

Public Abstract

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In many places in the modern-day American West, relatively stable ranching communities have undergone rapid transformation as exurban migration and urbanization have led to a period of social and economic restructuring. This study considers how residents of Fremont County, Colorado have constructed community meaning as amenity-driven migration has given rise to such reorganization and, broadly speaking, has divided former ranching communities into old-timers and newcomers.

I analyze participant interviews at two levels, first at the single-valley scale of Garden Park, a small valley in the northern part of the county, and second at the countywide scale, to explore how residents define what it means to live in their changing landscape. Results suggest that residents from across traditional old-timer/newcomer divides often share meanings of community and that these meanings are reflected in resident interaction at both the single valley and county levels.

Even though residents respond to common social and physical environments, their understandings of those environments and their ideas of how those environments should look are often very different. Nevertheless most community residents express a common theme of paired cooperation and competition as they redefine what community means to them in this changing social and physical landscape. Consequently, this study suggests that a multi-layered, local approach to understanding community interaction might provide insight for future exurban community well-being.