reification of the past and a continuous comparison of current situations to the 'way it used to be' by natives as well as more recent arrivals. Rosalie articulated this sentiment clearly when she said, "It's not Great Barrington anymore. You can ask anyone around here that's lived here all their lives. It's not Great Barrington anymore. 'Cause the city people are moving in and taking over."

This sense of loss was echoed by Sheila who commented that the feeling of community was gone. The community and hospital fairs were gone. No one had the time, energy or desire to do that anymore. The local businesses were gone, too; you couldn't just go into town to buy anything as practical as thread or material. Everything was high end. Ralph found it telling that the local Agway now sells birdseed but no baling twine. This doesn't mesh with the idea of an agriculturally-based area and is seen as representative of other changes.

Building off of the working-class community identity, Tim noted the fact that the stores used to be family-owned and primary sources of income, but now, "a lot of the stores around here are hobbies. People who have already made their money and are looking for something to pass the time." This is seen as a threat to the working-class productivity that used to be Great Barrington's identity in the region.

There is a concern that Great Barrington is losing its practical side. As we saw in the last section, Great Barrington was often identified as the 'real' town in the Southern Berkshires – the working class, practical town. This was often in comparison to Lenox and Stockbridge. So, when Emily noticed trends in Great Barrington to preserve and rarify an idealized past, she became suspicious. That was the type of thing you would expect in Stockbridge (well known for preserving the 'Main Street' that Norman Rockwell painted), not Great Barrington. That doesn't fit with the working image of Great Barrington.

John sees the changes as connected to the suburbanization of the area.

"Not only loss of agriculture, but the loss of small scale entrepreneurial industrial energy is going away, and what we're getting instead is suburbia. It's a kind of

rural larger scale suburban mentality where everybody wants to make sure nobody's doing anything...Great Barrington is becoming hostile to that kind of rural tradition. But they don't even know they're doing it...it's unconscious."

Beth, a second home owner from New York, lamented the fact that "the last few stores that are left that I can shop in, you know, are changing also to a clientele, you know, I live in NY, I could shop like that in NY, I don't need, want to shop like that [here]." Laura, a transplant, agreed with this sentiment, saying that downtown Great Barrington had turned into the upper-upper west side. It was now a boutique town.

Rebecca, another second home owner, added,

"I don't love the changes, I'm not the person interested in the art galleries and the fancy restaurants. And I'm sure all that's being fed by NY, so I feel, you know, sort of I know there's a lot of tension in town about it. I miss the old Great Barrington. I chose it. I could have afforded to buy in Lenox or Stockbridge if I wanted it, I didn't want it. That's why I chose here. I'm sad about it. I'm not interested in all these galleries."

The symbols of 'sophistication' intended to promote the town's development are the very things that are turning some people off. People's choices to stay or to go, based in part on their interpretation of the community's identity, play a significant role in constructing community and drawing boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders.'

Counter-narratives

Many people attribute the change in Great Barrington to the wealth of the recent domestic immigrants and the shift in businesses to meet their needs. As Patrick says,

“It’s a town that’s very quickly becoming a rich persons’ hang-out, for want of a better word. I think, certainly in terms of housing and living here, it’s becoming far out of reach of working class people and it certainly stretches most middle class people...it’s fairly elitist.”

Melody says that it has changed into a Cape Cod community; “you can’t afford to live and work here.” Claire supported this when she observed that the economy had become so based on tourists that the only place left to buy real things that real people need to live was K-mart. For Sheila, the focus on tourists has resulted in a lack of family restaurants that are affordable.

John echoed these frustrations about the increasing economic exclusivity of the area. “The sadness that I have about the area is the loss of diversity. Not that we have a lot of racial or ethnic diversity around here, we have some, but for me diversity is about other [things].” He then goes on to talk about the lack of farmers and working-class people as well as jobs for them.

For some, the exclusivity has a bitter edge when coupled with the increasingly progressive politics of the area. George, a 20 year old recent arrival, spoke about the progressive lifestyle that he sees being sold in the Berkshires. The selling of it, however, seems to undermine the very politics of it. As he said, “there’s a cost of living here that, like, makes it so a certain kind of person can’t afford to live that way and a certain type of person can afford to come and take advantage of that.” On a related note, Patrick expressed frustration that people in town are more interested in maintaining a Norman Rockwell looking town than seriously looking at local labor issues.

Also having observed this inconsistency, Frank said the following as he was trying to understand where the conflicts were coming from:

“Maybe the difference is that outside the Berkshires they don’t walk around so much with a chip on their shoulder about how smart, progressive, liberal, understanding geniuses that we are when I don’t think we’re any different than anyone else. I don’t see as much open-mindedness, as I think the people say is here, is here...it just seems like, isn’t that what this place should really be about? Being non-judgmental? I don’t know how much of that goes on. Neither conservatives nor liberals around here really have a handle on being non-judgmental.”

Future

I concluded my interviews by asking people to first describe their worst case scenario for Great Barrington 50 years in the future and then the best case scenario. For the most part, the best case scenarios had to do with keeping the parts of the past or present identities that they liked and not having it change much more. Worst case scenarios focused on the loss of unique community symbols and compared Great Barrington to another place. People were worried that it would become so exclusive and upscale that it would be no different than the Hamptons, Cape Cod or other resort areas. There was also a concern about the amount of people coming into the area and the development that was coming with them. Using a local reference, Lori was concerned that Great Barrington would turn into the Pittsfield-Lenox road, an area where there is nothing but strip-malls and big box stores. Development towards either that type of commerce or the high-end exclusivity of the Hamptons symbolized a loss of that which

makes Great Barrington unique for many people – the reasons they have chosen to come and/or stay in the area. The amenity-based development has sought to incorporate development and cultural amenities with the symbols of country life. The fear for some is that the balance will be lost, and that, as the symbols of country life are lost, so too will be the community they symbolized.

Conclusion

Community identities serve as a way for a community to interpret and understand itself. They also help individuals understand their relationship to the larger social structure. Contemporary Great Barrington has multiple co-existing community identities. In all of them, symbols of the country and rural life are prominent. These same symbols, however, can be used to support very different images of the community. The ‘real’ Great Barrington and the amenity-based Great Barrington are not generally seen as compatible because the compromises necessary to sustain the former destroy the latter and vice versa. Debates about development often hinge between these two community identities. Alternative community identities get lost in this binary conflict.

The fact that there are co-existing and occasionally conflicting community identities makes it difficult to define the community of Great Barrington. It is not possible to freeze the community at any one moment in time in order to capture the ‘truth’ of it. Instead, it needs to be understood as multiple communities in a constant negotiation with each other and with multi-scalar forces. Regional, national and international economic and political forces have shaped the town’s situation. Competitive national and international labor markets have led to many New England mill closures. Related international trends have brought an influx of immigrant workers to the

area. Looking for a new economic base, many towns like Great Barrington have turned to amenity-based development to exploit their resources. Success in this market is based upon the disposable income of urban upper classes and the symbolic differences between the city and the country.

The adjustments and adaptations Great Barrington has made to these multi-scalar processes represent progress for some, loss for others, and an uneasy mix of both for many. If there's one thing that everyone seems to agree upon regarding community in Great Barrington today, it's that it is changing. This should not be a surprise given that communities are, by definition, a process that is always evolving. Given this dynamic nature and the variety of opinions about what is best, it is difficult to imagine that people can make claims on behalf of the 'good of the community.' Yet this happens often.

Some claims are made on behalf of a 'traditional' community. These claims are based upon the idealization of a historical social order, much like the communitarian arguments by philosophers such as MacIntyre and Etzioni. For those in positions of power, this was a good thing and something to be fought for in the name of the community. For those in less ideal positions, however, this is a community identity to be fought against. Similar comparisons can be made with contemporary community identities. Many arguments are made on behalf of the newer progressive community identity that invokes symbols of inclusion. As Patrick pointed out, however, the choice of communal 'goods' in this community often do not question the power structures that make the community exclusive. In all situations, this definition of community facilitates the creation of a base of communal 'goods' that can be used to push forward specific agendas. As I will explore in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6, these community identities

and their associated ‘goods’ are instrumental in constructing not only the town’s social environment, but also its economic, natural and built environments.

Regardless of the particular agenda, all creations of community invoke symbols of the community and construct lines between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’ To understand the ways in which community is constructed through the creation of boundaries, it is necessary to look at how people are defined. In the next chapter, I turn to the ways in which people are labeled and categorized in Great Barrington. The characteristics of individuals place them on the ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ of various Great Barrington communities. Positions in relation to these boundaries often carry with them responsibilities for either the actions of the community or threats to it.

Chapter 4: People

Community identities, as discussed in the previous chapter, are meant to provide a sense of ‘who we are’ to the people in a community (Colombo and Senatore 2005). These identities, in turn, are based on a combination of real and imagined characteristics that community members are believed to have in common. Community identity is individualized as lines between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ are drawn according to these characteristics. If a person is not believed to possess the characteristics that symbolize a dominant community identity, they tend to find themselves marginalized and repressed. (Frazer 1999; Joseph 2002). For this reason, there is much power in the ability to define the characteristics that determine the line between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’

In areas experiencing a boom in amenity-based development, particularly when accompanied by an increase in second home ownership, research has found length and type of residency to be key characteristics for defining community. Studies on tourism and amenity-based development have focused on the ways natives have placed all newcomers (tourists and seasonal visitors) as outsiders (Jordan 1980), and the ways these outsiders have been held responsible for changing community identities (Fitchen 1991) and creating a perceived decline in local quality of life (Ringholz 1996). Maintaining a focus on length and type of residency, Stedman (2006) has provided a new perspective by focusing on the newcomer’s perspective instead of the native’s. His research on the sense of place and place attachment amongst second home owners in high-amenity rural locales have found that second home owners have higher levels of place attachment than locals. In so doing, his research has brought into question the legitimacy of local claims to place that are based on natives’ assumed higher levels of attachment.

If residency is to be used as a determining characteristic for community membership, then it is necessary to clarify what particular residency types represent and what symbols they support that make them meaningful. For example, Stedman (2006) found differences in place attachment between residency types. Year-round residents' attachment was based on social networks and community meanings, while seasonal residents based their attachment on environmental quality and escape from everyday cares. According to these findings, residency is not so much a marker of legitimate attachment as a symbol of types of engagement with the social and physical environments.

Frazer (1999) identified a series of normative principles associated with the idea of community including the belief that an individual should participate in the community where they are rooted and that shaped them. The fact that second home owners and newcomers alike challenge this principle make them 'outsiders' of the local community. They do not have the same history with the local social networks as natives. Gallent (2007) argues that the 'outsider' status of second home owners is based on their deviance from normative views on dwelling, home ownership and community participation. The sense of 'home' that they support is not singular, thereby appearing to devalue their connections with their home in the high-amenity locale and, by extension, the community. Transplants, however, do participate in social networks and community relations in a manner consistent with other full-time homeowners. The distinction of transplant, then, must represent something different.

As noted in the previous chapter, the productive rural landscape is an important symbol of the community identity I refer to as the 'real' Great Barrington. The more

recent amenity-based community identity focuses on the consumptive land-use and its aesthetic value. It is here that we find a distinction between natives and transplants. Natives are associated with the productive use of the land while transplants are associated with a consumptive use. The fact that these symbols of community identity are associated with residency types perpetuates the stereotypes that are the foundation of 'insider' and 'outsider' boundaries in Great Barrington.

Consistent with research on other high-amenity areas (Smith and Krannich 1998; Kuentzel and Ramaswamy 2005; Stedman 2006), descriptions of community in Great Barrington are dominated by distinctions between various types and length of residency. I have previously identified three major categories based on residency: natives⁵, transplants, and second home owners. In addition to length and type of residency, the following categories arose throughout the course of my interviews: occupation/class, religion, age, race and ethnicity, and political orientation. These additional categories intersect with that of residency to simultaneously create and deconstruct stereotypes and definitions of community. I will begin by looking at the symbols associated with the different types of residency in Great Barrington. I will then complicate these by focusing on the inconsistencies in the symbols and boundaries of the community identities outlined in the previous chapter.

Stereotypes

There are constructed composites of natives, transplants and second home owners that dominate discourses about community in Great Barrington. While no one I spoke with believed these stereotypes truthfully represented all members of the community,

⁵ The terms native and local were used interchangeably by my respondents to represent on category of resident. In consideration of this, I shall use both terms throughout this text.

they were present in almost all descriptions about the community⁶. Even in situations where a respondent was actively contesting these constructions, there was a conscious engagement with the stereotype. For that reason, I think it is important to engage with these stereotypes in order to later discount them. The following descriptions are my interpretation of how these stereotypes are defined in Great Barrington; they are a combination of individual characteristics and the community symbols they represent:

- *Natives*: Individuals whose families have lived in Great Barrington for generations. They are usually farmers or former mill workers. In either case, they are currently in financial difficulties and are resentful of the wealth they see in recent domestic immigrants. They are thought of as protectors of the ‘real’ Great Barrington while at the same time are held responsible for overdevelopment as they try to recoup their economic losses by selling or developing land. They are white and active Protestants or Catholics. They are politically conservative and prefer little governmental interference in local affairs. The majority of natives currently in Great Barrington are middle-aged or older as the youth move away because they can not afford to buy homes or start families in their hometown.
- *Transplants*: Individuals who have chosen to move to Great Barrington during their adult lives. Although they live in town full-time, their income comes from remote sources. They tend to either have lucrative New York City careers they can continue at a distance or they live on trust funds. They are white but not as religiously oriented as other groups. They support progressive politics and have directed much of their activism towards participation in the local government and town boards. They came

⁶ The notable exceptions to this were my three interviews with recent Latino immigrants. In those interviews, the main distinction was between the immigrant Latino population and the American natives.

to the area because of its many amenities, and they actively work to maintain those amenities.

- *Second Home Owners:* Individuals who have chosen Great Barrington as their escape from busy city lives. They are predominately from New York City and Jewish. They are very well off economically, and they come to the town with their city ways and a sense of privilege that breeds resentment in others. Their politics are unknown since they choose not to get involved in local politics. They are close to retirement and many will decide to move here full time once they are no longer tied to their jobs and lives in the city. They greatly value the isolation and natural amenities of the area; things that are lacking in their city lives.

The combination of qualities each category represents holds a power in contemporary constructions of community in Great Barrington; boundaries between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ are constructed along these lines. Even people who acknowledge these stereotypes as false and polarizing still tend to incorporate pieces of them in their conversations about the town. There is less awareness, however, of the ways in which this focus on residency and the associated stereotypes negates certain groups. While there are battles between the ‘real’ Great Barrington and the high-amenity Great Barrington, there is little if any mention of racial diversity or recent international immigrants. Deconstructing these stereotypes will not only provide a more comprehensive picture of Great Barrington’s community, it may also assist in understanding how and why the boundaries of various community identities have been constructed to exclude as well as ignore particular groups.

Residency: Layers of Sediment

“There’s a wonderful mix of people who have been here and people who have come here in different- kinda- layers of sediment...” Rick, a recent transplant

Natives

There is disagreement about how long an individual and/or a family must live in the area before being considered a native. Clearly, if you moved to the area from somewhere else you are not a native. However, what about children who were born in the town to parents who moved here? Cynthia, who has two college age children, considers them to be natives since this is the only home they’ve ever known. Gail, a recent college graduate living at home with her parents while looking for a job, feels similarly.

The more common perspective, however, defines natives as the ones whose families have been around for generations. The exact number of generations is not set in stone, but Robert, who moved to the area 9 years ago, reckons that it takes about three generations to be identified as a native. Ralph, whose family has been in the area for at least ten generations, takes it back even further. Depending upon how ‘native’ is being defined, or, rather, what group it’s being distinguished from, he speaks of the “original Yankees” that were followed by the Irish and Italian immigrants around the turn of the last century, who were then, many years later, followed by the hippies and now the New Yorkers and Latinos.

In general, natives are defined as those who were here before the most recent wave of immigrants (domestic or international). In Great Barrington at the moment, this often refers to those whose families were established in the town before the transition

from mill-town/agricultural town to touristic destination. However, the boundaries of this category are fuzzy. The term is most often invoked when one wants to obtain a position of authority and/or legitimacy in relation to town affairs and social interactions.

Transplants

The ambiguity of the term transplant is a reflection of its oppositional position to the term native. Transplants are full-time residents who are not considered natives. This covers a wide range of people. Scott, a lawyer who moved to the area 9 years ago, divides transplants into two groups: the retired hippies, who originally came in the 60's and 70's, and the yuppies (of which he considers himself one), who have come more recently and have managed to continue their predominately metropolitan-based jobs from a distance. Robert refers to this group as 'urban refugees.' He describes them as "reasonably worldly; they have lived places all over the world...and have chosen to settle here. So we have a common ground to start with, an appreciation of this town and this area." Similar to Tuan's (1980) argument, some suggest that they bring a greater appreciation for Great Barrington because even with a greater understanding of options than locals, they have chosen to live there. At times transplants use this 'worldly' experience to claim expertise about what is best for the town.

To put the most recent influx of transplants in context, it is necessary to note that a major source of domestic immigrants to Great Barrington is New York City. After the attacks on the World Trade Center, many families sought the safety and comfort symbolized by rural small-towns such as those in the Berkshires. By moving to Great Barrington and other towns in the area, they were able to stay within commuting range of

the city while avoiding the danger that it represented after 9/11. This post 9/11 influx of transplants brought about a housing crunch that is just starting to level off.

There is another group of newcomers that are not always classified as transplants. They are the individuals who moved to the area for reasons associated with family, romance or employment. This may seem identical to the definition of a stereotypical transplant, but there is a subtle difference. Although they have move to the area recently, they have come for a specific reason that is not directly associated with the amenities in the town. Although they defy specific categorization, they are usually associated with the stereotype (natives or transplants) that their beliefs and social relations most closely resemble.

Second Home Owners

As with the other two categories of residency, second home owners are not a homogenous group. Within second home owners, there's a clear distinction between summer people and weekenders. One man, even though he didn't want to be interviewed, wanted to be sure that I understood the difference between the two groups. He made it clear that summer people had a more legitimate claim on the area due to the nature of their part-time residency. (He was a summer person himself.) This distinction was echoed in my interviews as well. Rebecca, who has had a second home in the area since 1981, comes up from NYC most weekends and then full-time from April through September. Although she initially came for family reasons and as an escape from her NYC life, she has since become more involved in the community and feels very connected. "At this point I have real roots here."

Another second home owner I spoke with, Melody, who had come to the area for weekends for years and only just started coming for the summers, comments that she's "not really a part of the community as a weekender, [I] don't know anyone," however, she does go on to talk about her participation in a neighborhood organization. This supports findings by Stedman (2006) that second home owners are involved in the social networks in their immediate vicinity, but also reinforces the idea that those coming to the area as an escape are not as likely to engage in the broader day-to-day workings of the town.

This distinction, however, is not always consistent. The number of years an individual and/or family has been coming to a second home also factors into one's relationship with the town regardless of one's identity as a weekender or summer person. Two of the second-home owners I spoke with had inherited their Berkshire homes from their parents and had perspectives on the changes within the community reminiscent of natives.

Occupation/Class

The structural changes brought about by the shift to amenity-based development have created a new class structure. The agricultural and industrial working-class is being replaced by a service-oriented working-class that caters to the needs of a growing upper-class that is moving to Great Barrington from elsewhere. Social relations are being adjusted as this shift occurs. For some, there is opportunity in these changes. Others, however, find themselves excluded from the new social networks.

As I indicated in my brief descriptions of stereotypes, it is assumed that natives were previously farmers and mill workers and are currently barely scraping by,

transplants have city incomes and are more comfortable, and second home owners are quite affluent. These categories are based to some degree on the changes in Great Barrington's economic base over the past half century. Even through the 1960's, Great Barrington was a mill town and agricultural center. Many people who consider themselves natives identify with the associated occupations. There is still farming in the area, but the majority of farms have closed.⁷ This is particularly true of the dairy industry which used to be dominant in the area. There is a general lament about the closing of the mills,⁸ the demise of the farming industry and the general lack of working-class jobs in the area. The lack of lucrative working-class employment opportunities and the rising property values have driven many natives as well as transplants out of town. This is exemplified in David's repetition of a common saying amongst natives that "You can't afford to buy the house you live in." This statement connotes the injustice and frustration of being priced out of your own hometown.

There are many natives, however, in addition to transplants, who own and run successful businesses in town. Not surprisingly, those who have been able to weather the changes in the past few decades tend to be more optimistic about the direction of development in Great Barrington than those who have not been able to maintain viable businesses. According to my research, business success is not directly related to any type of residency, although the assumption exists that transplants and out-of-towners are pushing locals out of the business market in the same way they are being pushed out of the housing market.

⁷ At the same time, there are new agricultural endeavors taking shape. They tend to be community-supported agricultural projects started by transplants.

⁸ The last paper mill in Great Barrington closed during the course of this research.

Most people in Great Barrington today work in tertiary and quaternary industries – sales and information. This is consistent with the amenity-based development and the ability for many to telecommute to work in NYC. As Larry points out, living in Great Barrington and staying connected to jobs and markets elsewhere has been made possible because of “the internet and other abilities to do work from home.” Technology has facilitated the influx of new people who are able to do business elsewhere while living in Great Barrington.⁹ Often this includes salaries above local economic standards creating and reinforcing class distinctions between natives and transplants.

It is important to note, however, that not all natives and transplants are in this situation. There are natives whose families have been very well off for generations. Their stories and the associated historical class structures are not often mentioned in discussions about the ‘real’ Great Barrington. Stories about contemporary Great Barrington tend to victimize natives who are economically excluded from the town while not mentioning a similar process among transplants. Patrick, for example, was put in the similar position to many natives when he had to sell his home to pay the bills. He and his family are now renting, unable to purchase a new home given the current housing market. Economic difficulties are usually associated with those left out of the new class structure – predominately natives. It is clear from my interviews, however, that the high cost of living and exclusive nature of the town make it difficult for a wide range of people to survive economically.

The wealth of second home owners, which is assumed to be high, and transplants with large amounts of disposable income are regarded with a mix of disdain and

⁹ The notable exception to this increase in flexibility due to technology is the lack of cell phone coverage. There has been debates raging for years as to whether or not Great Barrington should have a cell tower. Many people who image the area as a pristine area use health arguments to stall the siting of a tower.

appreciation. It is the double edged sword of amenity-based development: an increase in economic activity and tax base at the same time that property values and the price of services is growing disproportionately to local incomes. Rosalie, a native, notes that “They [weekenders and new folks] do help our tax base, and they don’t have kids, which is a good thing, so our school doesn’t get bombarded with extra kids.” It is important to note, however, that there are second home owners such as Beth who have inherited these properties and struggle to pay for upkeep and taxes. These individuals do not have the assumed income of most second home owners.

Multiple interviewees mentioned what Ralph referred to as the “new trust fund hippies” with a tone of disdain. The underlying frustration was related to the working-class identity of the town. These hobbyists are not financially dependent on their endeavors, and they mock ‘real’ farmers and business owners by ‘playing’ farmer and ‘playing’ shop owner. Whether or not one visibly ‘works’ for their living is seen as an important class distinction.

Many of the new jobs being created in town are low-paying, service-oriented positions. The majority of these positions are being filled by a new wave of immigrants, most of whom are Latino. These individuals are filling in an important component in the new class structure. They are creating a new working-class population at the same time that many residents lament the loss of the industrial working-class. Legal, racial, and language factors combine to keep this population partially concealed and therefore outside of much of the debates about community in Great Barrington.

Religion

There are over 20 places of worship in the town of Great Barrington. Ralph told the history of the town by describing the houses of worship starting on the south side of main street and moving north. You first come upon St. James' Episcopal church and the Congregational church, representing the early Protestants. Then you come to St. Peter's Catholic Church which was built by the Irish and Italian Catholics. Moving slightly out of the downtown area, you come to the Hevreh, the newest house of worship built by the growing Jewish population. In addition to this are the Zion Baptist church, the Quaker Friends Meeting house, and the Unitarian Universalists among others.

There is currently no mosque in the town, but Gary spoke about a group of African-American Muslims who bought a mansion just south of town in the 1940's. There was tension between the group and the town which was manifest in the town's insistence that the organization pay taxes. They refused and eventually left town.

Class distinctions get interwoven with religious affiliation in the history of Great Barrington. When the Catholics arrived about 100 years ago, they were primarily laborers in a town run by the protestants. The recent wave of international immigrants (predominately Catholic) is filling a similar role. The domestic immigration of Jews, however, is associated with the development of second home ownership, and, as mentioned above, a wealthier class of people.

There is debate within the town regarding the level of anti-Semitism. Some people believe the term New Yorker is code for Jew. This is important as the label is often used in a derogatory manner. Others believe New Yorker is a more general category of wealthy, arrogant outsiders. It is evident from my interviews that some

degree of anti-Semitism is present. I heard it acknowledged as such by some locals and there are some Jews who confirm its existence. Sharon, a Jewish second home owner, says that most people would deny the anti-Semitism, but you can read it between the lines. She described being referred to as 'you people' in a way that made it clear the speaker meant Jews.

Membership to a religious faith and activity in a local house of worship provides a strong sense of connection and an active network of support for many people in Great Barrington. In my conversations with people who identified themselves as active religiously, I heard this theme of connection and community echoed from the Protestants, Catholics, Baptists, Jews and Quakers. While religion provides an important social connection for many, others are not religiously active or involved in religious communities. This, however, does not mean that they wouldn't be clumped with a particular religious group if they or their families have a historical link with that religion. This is particularly true in the case of the Jews and is part of the power of the stereotype. Familial or ancestral relations become determinant of perceived individual identity.

Age

The average age in Great Barrington is above the state average: 40.3 years versus 36.5 years (city-data.com). This difference is assumed to be a combination of 20-30 year olds leaving the area to find work and affordable housing and people moving to the area for retirement. A common concern among locals is the way in which the young generation is being pushed out. There aren't many locally-based jobs that can support an individual or family renting or buying a house. As John noted, you almost have to have made a name for yourself and be established in your career before you move to the

Berkshires. His 12 year old son agreed, adding that as much as he liked the area and wanted to stay here, he knew he couldn't afford to. Gail, a recent college graduate who grew up in Great Barrington, echoed this as she spoke about her frustration with her inability to find work and housing in her hometown and the realization she might have to move to a city to find work. "I like it here. I don't really want to establish myself in the city."

Another age-category that requires attention in Great Barrington are the teenagers, the 'youth.' In the 1990's there were a series of serious drug and alcohol related accidents and deaths among the local youths. In 1999, Amanda Root, a 19-year-old high school drop-out, helped found the Railroad Street Youth Project, a local organization to help empower young people and integrate them into the community. While there are now significantly more programs for the youth through the Railroad Street Youth Project and the South Berkshire Community Center, there is still some contention, especially in the downtown area, about teen-agers hanging out in front of businesses and in the back parking lot.¹⁰

The position of seniors and retirees in Great Barrington is very much determined by economic factors. Melody and Larry both spoke of concerns about Great Barrington becoming a retirement community for the wealthy as people transition from weekenders to summer people to full-time residents upon retirement. While this does happen in some cases, most of the second home owners I spoke with do not intend to move to the area full-time. They value their time in Great Barrington as a piece of their larger experiences.

¹⁰ Specific issues related to this situation will be explored in Chapter 5.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is subsidized housing in Great Barrington for seniors who are on fixed incomes and/or are having economic difficulties. For this population, conversations do not revolve around which of the 32 restaurants to eat in, but, rather, the rising cost of food at the grocery stores. Sheila, who works at the senior center, laments the fact that the people who helped make the town what it is are now becoming excluded from it. One of the important services offered by the senior center is a transportation program that helps seniors get to medical appointments, to activities and to the stores. In a rural area with limited public transport, this is an invaluable service for many potentially isolated individuals.

Race and Ethnicity

“Blinded by the white” --Charlene

According to the 2000 census, Great Barrington is 91.2% White Non-Hispanic, 3.1% Black, 3.0% Hispanic, 1.3% other races and 1.4% two or more races. While at some points in history of Great Barrington the ethnicities of the white non-hispanics would have been an important means of classification, they do not figure greatly in contemporary discourses. Now, if anyone talks about racial and ethnic diversity, they are usually referring to the small African-American population and the growing Latino population.

There is a long and well-documented history of African-Americans in Great Barrington, the most well-known of whom was WEB Dubois. The population has never been particularly large, but Susan, an older African-American, noted that within her lifetime there had been an increase in African-American children in the schools. When her children were in school, it was rare for more than one African-American to be in any

grade level. This made socializing and dating very difficult in a time that saw little integration. In Susan's opinion, this question of social life is a major discouragement in terms of professional African-Americans moving to the area. Additionally, Great Barrington historically had the reputation among African-Americans as a town you didn't stop in if you could help it. Given that the local African-American youth are experiencing the same economic difficulties as others their age, it is not likely that the African-American population will grow significantly in the near future.

On the other hand, the Latino population is growing quickly, much faster than is indicated by the census data. Roberto, who came to Great Barrington two years ago, describes the area as "tranquilo – un pequeno lugar con bastante trabajo. La gente aqui piensa diferente que la gente de la ciudad." (peaceful – a small place with enough work. The people here think differently than the people in the city.) Many recent immigrants, with and without documents, have found work in restaurant kitchens, doing landscaping and cleaning houses. Another important factor for making the area attractive to this recent wave of immigrants is the English as a Second Language classes and other services available with translation for Spanish speakers.

Robert, a recent transplant, remarked that both the African-American and Latino populations were invisible in Great Barrington. This is clearly related to sheer numbers, but it also has to do with use of space, something I will discuss further in the subsequent chapters. It is also important to note that there are other immigrants in Great Barrington, coming from India, Thailand, and Greece among other locations. When people speak of immigrants, however, they are almost exclusively referring to the Latino population.

Political Orientation

Conservatism, liberalism, progressivism, and interesting mixes of these and other political orientations combine to make for lively conversations in Great Barrington. One can expect to see picketers on major intersections with signs proclaiming “Impeach Bush” and “Stop the War” at least a few days of every week. A local currency, Berkshares, is being experimented with as a way of supporting the local economy. At the same time, the importance of private property and real estate as an investment belie the liberal capitalist structure upon which the town rests. Some of these contradictions were caught in Ben’s description of the town’s population as “petty bourgeois progressives.”

It is stereotypically assumed that the natives are more conservative than the transplants. This, however, is not always the case. I spoke with natives, transplants and second home owners who supported conservative ideas as well as an equal mix of people with progressive ideas. For example, Ralph and Emily are both natives working in the same field, yet Ralph was one of my most conservative respondents and Emily one of the most progressive. Additionally, political differences become difficult to evaluate when the end goals look the same. Conservative politics look very similar to progressive politics when discussing change and development in Great Barrington. Both sides value and want to maintain the character and identity of Great Barrington: natives because it is their history; transplants because there is something unique about the place and made them chose to move there.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, community identities are constructed through the association of particular characteristics with ‘insiders’ and opposing characteristics with

‘outsiders.’ Usually these characteristics are associated with symbols of the community. Their use as boundary markers means that characteristics of individuals help define the very community they are associated with. Following the analysis of this chapter, it is important to note that these characteristics are often stereotypes that obscure the more complex nature of individual and community identities. This is consistent with past research on communities which shows how the idea of community is often used to create an homogenous and egalitarian identity while actually concealing systems of exclusion and inequality (Li 1996; Agarwal and Gibson 1999).

Even though everyone knows people who do not fit into the stereotypes for their type of residency, the labels and stereotypical descriptions of native, transplant and second home owner are frequently invoked during conversations. If someone is placing him or herself in the stereotype, it is because it offers some type of power. Whether it is a ‘legitimate’ claim to the historical community or ‘authority’ over shaping the best future for the town, one’s type of residency can be used to build solidarity and affect or obstruct change in the community.

Grouping others using the stereotypes also forms solidarity, but in an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ manner. When people were not pleased with the way things were going, the invocation of these stereotypes was used to construct an enemy that could be blamed. For example, many people blame the second home owners for the rising property values that are pushing natives out of the community. According to Gallent’s (2007) observations, this blame could in fact be a way of distracting attention from locally controlled factors such as the employment base and educational opportunities. It is easier

to blame someone else for the current situation and easier still if that ‘someone else’ is more of a caricature than a real person.

Type and length of residency are used as a way of associating symbols of community identities with particular individuals. It is easier to identify someone as a native, transplant or weekender than it is to show how they are responsible for social and environmental decline. The connection, however, is implicit in the categorization process. ‘Outsiders’ are inevitably held responsible for the problems the community is facing. The response becomes that of blaming individuals instead of analyzing how the community itself is creating the structures that are causing problems. This becomes apparent during discussions about specific places that are under pressures from development. In the next two chapters, I will explore how this plays out in the creation and maintenance of open spaces as well as the downtown Main Street of Great Barrington.

Chapter 5: Landscape

Nothing is more important to the future of Great Barrington than the attraction of its open space, and the contributions which that resource makes to the Town's environmental quality and amenity, and through that, to the Town's economic vitality.

- Great Barrington Town Plan 1997, p. III G-1

A seemingly innocent appreciation of landscapes and desire to protect local history and nature can act as subtle but highly effective mechanisms of exclusion and reaffirmation of class identity.

- Duncan and Duncan 2003, p.4

The landscape is one of Great Barrington's greatest amenities. Phrases such as 'natural beauty,' 'beautiful scenery,' and 'attractive physical landscapes' became refrains as I asked people to describe the town and its strengths. These sentiments were echoed in real estate advertisements for the area. "A beautiful building lot with space and views." "Beautiful! Beautiful piece of land with great views of the Berkshire Hills." "Pastoral views for this 5 bedroom, 4 bath cape, in an area of fine homes." The scenic quality of Great Barrington is a major selling point. It is part of what defines the area and attracts people to it.

The landscape, however, is not an innocent artifact. It is not merely the backdrop for daily activities. It is the embodiment of social and political processes (Cresswell 1996; Massey 2005) – the very same processes that construct community identities and related systems of inclusion and exclusion. It is constructed, both physically and symbolically, in concordance with dominant ideologies and in support of specific

agendas (Dowler 2005). The construction of landscape is, therefore, intertwined with the construction of community. As Duncan and Duncan (2003) noted:

Landscapes, especially those that are highly controlled, are integral to the performance of social identities. Collective memories, narratives of community, invented traditions, and shared environmental concerns are repeated, performed, occasionally contested, but more often stabilized or fixed in artifactual form.

(p29)

This interconnectedness of the physical and social environments, however, is often ignored with the result being, as Gupta and Ferguson point out, the enabling of “the power of topography to conceal successfully the topography of power” (Gupta and Ferguson in Massey 2005 p.67).

Given this connection between landscape and social processes and the fact that landscape is one of the key amenities in Great Barrington, any analysis of community during amenity-based development would be incomplete without a closer look at the landscape. It is the goal of this and the next chapter to examine the ways in which community identities and their associated values and aesthetics are negotiated through the landscape. This chapter will focus on open spaces and their multiple valuations – productive, consumptive and economic.

Aesthetics are considered a primary resource in Great Barrington, but they are a subjective value. Thus the question must be asked: how is beauty defined and maintained? What are the arguments and philosophical stances taken during debates related to the aesthetics of the landscape? How do conceptions of community and community identity interact with these debates as they are interwoven with discourses

related to history, development, preservation, environmentalism, justice and rights. The material landscape both shapes and is shaped by these debates.

As noted in Chapter 3, the rural landscape is fundamental to the majority of community identities in Great Barrington. For example, the pastoral landscapes underscore both a productive, agricultural community and a consumptive, aesthetically-oriented community. Landscapes can be negotiated in multiple ways to fit the world-views of different community identities. Conservative natives at times invoke progressive environmental laws to keep out development (and new people) from their neighborhoods. Progressive transplants at times support conservation efforts that maintain the agricultural lands of native farmers. Conflicts can arise when the landscape does not equally support the values of divergent community identities as we shall see later in this chapter. However, opportunities for cooperation and inclusion are also possible when landscapes are designed to support multiple meanings.

Open Spaces in Great Barrington

The ‘natural’ landscape (which includes farmlands, forests, and lawns alike) is fundamental to Great Barrington’s amenity-based development. People come here, predominately from New York City, to enjoy this rural aesthetic. They leave behind the urban landscape for, as Bob said, “our little piece of Eden.” The importance of the visual and its contribution to the economy were succinctly stated in the 1973 Town Plan: “Great Barrington’s basic resource is beauty and that its most important land use is residential” (p.x). The definition of beauty, however, varied based on a person’s aesthetic values which were, in turn, related to community, political and environmental values. For some it was areas of ‘untouched’ nature such as the forests (all forests are

second if not third or fourth growth). For some it was the rolling hills of farms creating the pastoral atmosphere. For many it is the combination of these different types of open space land-uses. When combined with the downtown area (to be discussed in the next chapter), the 1997 Town Plan identified the value of these open spaces as follows:

The contrast among these diverse town features – vibrant, village centers with buildings of architectural and historic interest, scenic mountain terrain, working rural landscapes, and the River running throughout the length of the Town – distinguishes Great Barrington among Berkshire communities. (p.1-1)

So how does the town go about exploiting this basic resource while maintaining the associated identity(ies)? While selling property is obviously a key way of benefiting from the demand for a ‘little piece of Eden,’ there’s a realization that too much development would undermine the very thing that is producing the demand: the attractive landscape. Rick hinted at this balancing act:

There is a nearly universal appreciation of the value of nature and community up here - that people understand that they have a good thing...I think there’s more generally an understanding that it’s important to be careful about anything that would disrupt open spaces, the sort of nature...the overall character.

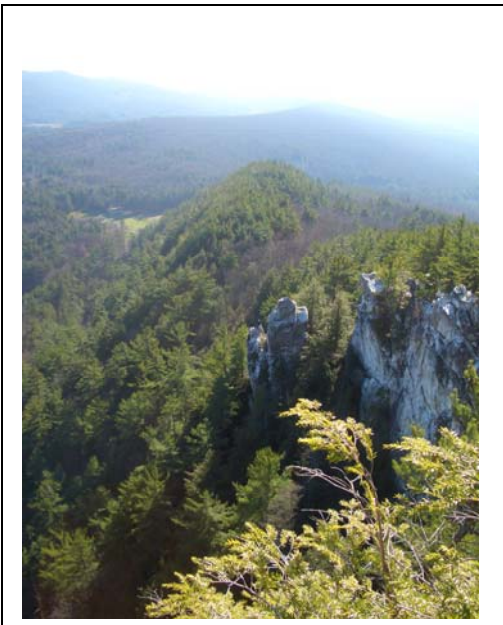
There are differing opinions, however, over how much development is too much. The lines between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ in various community identities come into play when people feel the landscape is threatened. At times the newcomers are held responsible since they are the ones buying the land, and at times the natives are held responsible because they are the ones selling the land. Although not always polarized to

such extremes, there is a clear trend to blame people or forces (eg. the economy) that are outside of an individual's definition of the community.

Nevertheless, there is a shared appreciation for the beauty and value of the landscape. This appreciation manifests itself in efforts to preserve the landscape.

About a third of the Town's land area is reserved for open space, at least to some degree. About 7,000 of the Town's 30,000 acres is State or Federally owned, and another 2,500 acres is owned by the Town, by the non-profit groups, or is used for private recreation, such as golf courses. (Town Plan 1997, III G-1).

Various non-profits and land trusts, such as the Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC), have been acquiring land through donations and purchases. The goal of protecting open spaces and the beautiful landscape is reinforced by discourses of environmentalism, recreation and appreciation for the 'local'. As the BNRC's mission statement says, they place "special emphasis on protecting Berkshire's farms, forests, streams and ridgelines – the great landscape features that give us clean water, fresh air, local produce, healthy wildlife and outstanding recreational opportunities."



Two views from Monument Mountain, Great Barrington, a preservation area.
(photos by author)

Although this type of preservation may safeguard certain lands from development, it does not remove it from the larger discourses of property and wealth. As Duncan and Duncan (2003) point out, “Property relations are encoded in the nature preserves through the conception of nature as capital....The conception of nature is permeated by the language of capitalism, of economic rationality, and of the passing of wealth from one generation to the next” (p.134). As the property values in Great Barrington rise, the future generations for whom the land is preserved become more and more exclusive.

Another important feature of the landscape is agricultural land. The 1997 Town Plan clearly makes this a priority in the following passage:

Only over long geologic time will nature reduce the contrast between mountains and valleys, but the other crucial visual contrasts are at risk of much more rapid erosion of open and agricultural land. Loss of active agriculture reduces the visual quality of the Town, even when the land is not then urbanized. p. III F-2

While farms support a variety of rural community identities by being productive and maintaining the pastoral landscapes, farmers are put in a difficult position. They are doing the work of maintaining the town’s primary resource, its beauty, but they are barely able to make ends meet. As Emily said while looking out over her farm to the multi-million dollar homes lining her property, “It makes my bones sore to think of all the work I do to make their views.”

Farmers in Great Barrington are the actors in a landscape that is consumed through the privileged gaze of those who can afford to buy access to the views. Due to the Western tradition of feminizing the landscape, feminist geographers have shown how

this type of gaze is a masculine one as it looks out over the feminized landscape (Rose 1992). While at times the farmer is seen as the (active) male plower of the (passive) female landscape (Williams 1973), the external gaze of the voyeur shifts this power dynamic. The farmer is now associated with the land and his or her work is now a part of a valuation of the landscape based on aesthetics rather than production.



Rolling farmlands are an important feature in the aesthetics of the local landscape. (photo by author)

In an attempt to ease the burden on farmers that are competing in a market of land-values that are not connected to their use of the landscape (and the related community identities), efforts are being made to make it more economically feasible for farmers to survive. A primary means of maintaining the agricultural lands in Great Barrington is the APR (Agricultural Preservation Restriction program) which allows for agricultural lands to be taxed on their agricultural value rather than their development value in exchange for the agreement that the lands will not be developed. This takes a commitment on the part of the farmer to maintain the lands, because, as Robert said, “It’s easier [and more lucrative] to farm houses than crops.”

Berkshire Grown, a local non-profit organization focused on supporting local agriculture, has found ways to tap into the different discourses around agricultural land.

Barbara, the current director of Berkshire Grown said:

If we say we are trying to support open space, we will find support in our second home community because they moved here for those views. If we say eat locally grown food because it will save your view; that's a message that will be meaningful for that community. If you say keep the local farmers in business because we want them to continue to be able to farm, there's a different audience that might like that message.

Agricultural land, however, is not everyone's ideal. Tensions arise between productive and consumptive uses of agricultural lands. New home owners who have bought homes near farms to appreciate the pastoral views will at times complain about the things that come with a working farm such as the smells and the early morning noise of tractors. For this reason, there is a "right to farm" controversy in the area where towns have been passing laws to protect farmers from ex-urban neighbors who don't like smells and noises.

Anyone I visited in Berkshires whose land abutted either state parks, conservation land, or APR land made a point of mentioning it. Part of the value of their beautiful views was that they wouldn't change, and this was appreciated by both full- and part-time residents. A typical real estate advertisement read as follows: "Beautiful in-town building lot: "surrounded on 2 sides by conservation land, it's within walking distance of Great Barrington's Main Street." While this beauty is fundamental to everyone's

concept of the area, as more land is 'saved' from development, access to that beauty becomes more exclusive.

There is much debate about the responsibilities of the town to control growth and the rights of individuals to do what they want on their own land. This issue is illustrated in the recently approved Scenic Mountains Act. The gently rolling mountains that surround Great Barrington are key to the landscape aesthetic. Some new home construction took advantage of this and developers built homes on ridgelines and the upper slopes of the mountains to obtain the best views for the future home owners. There was a major backlash to this trend, however, as other people complained about their views being ruined by these new homes, these blights on the landscape. Frank captured this sentiment when he said,

It really bugs me to see big houses on top of ridges. For me it's just a detraction from scenic beauty...I hate to see that, but on the other hand, who am I to tell whoever owns that property that if that's how it's zoned they can't build a big house there.

The town reacted by passing the Scenic Mountains Act in 2006 which was approved by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation in 2007. The preamble to this document states,

We live surrounded by scenic mountains. If a mountain or a related erodible watershed is to be altered, the regulations that follow provide protection for the Town's watershed resources, scenic areas in question, and due process for those who propose changes.

The intention is for the development of ridgelines and steep slopes to be virtually impossible, no matter how much money the land owner had. It is important to note that protection of the area's most important resource, beauty, was made legitimate by combining it with environmental and natural resource concerns. This is consistent with Duncan and Duncan's (2003) findings that aesthetic values were made legitimate through their coupling with environmental and historical arguments.

The dilemma inherent in the preservation of open spaces and beautiful landscapes is the associated rise of adjacent property values. The more beautiful the landscape, the more expensive the land, and, therefore, the more exclusive the area. This type of exclusion is not usually directed against any specific type of people, but, rather, it is in terms of positive goals. Arguments for maintaining a certain 'quality of life' and the 'rural identity' of the town are often related to slowing down the influx of new people. It is interesting to note that this holds true for natives, transplants and weekenders. Community identities based on concepts of a rural town, be they historically based and/or idealized, lead to a desire to keep population density down, and, hence, people out.

During their research in Bedford, NY, the Duncans came across similar situations. "Exclusion itself is not the goal, but the means for preserving the 'look of the landscape'. The aim is not to intentionally exclude types of people, but to prevent an overall increase in the number of people and houses in the town." (Duncan and Duncan 2003) p.29. To emphasize the point that it's not about keeping out a certain type of person, Rick followed up on his comments about preservation of the landscape cited above by saying,

I think similarly about density and crowding and population and I think there's, you know, among people from all strata of society, I think there's, kind of, a

recognition of the balances at play. You can't be all against weekend people because they bring money and jobs to the community and that helps people live their lives...the rich people can't be obnoxious and intolerant of people that are rural or different than them because they recognize that it's a place where they are sort of cultural guests. It's kind of their place but not their place at the same time. Social exclusion is an interesting result of policies that are developed by those in the town who think of themselves as politically progressive, but the more land that is removed from development and the more environmental restrictions put on land-use, the more difficult it is for people to afford to live in the area. Policies such as the Scenic Mountains Act are aimed at controlling development by the wealthy, but the effect is to make the area less available to people in lower income brackets.

The ability to control the way spaces are used – either through ownership or laws – is a way of expressing power and controlling the construction of community. According to Cresswell (1996), the “right to exclude is a major pillar of capitalism, guaranteeing and legitimating private property” (p.90). Private property, and its connection to the free market, are intertwined with liberalism's focus on individual rights over public ‘goods.’. This sentiment is found in John's statement that: “I'm a firm believer that a person who owns property ought to be able to do whatever with that property within reason...” He goes on, however, to talk about the dilemma that creates when people don't agree about what ‘within reason’ is. “There are things that bug me and things that bug other people, they might not always be the same so there are some inconsistencies.” It is here that we begin to see challenges to the liberal philosophy.

Debates about private property and landscape tend to raise questions about individual rights and communal 'goods' (Duncan and Duncan 2003). In general, my respondents felt there should be some kind of control over growth and development. There is a lot at stake for the entire town given its reliance on the landscape. As the 1997 Town Plan warned against "the sprawling of development along the valleys both obliterates countryside and diminishes villages." (p. III F-2). There is the assumption that there should be some definition of the 'common good' that could counter the individualistic liberal philosophy. In trying to define what the common good is and how it should be enforced, more communitarian arguments came to light. Just as communitarians see community as more than just a grouping of people, landscape is seen as more than just individual plots. Questions arise about the "true cost," as Scott puts it, of ruining open spaces and losing green spaces. This logic assumes that the community, not just the market, should have a say in shaping the landscape.

This, however, is where the variety of community identities active in Great Barrington complicate things. How is the community defined, and who is defining the 'goods'? For many of my interviewees, the inability of locals, aged 20 through 35, to afford to live in their hometown is definitely a problem. Property values based on what New York second home owners can support immediately price natives out of the market. The 'old' Great Barrington, the rural, working-class town is feared to be disappearing. But, on the other side, most people felt uncomfortable pointing the finger at any particular seller because they appreciated their right to make a significant profit from their property.

Access to and use of lands is another point of controversy between private property rights and communal 'goods.' As more land is sold for residential development, the sight of 'No Trespassing' signs is becoming increasingly common. Areas that were previously used for hunting, fishing, and hiking are becoming off-limits to the public. Those who own land are able to determine appropriate uses for it without consideration for common 'goods.' While environmental regulations help control the exploitation of ecosystems, there are no systems in place to negotiate public vs. private use of lands. If it isn't a publicly owned area, then it is at the discretion of the land owner to determine its use. The exclusive nature of this is readily apparent.

During my conversation with Charlene, she became very contemplative when I asked her about things in the town that could use improvement.

We haven't figured out a better way to use land because we're still in a capitalist economy where money is what we value most, so people sell their land for as much money as they can get. It is hard to convince someone not to do this. That to me is one of the hardest things. How do you do that? It's just really tough. How do you find a way to use land to develop affordable housing when you have a community with enough people that can develop and then buy very expensive houses?

Another focus for 'common goods' can be found in the environmental politics of the area. Protecting watersheds, air quality, and wildlife corridors are often considered worthwhile agendas, but these efforts tend to be used to control social as well as physical landscapes. Developers must jump through a huge number of hoops to do anything in town. As Rosalie, who is active in local politics, says,

...the [town] boards just give everybody a bad time, and I don't agree with that at all. If you're not abiding by the bylaws, that's one thing, but if it's just because that's five people's opinion doesn't mean that's the right to go...Planning and zoning boards, conservation commission, scenic mountain act, river waterway act. There's a lot of things that are just too much. There are just too many restrictions in town.

The use of zoning and conservation bylaws to slow down approval processes creates, similar to what Duncan and Duncan (2003) noted in Bedford, a very conservative process underneath progressive politics.

In a related incidence, Ralph told me the story about a local fight against a new home site in his part of town. The man who was planning to build turned a lot of people off with his arrogance. He kept talking about the amazing house he was going to build. The land he had purchased was by the side of one of the rivers in town, a river that was part of the town's water supply. Knowing that they had no right to object to an ostentatious home in their neighborhood based on their personal preferences, they invoked environmental discourses to stop the development. Due to the home's proximity to the river, they were able to pass environmental bylaws to stop the development and preserve a portion of the physical and social landscapes. Ralph's experience illustrates what Duncan and Duncan (2003) note as a legitimization of the romantic sense of place when what were previously seen "as politically weak aesthetic criteria" are turned into acceptable criteria of environmental and historic preservation (p.172).

Conclusion

Great Barrington's responses to concerns about the impact of liberal policies on the landscape are connected to community identities. For those who feel they are being pushed out of their home town for economic reasons, there is a belief that there should be systems in place to adjust for the influx of money and the privilege it brings. The APR is an example of such a support system. For those who feel that aesthetics are a public resource, they believe that they should be protected against individual short-sightedness. The Scenic Mountains Act is another example of this type of attempt to control the free market. Both of these efforts to construct a particular version of Great Barrington and its landscape can support multiple community identities. Preserving working farm land connects to both the agricultural identity and the aesthetic appreciation of pastoral views. However, combining the APR with the emigration of former mill-workers makes clear that social support systems are not universal; they are there to support those who assist in creating a specific image of Great Barrington.

The ways in which the landscape is constructed, both physically and symbolically, is fundamental to the creation of community and its systems of inclusion and exclusion. The landscape, like the community, is not a fixed entity. It is a constant negotiation, and, as such, is responsive to political, social and environmental changes. The valuation of the aesthetic related to the current community identity based on amenities has led to systems of exclusion within the community. In the next chapter, I turn to a different aspect of the landscape of Great Barrington: Main Street. I will explore how community identities interact with debates about the control and use of space.

Chapter 6: Main Street

“Downtown Main Street is a classic of its kind, characterized by historic “commercial block” buildings and tall storefronts, with pedestrians continually passing along its sidewalks.” Great Barrington Town Plan, 1997; P.1-1

The four block downtown area stands out as a powerful symbol of Great Barrington in people’s perceptions of community identity. Changes to the specific stores along the main shopping streets as well as control over the use of spaces are often controversial and heated topics. I have shown how the landscapes of open spaces discussed in the last chapter are constructed through social forces, but it is in the built environment of downtown Great Barrington where most people connect the creation of place with the creation of community. This is the area where people gather; it is the symbol of the community.

As was established previously, place is a constant negotiation (Cresswell 2004; Massey 2005), and, as such, it’s flexible and responsive to the social environment around it. Community identities become dominant, in part, through their control of places and their symbols. Cresswell (1996) articulates this process clearly in the following passage:

Place reproduces the beliefs that produce it in a way that makes them appear natural, self-evident, and commonsense. ...thus places are active forces in the reproduction of norms – in the definition of appropriate practice. Place constitutes our beliefs about what is appropriate as much as it is constituted by them. (p.16)

The ability to control space, therefore, and have it reflect specific community identities and ideologies is a very powerful, if unstable, tool.

In Great Barrington, the negotiations that are Main Street are a combination of competing contemporary community identities and their visions of the past. New England villages have long been an icon of idealized American life, most notably as recorded through the paintings of Norman Rockwell. Great Barrington is trying to tap into some of that nostalgia for its tourism market, but there is disagreement about what it is to be memorialized. Contemporary constructions of community and community identity draw upon symbols from the past that best support their current values. Therefore, there are as many images of the past to be memorialized as there are contemporary conceptions of community. The following are a few examples of how the past and present come together in relation to Main Street:

- The aesthetics of Main Street – the particular historical look of the downtown. For those who are involved in selling the town as a commodity, the uniqueness and aesthetics are an important amenity. Additions and changes are made to create a more attractive and historic look to area such as lining the Main Street with trees and renovating buildings to look more ‘authentic.’
- A symbol of small-town country life as defined in opposition to the city. The country is seen to hearken back to a simpler time when life was focused on small localities; the current era of globalization has brought with it a nostalgia for small town life (Duncan and Duncan 2003). Main Street in this conception is focused on local businesses and face-to-face interactions. This is a particularly strong pull for exurbanites looking for an alternative to the city.
- Traditional New England values: Main Street is meant to be an embodiment of the community so valued in New England towns; a community characterized by what

Meinig (1979) identifies as “an intimate, family-centered, Godfearing, morally conscious, industrious, thrifty, democratic *community*” (Meinig 1979) (p.165). For this conception, it is the use of the space that is most important not just the façade.

In Chapter 3, I identified a couple dominant community identities which I labeled the ‘amenity-based’ Great Barrington and the ‘real’ Great Barrington. I also identified alternative community identities which were on the fringes of debates about community. In this chapter, I will show how these identities are negotiated via Main Street. I will explore the importance of control of space in the construction of community.

Main Street as Amenity

While all of the towns in Berkshire County share similar natural amenities in terms of landscape, the downtown of Great Barrington is one of its unique features. Great Barrington’s downtown pivots around the intersection of Main Street and Railroad Street. The buildings in this area are two to three stories high with storefronts on the street level and office and apartment spaces above. The sidewalks are wide with large oaks framing the street. Crosswalks giving pedestrians right-of-way slow the flow of traffic through the center of town. Large churches and municipal buildings flank the business district along Main Street marking the transition into the less dense commercial developments along Route 7 to the north and south.

As Larry stated so simply, “Main Street is a gem...it has a certain charm.” Identifying what that charm is has been a key focus in the revitalization of the downtown during the past few decades. The turn of the century architecture, the lack of large chain stores, and the variety of goods and services offered all help establish the small town



The top left photo is of Railroad Street and the other two are of Main Street. There is a very conscious effort in Great Barrington to create a pedestrian and consumer friendly environment. (photos by author)

atmosphere that is so prized in Great Barrington. Great Barrington has sought to augment its small-town attractiveness by tapping into the market of cultural activities in the region. Although this has included a proliferation of art galleries, antique stores, and high-end boutiques, Great Barrington has made its niche in the culture market of the Berkshires through restaurants. Other nearby towns offer cultural amenities such as Tanglewood, Jacob's Pillow, and various theater companies. Great Barrington, however,

is known as the place to go for good food. In addition, the building of the Triplex Theater ten years ago has also heightened the evening activity in downtown Great Barrington.

Capitalizing on this small town quality has been a focus as the town has marketed itself more and more as a tourist and leisure get-away. The 1973 Town Plan noted the beginning of this trend when it said,

Present economics and mass production...often result in pervasive sameness and preclude the attention to detail and dignity which produced Great Barrington's commercial center.... The town is distinctive, and distinction attracts people; it should be re-enforced" (P. 46).

This challenge has been taken on by various interest groups in Great Barrington. The 1997 Town Plan described local coalitions of "town officials, downtown businesses, and concerned citizens [that] are working to support and reinforce Main Street as a local business center and as a showcase of a classic, vital, small town Main Street" (p. III C-1).

These coalitions are a combination of natives, transplants and second home owners, but the symbolic image they are working to create varies among participants. For some, it is a version of history specific to Great Barrington. For others, it is a version of history in which Great Barrington is symbolic of larger stories. A couple of decades ago, Meinig (1979) noted a trend in other New England towns in which exurbanites were moving to New England and "armed with considerable wealth, taste, and a vision of what a New England Village should look like" (p.176) and subsequently remodeling the towns to fit the idealized symbol they associate with New England towns. This coincides with Spain's (1993) observation that newcomers to amenity rich rural areas are often more

equipped with financial and political resources than natives and are, therefore, able to greatly influence the material and symbolic construction of places. Combining these resources with the definition of the country as an idealized past in opposition to the contemporary conflict of the city, Meinig (1979) describes how:

The exurbanite is living consciously and determinedly in a symbolic landscape, having selected that setting for a special way of life, one widely understood and admired by Americans. For exurbanites, the New England Village is a way of connecting their lives to an idealized past. (p.177)

I do not want to imply, however, that this conception of the past is less legitimate than those based on the specific history of the town or that it is exclusively a newcomer's conception. Everyone is living in a symbolic landscape and chooses to construct place and community with the symbols that best fit their world-views when they have the opportunity. The difference, however, is that the 'amenity-based' Great Barrington appears to have more power in defining Main Street and the community it supports. To the extent that working-class businesses support a particular aspect of the 'amenity-based' community identity, the two main community identities in Great Barrington have negotiated a mutually-beneficial conception of Main Street.

The loss of the 'real' Main Street

Some people worry that too much attention paid to maintaining the classic look of Great Barrington's Main Street will turn it into another Stockbridge or Lenox or, worse, the Hamptons. There is a constant negotiation between developing the amenity-based aspects of the local economy and keeping the 'working' aspects of the town that people value. Everyone acknowledges the importance of tourism and leisure activities to the

town, but there is concern that these activities and the associated businesses are taking over the town and its identity. No one I spoke with, be they natives, transplants or second home owners, wanted Great Barrington's downtown to become a façade of a working downtown where only boutiques and high-end specialty stores were found. The question, however, is when will that point be reached. For some, it's still an acceptable mix. For others people, it's too late – the town's already there.

Sheila and Rosalie, both of whom have lived in Great Barrington for over 60 years, get frustrated when talking about the changes downtown. The fact that they can't shop downtown anymore due to the type and price of merchandise reinforces the feeling that, as Sheila said, "This isn't Great Barrington anymore." Rosalie was more specific when she said, "I want to go back to the old Great Barrington; I want to see it go back to stores you could afford, stores local people could afford."

Many people joked about the fact that the locals shopped on the outskirts of town, in the K-Mart plaza to the north and the Big Y plaza to the south. These comments were often made with an undertone of frustration that the downtown was no longer for the locals. The heart of the town had been given over to tourists while the locals skirted the congestion. This sentiment was echoed by transplants and second home-owners who found the hassle, if not the price, of shopping downtown to also keep them away. Lori spoke of being "pushed to the edges of town," and Bob and Sara strained to identify that point where the draw of the amenities of a place (such as the shopping and restaurants downtown Great Barrington) are outweighed by the hassle of their popularity. Bob said:

As much as I think I like [going out], I don't want to plan everything in advance. I don't want to worry that if I don't have reservations we can't get in. I don't

want to start our Saturday night at 5 o'clock in the afternoon to make sure we could get in to dinner before a movie. But at a certain point, as they say, 'It's too popular, people don't go there anymore'.

Managing the success of the restaurants and other attractions in downtown Great Barrington has proven to be difficult for the town. The double-edged sword that provides the economic activity for many local businesses also brings the traffic congestion and a shift in the types of stores in the downtown area. Many of the stores that used to provide daily goods, such as furniture stores, shoe stores, and grocery stores, have been replaced by high-end restaurants, galleries, and boutiques. Given the current plethora of restaurants, galleries, gift shops, and antique stores, the following description from the 1973 Town Plan is almost humorous in its out-datedness: "Great Barrington is not especially rich in tourist-oriented specialities, claiming three galleries, three gift shops and five antique stores." (P.38).

There are mixed feelings about these changes. For some, it is a symbol of growth and prosperity, offering a wider variety of material goods and cultural activities. It is here that you find the use of the term ‘sophistication’ in the Chamber of Commerce’s label of ‘sophistication at a country pace.’ For others it is just another example of Great Barrington losing its identity. A common example used to illustrate the downtown changes is Gatsby’s, a clothing store. In trying to describe the changes to merchandise available downtown, Sharon said the following with a bit of exasperation in her voice: “Go to Gatsby’s. It used to be that you’d go in there and it was a plain store. Now there are jeans for \$200.”



Gatsby's on Railroad Street. (photos by author)

However, there are still places in the downtown area that people hold on to as icons of that working, vital downtown that is so prominent in some conceptions of the town. For example, when Rebecca was originally looking to buy a second home in Western Massachusetts in the early 80's, Great Barrington drew her attention immediately. She expressed this during our conversation:

The thing I liked about Great Barrington in those years was it felt like, in contrast to Pittsfield which was sort of the retail hub of the north, this was the same thing

in the south. There was shoemaker's and carpenter's and hardware stores – you know, stuff people need...but Great Barrington's changed, and I don't love the changes. I'm not the person that was interested in the art galleries or the fancy restaurants...I miss the old Great Barrington...What I really want is Carr Hardware to stay there.

Carr Hardware, located on the west side of Main Street just north of Railroad Street, was the most frequently mentioned location when people described what Great Barrington used to be and what they wanted to see stay. There is a tension evident between the desire to construct an image of the classic New England Main Street (ala Norman Rockwell) and to maintain a downtown that provides for the needs of locals. This is where Carr Hardware comes into play as one of the last clear icons of the working-class mill town that it once was.



Carr Hardware on
Main Street.
(photo by author)

At this point it is important to return to the idea referenced above about the selective use of historic symbols in the conceptualization of the past. Place-identities are based upon references to the past, and preservationists of place are “seeking to fix, to stabilize, the identity of a particular place, but around an identity which itself is most

unlikely to be the product of an autochthonous history” (Massey 1994) p.8. Carr Hardware, for example, is a working class store, but it is also the only national chain store on Main Street (it is a TruValue Hardware store). I point this out not to delegitimize Carr Hardware’s symbolic importance to many people, but, rather, to emphasize the point that debates about conservation of particular places are complex due to their multi-layered meanings.

Controlling social relations through Main Street

As discussed in the previous section, Main Street is seen as a symbol of the community, and the changing nature of the stores and the clientele they serve is a reflection of a particular view of the community. The social relations found on Main Street are also constructed by the definition of appropriate and inappropriate use of spaces. Debates about Main Street are usually centered on the binary conceptions between the ‘real’ and ‘amenity-based’ Great Barrington, but one can also find the articulation of alternative community identities through variations in the use of space in Main Street. Cresswell (1996) argues that conflicts over the appropriate use of a place underscore different views of appropriate social relations. The ability to define and enforce the ‘correct’ use of a place when a conflict arises is in the hands of those with the power to make their ideology dominant.

A few people I spoke with had very specific views of what downtown should look like and how it should be used. The most eloquent was William, someone who has spent a significant amount of the past two decades developing buildings in Great Barrington’s downtown. His view is that the Main Street area should function like a cross between a mall and a town square. The ideal is good one-stop-shopping with the right mix of stores

that dove-tail with the local market - something for everyone. William is one who feels like the mix has gone too far towards the ‘cutesy’ and ‘impractical.’ He refuses to rent spaces to galleries, antique stores or professionals in his downtown buildings. His vision is to recreate the traditional downtown that works to bring people together. In his words, he envisions “an artificial town square where people can rub elbows, see their neighbors and chit chat.”

William’s conception of the downtown as both a mall and a town square is interesting in terms of use and control of the space. Contemporary malls have taken over the traditional role of the central business district of many towns and cities. These malls, however, are owned and managed by private firms and strictly regulate the use of the space. Anyone who is not involved in the primary activity of the mall (ie. selling or buying goods) is watched with close attention if not outrightly asked to leave. A town square, on the other hand, is a place where loitering is acceptable and is expected. William’s examples of functioning town squares came from his experiences in Mexico where the town square is the gathering place of the community.

The presence of youth on Main Street highlights the tensions between these two separate visions of the downtown. There are a couple of key areas where teenagers like to hang out. The parking lot behind Railroad Street is one, another is on Main Street just outside of Barrington House, one of the main structures in the downtown area. They often sit in the doorway to the building talking with friends. There is often conflict between these adolescents and the owner of Barrington House because he says they are blocking the entry to his building and intimidating customers. They say they are just hanging out on a public street. When he asked them why in that particular spot, they said

it was because they wanted to be seen. His voice betrayed his frustration with this situation when he told me the story, yet one might argue that this is a success in William's idea of creating a space downtown that was being used as a town square.

The owner of Barrington House is not alone in frustration with the youth on Main Street. John mentioned a conversation with his mother who complained that she found the teenagers intimidating and didn't like walking past them on Main Street. While he himself didn't find a problem with them hanging out there, he could understand his mother's perspective. According to Larry, the recently completed community center was designed to address some of the needs for this age group – to give them a place to go. The community center, however, was built outside of the downtown area, far from the schools, and has ended up being more for older folks and daycare programs.

Another organization in town, the Railroad Street Youth Project (RSYP), was started in 1999 by local youth after a series of drug related deaths. In addition to its youth-oriented programming, RSYP provides a drop-in center for youth in the downtown area. The success of their programs, however, has brought some backlash from the individuals in town. Carol, who works with RSYP said:

There are many people that think that...well, they blame Railroad Street for the kids hanging around downtown. They blame Railroad Street for anything. They think that the kids that go to Railroad Street are the bad kids...but what I tell people is that it's *every* kid. All types of kids go to Railroad Street.

At the time of my research, the RSYP was in the process of looking for a new space because its lease was not being renewed. The difficulty of finding a centrally located space that did not have an exorbitant rent was causing the organization much concern.

According to George, a man in his early twenties who spent his late teens in Great Barrington, the issue is not that Railroad Street is bringing kids downtown, it's that there aren't other places for youth to be. According to George:

If you're spending money at local businesses, that's almost always fairly comfortable, essentially because a lot of young people run the counters at these places. I get the sense that it's not totally cool to hang out like in the parking lot or even out here sometimes [in front of the coffee shop]...there seems like there's a tension, but it seems like it really depends on like how the kids are dressed, how often they're here, if they work here or not.

George went on to describe run-ins he had had with local business owners who accused him of loitering. The fact that loitering is invoked with teenagers hanging around but not with tourists sitting on benches eating ice-cream speaks volumes about appropriate use of space and the way that is controlled. This supports Cresswell's (1996) argument that when different uses of a place come into conflict, it is a conflict between different spatial ideologies. Those with the power to define the appropriate use of a place, such as what type of action is loitering, are able to impose their spatial ideology on others. George was particularly attuned to this dilemma, as illustrated in the following comment: "Especially in the summer when there's all these people, tourists and second home owners and people like that who are really expecting one certain thing and they're confronted with a local culture that doesn't really jive with that, that seems like a point of tension."

Interactions between youth and town businesses would not be complete without a mention of the atrium space in Barrington House. The owner has tried various tactics to dissuade teenagers from hanging around this indoor corridor that has kiosks and

restaurants. His current approach is to play opera music constantly in the atrium. This new tactic has added a bit of humor to a situation that is often confrontational; all of the youth I spoke to commented on their new found appreciation for operatic music.

There is another group of people in Great Barrington who are discouraged from using public spaces, but in a much more subtle and invisible manner. In the past decade, the immigrant population in the Berkshires has grown rapidly. Primarily from Latin America, many of the immigrants do not have legal documents. South County has become an attractive area for many immigrants due to the availability of employment, the quality of pay, and the formal and informal support networks that have been created. There is a program offering free English classes that also provides transportation, childcare and information about other support services in the community. The Community Health Program and Volunteers in Medicine also provide free services with translation.

Many of the people I spoke with that were involved in these programs and activities were very positive and optimistic about the support being offered to the new community members, but there is an important piece missing from this picture. Roberto, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, spoke about the fear he and his friends faced every time they went out in the street. “Es más seguro estar en casa. Siempre hay miedo estar en las calles – quien sabe que pasará .” (It’s safer to be at home. There’s always fear to be in the streets – who knows what will happen.) In addition, he echoed a theme that was repeated multiple times by Eduardo, a recent immigrant with documents, that “no hay lugares para descansar. Solo hay el centro, pero no hay parque.” (There aren’t any places to relax. There’s only downtown, but there’s no park.) Central parks are

important areas of social interactions in many Latino cultures, and the lack of such a space adds to the exclusion of the Latino population through the design of public spaces (Duncan and Duncan 2003).

Current development debates

As was noted previously, Great Barrington has historically been the service center for Southern Berkshire County. Shoppers regularly come from Sheffield, Mt. Washington, Egremont, Alford, Monterey and New Marlborough. Many of these towns have experienced much higher levels of second home ownership than Great Barrington (upwards of 60% as opposed to under 10% in Great Barrington). These new part-time residents in addition to the transplants in Great Barrington have created a changing market for businesses in town. The needs of the new 'local' market is different than it was a few decades ago. The challenge for town planners is to meet the needs of a diverse community without perpetuating the systems of exclusion that leave some people feeling like they do not belong.

The 1997 Town Plan provides vague optimism regarding some of these tension in the following statement: "Well-considered development can not only avoid damage, but it can also bring positive reinforcement to cultural and historic preservation, helping to heighten the sense of place which is important both to the Town as a whole and to its villages" (P. III D-2). The question begs to be asked: what exactly is "well-considered development"?

According to the same Town Plan, "[t]he Town wants business growth that serves the needs of local and regional residents, maintaining the balance between these business

types and largely tourist-oriented types.” (P.I-1). The Town Plan identifies some compatible business types include:

telecommunications, computer simulation and motion picture special effects, publishing, health and wellness, agriculture and horticulture, antiques, book stores, arts, graphics, finance, fabric printing, advertising and marketing, nursing homes and assisted living for elders” (P. III C-2).

These are the types of “businesses whose land use development and building needs are compatible with the existing land use and building character of the town” (P. III C-2).

These criteria for selecting appropriate business types reinforce the preservationist tendencies in Great Barrington. As noted before, there is nothing inherently wrong with this tendency as long as it is accompanied by an awareness of the multiple meanings of places and the ways in which control over their use can create systems of exclusion.

The changes to the downtown area of Great Barrington during the past few decades have focused upon consumption-oriented uses of space. The ‘community’ which the new downtown caters to is, in part, being constructed through these changes to the downtown area. There is much debate at the moment about the development of land along the Housatonic River just east of Main Street. Both the old Searles school and the former New England Log Homes site are coming up for development in the near future. Mixed-use zoning is a popular goal for this area, but opinions about the specifics of how it should play out vary greatly. Understanding how downtown development shapes social relations within Great Barrington is paramount to the efforts of groups such as the Alliance for a Healthier Great Barrington that are trying to make a more inclusive and supportive environment in the town.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The recent changes Great Barrington has experienced in regards to its social and physical landscapes are intimately connected with its move towards amenity-based development. The categorization of people according to residency patterns, the new class structure and the increasing consumptive value of the landscape are all related to the town's success at selling itself as a destination. Great Barrington has been packaged simultaneously as a country escape from city and a bit of city culture in the country. The complex dynamic of this relationship underlies many of the tensions and opportunities for the town. What are the symbols of Great Barrington that people value or dislike? What are the symbols of the 'outside' (predominately associated with New York City) that people are trying to embrace or avoid? How does one's position in the social relations of the town affect how these symbols are read in the landscape?

People often speak about the 'new' people in town and the effect they've had on the community (good or bad). Evidence of these negotiations is often found in changes to particular places. On one hand, the downtown area is more vibrant. On the other, stores that used to cater to a working-class clientele are being turning into upscale boutiques. Open spaces are simultaneously being fragmented through new home construction and being protected through preservation efforts. These changes are interpreted as either the beginning of a slippery slope that will ruin that which people value in Great Barrington, necessary adjustments that can be managed but are nevertheless essential for the town to stay viable, or a movement towards a more diverse and inclusive town. In all cases, the community identity is read through the construction of places. As city officials, community organizations and individuals plan for the future

of Great Barrington, they need to address the various conceptions of community active in the town and the role places play in those communities.

The experience of amenity-based development in Great Barrington in terms of changing demographics, class structures and community identities is very similar to other localities going through the same process (e.g. Salletmaier 1993; Lankford 1994; Marcouiller, Kim et al. 2004). The difficulties inherent in this process have been well documented, but there is little available information for towns about how to negotiate these changes. It is for that reason that I am left with the question first posed to me by The Alliance for a Healthier Great Barrington: “What have other towns in this situation done? What can we do to make our community stronger, healthier?” The Alliance didn’t assume that there was a singular description of community or a singular definition of health, but they did believe that there were interpretations and definitions that were more supportive of equality and social justice goals.

The dilemma for towns such as Great Barrington is the need for local solutions to processes that are operating at multiple scales – most of which are beyond the control of the town. International economic policies, the movement of manufacturing jobs overseas, and the consolidation of wealth in the hands of a shrinking minority all contribute to the contemporary experience of Great Barrington. A clear example of this is the local housing market. Property values are out of sync with the local economy; local incomes can not justify the high cost of housing. Instead, they are reflective of the regional wealth of New York City which is, in turn, a core center in international economics. Where, then, does a small town like Great Barrington find its agency in the midst of these larger processes? Control of place creation through zoning has been a

primary approach, but this is not enough. Great Barrington has succeeded at protecting its scenic ridgelines and keeping big box stores out, but these zoning decisions have not proved sufficient to address the social, political and economic stresses the town is experiencing. In fact, depending upon whom you ask, these actions appear to exacerbate the very concerns they are trying alleviate.

It is for this reason that I have focused on conceptions of community and community identity during this thesis. While I believe that tools for making change such as zoning, tax laws and social programs are important, I also believe that it is necessary to be able to articulate a broader goal – to have a vision of what a desirable world would look like. It is my belief that this vision is not a static image but, rather, a process that constantly redefines ‘healthy’ (in The Alliance’s parlance) to adapt to changing social relations and our understandings of these relations. Understanding how the local community is defined and how that definition is related to multi-scalar processes will, hopefully, prove useful in the realization of a socially and environmentally just town.

Throughout this thesis I have employed a particular notion of community; one in which community is understood to be an exclusionary process of social relations. I have argued that the lines drawn to separate ‘insiders’ from ‘outsiders’ are based upon symbols of identity that are malleable and can be used to support a wide range of agendas. These characteristics of community have led some to argue that ‘community’ as a concept should be abandoned since it is problematic for many social justice agendas (see Young 1990; Frazer 1999). I disagree, however, arguing instead that it is a useful, if troublesome, concept that merits attention to its complexities rather than outright dismissal. I believe the popularity of the concept and the variety of ways in which it is

invoked can tell us much about processes of social relations. Such an understanding can be used to inform the process of creating a new community, a new set of social relations, that is more inclusive and socially just.

Community in the Discourses of Social Philosophies

I now return to the discourses of community as articulated in prominent social philosophies. Situating the conceptions of community found in Great Barrington in this broader framework will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which community is employed and will, therefore, provide options for those who are attempting to affect change. During my discussion of the processes of community in Great Barrington, I have referred to differences among social philosophies as a means of exploring the logic used to explain various conceptions of community and the social relations they promote. Conceptions of community are not isolated ideas; they are interwoven into complex social, political and economic structures. Examining the different conceptions of community used by a variety of social philosophies reveals not only the values and priorities of these philosophies, but also the type of world they are trying to create. In order to demonstrate the differences between the ‘community’ in social philosophies, I have chosen to examine the philosophies that I heard reflected in Great Barrington, liberalism and communitarianism, and then offer feminist alternative that may offer a new path for the future.

The dominant social philosophy in Great Barrington and, for that matter, the world at this moment in time, is liberalism. Its prioritization of the individual has constructed a particular image of justice: the realization of egalitarian and universal individual rights. This image rests upon the presumption that equal rights (ie. the

entitlement to have or to do something as well as the entitlement not to have certain things done to you) will lead to a fair and just society. In Great Barrington, the liberal discourse on individual rights is particularly apparent in regards to place. If someone owns a piece of land, then they have the right to determine who has access to it and how it is used. Private land ownership is connected to a wide network of rights that are actively defended under the liberal paradigm.

This focus on individual rights extends into liberalism's conception of identity. One has the freedom and right to choose who one wants to be, it is not predetermined by the class or caste you are born. Communities, according to this theory, are almost completely ignored. They are seen as nothing more than an aggregate of individuals. It has been argued that liberalism's denial of community has allowed for the avoidance of social responsibility (Sandel 1998; Weiss 1998; Frazer 1999). As Anatole France so aptly put it, "the law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets, and steal bread." (France in Selznick 2002; p.8)

These limitations of liberalism were felt by my respondents who expressed frustrations with the lack of ability to address community needs during development due to the priority given to individual rights. This focus on community needs and what are generally referred to as common 'goods' in philosophy is not addressed in a liberal philosophy that does not recognize the concept of community. There are other social philosophies, however, that do address these issues. Internationally, liberalism's greatest critics have been socialists who argue that the means of production and distribution must be controlled by the community, rather than individuals, in order to achieve social justice. Socialism challenges liberalism's assumption that legal equality will lead to social justice

in all spheres of life, especially economically. In the United States, however, socialism's close association with communism during the Cold War has led people to shy away from it as an alternative to liberalism. It wasn't until 1981 when Alasdair MacIntyre published *After Virtue* that a new philosophical and political alternative began to emerge.

Launching what would later become known as communitarianism, MacIntyre set out to challenge liberalism's assumption that individual rights should be prioritized over the what is best for the community, ie. communal 'goods.'

There are a wide variety of theories that fall under the label communitarian. What they have in common is a critical view of rights-oriented liberalism and an alternative that focuses on community. The fact that communal 'goods' are held as a higher priority over individual rights, however, does not automatically create a more socially just alternative to liberalism. One has to look closely at the definition of community being invoked to understand the implications of the theory in lived experience.

Following MacIntyre's lead, the most active strains of communitarianism today idealize a particular image of community.¹¹ These communitarians nostalgically recall an historic community that was held together by a shared set of values. These values, usually supporting an exclusive status quo, are used to define a static image of the idealized community. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre makes the claim that the ills of our modern society are based on our loss of clear community-based identities for individuals. In other words, people no longer know what their 'place' is in society and therefore no longer know who they are as individuals.

¹¹ I acknowledge that not all communitarians support such an extreme image of community, but I have chosen this focus due to the dominance of the conservative political discourse in contemporary communitarianism.

This utopian image of community is, in fact, covering inequalities and struggles that run through all scales of community (McCarthy 2006). There is little questioning within communitarianisms of the concept of community or the power relations within families, institutions and cultural communities, yet these are the very structures that are meant to provide meaning and identity for an individual according to these philosophies (Frazer 1999). According to this argument, it follows that communitarianism condemns the oppressed in society not only to remain in that position, but also to be defined by it. Some feminists have questioned the costs of the very boundaries and roles that provide stability to the communitarian framework. It has become apparent that recognizing the heterogeneity of communities and the uneven power dynamics that constitute them seems to be neglected in communitarian theory (Weiss 1998). As discussed previously, communitarianisms value goods before rights, but, when combined with a lack of critical awareness of social relations, this will inevitably lead to the maintenance of the status quo and perpetuation of oppression.

The attractiveness and the difficulties with this image of community were apparent during my research in Great Barrington. People who were previously 'insiders' but felt they were being excluded from the new community, the new social relations, often referred to an idealized past that was simpler. A time when everyone knew their place and people worked together for the good of the community. This type of narrative is very attractive until counter-narratives are exposed that illuminate the constructed nature of the ideals. At all points in time, community is a contested social relation and to deny this fact denies the experiences of those on the outside or even along the borders.

Some feminists argue that communitarianism has merely replaced the liberal universalism and a new universalism that assumes shared meanings based on the communitarian interpretation (Weiss 1998; Frazer 1999). Weiss (1998) articulates this concern in relation to a feminist agenda when she says:

Liberalism's ideal is criticized for encouraging people to think of themselves first, for fostering egoism and rewarding selfishness, and for drawing a picture of the self that is incomplete where it is not inaccurate. But the complacent communitarian reliance on 'place' and inattention to the *problems* of social identity are also rejected for failing to address, and therefore solve, the issues at the heart of feminism. (p. 142)

Joseph (2002) argues that communitarianism is, in fact, just another strain of liberalism. She claims that the popularity of community as a concept is directly related to liberal theory. According to her, the fundamental practices of modernity (eg. liberalism, the nation-state, identity political emancipatory movements, capitalism) all "depend upon and generate community." In this sense, community is part of other powerful contemporary discourses, yet it is often positioned in opposition to them. The idea of community is romanticized, representing all that has been lost in our modern individualistic era.

Both approaches to community, ignoring it as liberalism does or imagining it as an idealized static form as communitarianism does, are insufficient if not actual barriers to the realization of a progressive social justice agenda. It is for these reasons that I have argued for an alternative conception of community that stresses its contested nature as a process of social relations. It is inherently exclusionary, but this does not mean that we

can ignore its importance in the structuring of identity and our everyday lives. In her book, *Social Justice and the Politics of Community*, Everingham (2003) proposes that what we need is a more comprehensive conception of community, one that is dynamic and constantly contested. She suggests that, in addition to the ideal of a community with a shared set of values, there are a wide range of ways in communities can be constructed. For example, communities may take shape through protest and conflict. We need to be aware of the many ways in which community identities and their lines between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ are constructed in order to create social relations that support a desired worldview. Acknowledging the divisiveness created by the boundaries of a community, Everingham proposes that an inclusive community must constantly reflect upon its boundaries to determine whether or not they match up with standards for social justice.

Given the importance of linking theory and praxis in feminism, how does the abstract conception of community as a process of social relations relate to lived experience? How can we use this model of community to make changes that support a progressive social agenda? As an example for how such a philosophy and social action can thrive, I turn to Jane Addams’ feminist pragmatism from the turn of the last century. I believe her philosophical writings in connection with her work at Hull House, a progressive settlement house in Chicago, can be used as a model for contemporary action focused on improving social relations such as the work being done by the Alliance for a Healthier Great Barrington.

Addams foreshadowed much of the communitarian critique of liberalism in her writings on community at the turn of the last century. She argued that individual freedom and sense of meaning are only available to us through community. Ignoring this

dependence on community, as occurs in liberalism, “allows us to ignore our responsibility to community” (Whipps 2004). Addams did not, however, fill in liberalism’s lack of community with a static idealized image such as is found in conservative communitarianisms. Addams’ community, both as a concept and as manifested at Hull House, was not interested in the preservation of traditional roles and responsibilities. Instead, her community was an active process defined by interdependence which strove to meet the changing needs of both individuals and the collective as events and relationships evolved (Green 1999).

Addams’ approach to realizing these goals was a social inquiry process based on paying attention to and working together with the diverse voices that comprise and recreate public life. Addams realized that this inclusion might be deeply disruptive and deeply beneficial to those in privileged positions. Her stance was that

the social inquiry process must include as equals those affected by its results if it is to build the mutual trust that makes it possible both to elicit the widely dispersed, necessary information only diverse participants can contribute, and to creatively negotiate shared ends-in-view that effectively advance the transformative deepening of democracy in that situation ((Green 1999) p.44).

It is in this process that we find Addams’ definition of community. She is not bringing people together in order to create an imagined ideal community. Rather, the bringing of people together in the manner she outlines *is* the realization of a progressive social justice. Justice, following her model, is not merely equal access to communal ‘goods,’ but equal access to the process of creating those goods.

I believe Jane Addams' conception of community in relation to issues of social justice is a useful model for those attempting to affect change in Great Barrington. Listening to people and working with them to construct inclusive social relations is the first step. There will inevitably be tensions in regards to community due to its divisive nature, but these tensions can lead to opportunities if, as Frazer (1999) suggests, we can emphasize the unsettling of boundaries and understand how people cross and recross these boundaries. The goal is not to create a rigid ideal of community, but, rather, a flexible concept of community that allows for dynamic social relations. This, however, begs the question of how such a goal is achieved. It is here that I return the concept of place in relation to community.

The theoretical connections between the concept of community and the concept of place are useful to understanding their underlying processes and how they function during the type of amenity-based development Great Barrington is experiencing. Throughout the course of this thesis I have been working with definitions of community and place that stress their constructed nature. I argue that they are not static entities but processes of social relations. As such, they provide an opportunity to study the systems of inclusion and exclusion that are created through the processes of amenity-based development.

The new class structure and distribution of power that have accompanied Great Barrington's amenity-based development is intricately connected with private property laws, zoning, landscape aesthetics as well as transgressions of place. The ways in which places are constructed and controlled are a means by which a complex and shifting environment of social relations is organized and made manageable. There are certain

activities that are appropriate in particular places. The power to control the use of space, to define appropriate social relations in a specific location, is imbedded in a complicated network of legal, economic, political and social power. Social relations that create, reinforce or challenge established constructions of place are, in fact, redefining the social relations that constitute community at the same time.

The systems of inclusion and exclusion created through the negotiation of social relations in place are mutually-constitutive with those that define community. It is often important for 'insiders' to maintain control over places related to their community identity while 'outsiders' are literally and figuratively put in their place. The fact that there can be multiple communities occurring at the same time in the same place explains the contention over changes to particular places. Constructing place is, in effect, the construction of community and vice versa. For this reason, a comprehensive understanding of the discourses of community and their manifestation in the construction of places is fundamental to the realization of a social justice agenda

Future Directions

This research project was a preliminary investigation into the intricate network of social relations that comprise the town of Great Barrington. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the issues that I have raised, additional research is needed. The following are directions for future research that were made apparent during the course of this research.

Throughout the course of my interviews, there was consistent frustration with the decision-making processes in the town. Those who were active in local government felt their hands were tied due to the constraints of their particular position while those who

where trying to work on their own felt they were being hindered due to a lack of vision and action by others. A deeper investigation into the formal and informal decision-making processes would not only illuminate the power structures within the town, it would also help dispel the notion of powerlessness of individuals and the inevitability of particular types of progress and development.

Due to the scope of this thesis, I was only able to address two types of places: open spaces and the downtown area. By examining the processes of a wider variety of places, such as homes, public parks, and gathering areas, a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of social relations in place in Great Barrington could be accomplished. I believe it would be particularly interested to examine how multiple dominant community identities construct particular places through their relationship and the nature of transgression in such spaces. This type of study would not only explore the way these different places function, it would also help town planning initiatives through an understanding of their importance in relation to community identities for various people.

It became evident during my research that significant time should be invested in understanding the experiences of recent international immigrants in relation to the town. I did some preliminary investigation into this during my interviews by making a point to speak with a few immigrants and immigrant advocates, but it became very clear during the course of my data gathering that I would not be able to delve into the topic with the depth necessary to do justice to the intricacies of the situation. The experiences of the immigrants I did speak with were clearly intertwined with the discourses on community and place that I found in other segments of the population, but there were also a very

significant number of ways in which they were different. The immigrant population is an integral and growing segment of the population and any work towards creating a more socially just system of relations requires listening to them and working with them.

Finally, the research for this thesis was done in collaboration with the Alliance for a Healthier Great Barrington. This written thesis is not meant to be a termination point, but part of a conversation that is meant to explore the ways in which the theoretical understandings of community, place and research on amenity-based development can help a progressive activist effort and vice versa. For that reason, future research should look into the ways in which theory and activism continue to inform each other in Great Barrington.

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