THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE IN A MOBILE WORLD

by

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Under the Direction of Ted Gragson

ABSTRACT

Environmental conservation has sometimes resulted in the displacement or disempowerment of low-income or otherwise marginalized individuals.   An alternative to conservation by displacement is conservation that emphasizes the importance of people's connections – psychological, social, and financial -- to the places they live. By gaining an understanding of these connections as they emerge at the local level, we may be able to pursue conservation in a way that produces positive benefits for low-income or otherwise marginalized individuals and communities. Public policy can augment these opportunities through the innovation and application of institutional forms that support the dual goals of environmental conservation and community empowerment. In this thesis, I discuss *balanced equity cooperative ownership* and *community loan funds* as two promising institutional forms to facilitate place-based conservation, and discuss their significance for a displaced group of mobile home park residents in Athens, Georgia. I conclude with a theoretical articulation of a sister concept to greenspace: that of "greenplace."

INDEX WORDS: Place-based conservation, Community Empowerment, Balanced Equity Cooperative Ownership, Community Loan Funds, Mobile Home Park, Greenplace.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION

SECTION 1:
INTRODUCTION

Human populations are growing and the Earth is not. As the space needed to house the growing number of people encompasses an ever-increasing portion of the Earth's surface, ecological conservationists – and the species and ecosystems we strive to protect – face both dangers and opportunities. A primary danger is that the increasing construction of human dwellings will result in the continual destruction of habitat for other species, thereby crowding out and driving to extinction many of the other forms of life we share the planet with. The opportunities, therefore, lie in inventing and implementing ways to make human dwellings and living behavior more consistent with the presence of diverse biota and healthy ecosystems. Realizing these opportunities means more than improving technology and architecture; we must also develop and experiment with social and economic policies that take into account both human *and* non-human habitat needs. These policies should be grounded in a solid understanding of the relevant social and ecological dynamics, and should function to expand – rather than limit – the range of options for the interrelationships between humans, each other, and the rest of the natural world.

Conservation by Community Displacement

Historically, conservationists have worked not to integrate the human presence with important ecosystems and the species that inhabit them, but to keep us out of them. Our policy has been to protect ecosystems and habitats through the designation of national parks, wilderness preserves, and permanently protected greenspaces. The primary purpose of such designations is to restrict the roles of humans in the areas we

1

wish to protect: people can be tourists, picnickers, recreators, biologists, and park rangers in ecologically significant places – but they cannot, in most cases, simply be inhabitants of those places. Therefore, much of the work of conservation has been first to identify the ecologically significant places on the globe, and then to find ways to prevent people from living or working in those places – even if it means actively removing them. For example, both Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks were made "wilderness" by banishing Native Americans from living in or hunting the lands inside their borders (Cronon 1996, Sarkar 1999, Stevens 1997). Following this model, 5% of Africa's land mass was turned into national parks by displacing an estimated 20 to 40 million rural people (Geisler and De Sousa 2001).

If we look closely at the types of people who are displaced by worldwide conservation initiatives, we see that they are the same people whose lives are likely to be disrupted by other forms of "progress" and "development": people who are marginalized due to their income level, social class, ethnicity, or culture (Stevens 1997). In a very real way, these people share something in common with the ecosystems and species we strive to protect: both, on their own, lack the financial and/or political resources needed to ward off outside threats. Although the shared nature of the threat could be seen as a potential opening to create new kinds of alliances, it is often the case that the protection of low-income or otherwise marginalized communities and the protection of sensitive species and ecosystems end up being mutually exclusive endeavors. In the United States, for example, it is sometimes argued that important conservation strategies protect land at the cost of displacing people with lower than average incomes or those who are socially or

politically marginalized (Geisler and De Sousa 2001). One example of this is the protection of greenspace in rural areas, which can raise property values, and can contribute to the loss of in-town affordable housing and the gentrification of neighborhoods (Cox 2000). Another example is the policy in some rapidly developing urban areas – such as Portland Oregon – to draw urban growth rings that limit urban sprawl, and which some researchers charge as disproportionately impacting poor people, who can no longer afford the "revitalized" neighborhoods they have lived and worked in (Cox 2000).

It is important to put conservation's potential for negative impact on marginalized communities in its appropriate context. Obviously, the disruptions to people's lives, both in the US and elsewhere, that are caused by environmental conservation initiatives are minor when compared to those caused by far greater forces such as urbanization, mechanization, globalization, colonialism, and war (see Mander and Goldsmith 1997). Nevertheless, there are both ethical and practical reasons to develop conservation tools that serve to counter, rather than align with, these forces. Ethically, we must ask ourselves if the dislocation or disempowerment of people who are already politically and economically marginalized is justified in protecting endangered habitats or species. Practically, displaced people have to move somewhere, and their increased economic vulnerability as a result of their displacement is likely to be a limiting factor in the amount of resources they have available to devote to caring for their new environments. Furthermore, if individuals displaced by environmental improvements conclude that "healthy" environments are for privileged members of society, this may create a

disincentive for them to protect local environmental resources.   This was demonstrated in

rather dramatic fashion when people displaced by India's "Project Tiger" teamed up with

poachers to decimate the protected tiger populations that were the cause of their

displacement (Sarkar 1999).

Global biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming rate, and worrying about the

local human communities who coexist with it may at times seem debilitating, particular if

those communities seem to lack organizational and financial capacity (Terborgh 1999).

Yet, by taking the seemingly easier route of partnering only with the more organized and

wealthy sectors of society, we may be alienating some of our greatest potential allies in

the work of long-term environmental protection (Brosius and Russell Unpublished).

There may be several – currently theoretical, but potentially testable (in further research)

– reasons for this: 1) people with lower incomes may be more reliant on their immediate

physical environments for their livelihood, and thus – with the right incentives – have

more motivation to care for them, 2) people with less income and education may have less

freedom to move freely between various locations, and thus may develop stronger

attachments to specific places as compared to those with more money and education (see

Gare 1995), 3) people with lower incomes may, due to decreased consumption levels,

smaller houses, etc., have less environmental impact on the area in question than the

"highest and best use" (in an economic sense) alternative, 4) people who are or have been

oppressed by the dominant social, political, or economic system may have large amounts

of untapped (or repressed) potential, which, with the proper strategy of investment and

support, might develop in a way that generates value for themselves, their communities,

4

and the environment, and 5) while parks, wilderness areas and greenspaces must be sustained solely by external sources of funding (visitor fees, Sierra Club dues, taxes, etc.), local people – empowered with the motivation, knowledge and ability to care for their local environments – can at least partially finance the protection of the environments they live in and are a part of, particularly if doing so is aligned with meeting their more immediate social and economic needs.

Empowering people with the motivation, knowledge, and ability to care for their local environments means a renewed focus on the economic and social implications of our work in ecological conservation. One way we as conservationists might go about making this shift is to think of ourselves as having a product to sell. If our product is environmental conservation, and our consumers are the individuals and communities who live in areas whose ecological values we wish to protect, then there are two questions we should be asking ourselves: 1) how can we reengineer our product such that it will be attractive and of service to local communities, and 2) how can we arrange the financing for our product such that conservation of local environmental resources and the maintenance of local community values will be sustained over time? Answering these questions effectively may lead to the development of products that both protect species and ecosystems *and* generate value for the people who share space with them.

Towards Conservation by Community Investment

The alternative to conservation by displacing and/or disempowering people is for conservationists to contribute to the stability of marginalized communities, and to work

with those communities to improve their ability to live in a manner that is both consistent

with the maintenance of healthy ecosystems, and that is feasible within the relevant

social, political, and economic contexts.   The policies we design to enhance the

complementarity of environmental protection and community stability will of necessity

be highly contextual: they will depend on the social dynamics of the human communities

in question, the kinds of dwellings that are present, and the particular vulnerabilities and

opportunities of the ecosystem they are a part of.   As I will show in the next section, the

insight that such a task is context specific is consistent with the recent spate of literature

that advocates for a "place-based," or bottom-up approach to environmental

conservation.   What this discussion adds to the place-based discourse (as reviewed by

Norton and Hannon 1998) is two things: 1) a focus on the conservation potential,

currently largely untapped in the United States, of working explicitly with low-income

and/or marginalized inhabitants of the places we care about, and 2) a focus on *specific*

economic and policy tools that might serve to enhance the ability of local communities to

take responsibility for their local environments.   The primary question asked in this

thesis is as follows: **how can policy innovations both enhance the stability of low-income or otherwise marginalized communities, *and* simultaneously foster the maintenance of healthy ecosystems over the long term?**

      After discussing my methodology, I will devote Section 1 to developing a model –

grounded in logic, current theory, and the experience of experts and grassroots

practitioners – for policy innovations that have the potential to meet the goals articulated

in the above question.   With these policy tools in hand, we can then turn to local realities,

and explore how the tools can be applied and adapted to fit local needs. In Section 2, I will relate the story surrounding a series of events that at first seem to have little to do with the project of ecological conservation: the dislocation of a group of residents living in Garden Springs Mobile Home Community in Athens, Georgia. I will argue that their experiences in being displaced, and their current work to create a new community can provide insights towards answering the above question, and that the insights gained from these localized endeavors can be adapted to larger contexts. Additionally, although environmental conservation is not currently a main priority of those working on this issue, I intend to demonstrate the possibility for conservationists to achieve locally important goals by investing intellectual, political, and financial resources in this type of project. By way of conclusion, I will expand on the development of a theoretical framework for achieving conservation objectives through investing in the stability of marginalized communities, and highlight some promising pathways for the development of social and economic policies that might contribute to this goal.

Methods

"The best way to understand something is to try to change it." (Greenwood and Levin 1998)

The material for this portion of the thesis was gathered through dialogues and interviews with leading experts in several relevant fields, through attendance at state and national conferences, through my active involvement in the genesis and development of

two not for profit organizations, and through one years' worth (August 2001 through August 2002) of participant observation with a group of the residents of Garden Springs Mobile Home Community. Experts interviewed and conferences attended are listed below:

Experts Interviewed:

  Chuck Matthei, founder of Equity TRUST, past Executive Director of the Institute of Community Economics, founder of the National Community Capital Association, and a core developer of the Community Land Trust Model.

  Paul Bradley, Vice President of the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund

  Skipper StipeMaas, community economic development lawyer and co-founder of the Athens Land Trust

  George McCarthy, Senior Program Officer, Ford Foundation.

Conferences Attended:

  Developing Community Assets with Manufactured Housing: Barriers and Opportunities. Atlanta, GA. February 2002.

  National Community Capital Annual Conference, Oakland California, October 2002

From Chuck Matthei, I learned the history and vision of community based lending and the community land trust model. From Paul Bradley, I learned how these ideas are being adapted in the State of New Hampshire to assist mobile home residents in adapting these tools to their local needs. From Skipper StipeMaas, I learned about the legal, social, and economic realities faced by low income and rural Georgians, and how some innovative

institutions are working to change this. And from George McCarthy, I learned about the financial resources that are available through private foundations to address these issues, once the appropriate models can be developed and the people are in place to make them a reality.

My drive to engage in these activities stemmed from my desire to contribute to the members of one specific community of low-income individuals who were – and are – struggling to strengthen their ties to their community and land of choice. I became involved with the residents of Garden Springs as a student activist: their land had been sold to an investor who planned to build student apartments, and I and other students sought to make the point that student housing needs did not justify the displacement of other segments of the Athens community. Ultimately, my interest in environmental and economic policy, and my commitment to this particular issue led me to become involved with a group of Athens social workers and lawyers who were working with some of the displaced residents to develop a new piece of land that would be cooperatively owned, and thus would make the residents immune to being dispossessed of their land in the future. After the residents formed a non profit called the People of Hope, they hired me as an intern for the summer of 2002 to support their efforts by helping them develop a newsletter, plan and run meetings, and organize community building events. Simultaneously, I worked with several members of the wider Athens community to raise funds and gather resources to create a pool of money that the residents could draw on as a loan to finance the purchase of their new land. This "revolving fund" ultimately became

incorporated as the Georgia Community Loan Fund (GCLF), and I am served as the first

President of the Board of Directors.

In addition to talking with people and attending conferences, I explored current and

seminal literature across a variety of disciplines, including environmental ethics, ecological

anthropology, human geography, environmental psychology, community development,

rural sociology, and economics. While the conversations I had and the articles I read each

elucidated a piece of the puzzle, the bulk of my efforts in this writing have been to

integrate the ideas I learned into a model – a "product" in light of the Introduction –

through which community based environmental conservation can be aligned with the

issues faced by the residents of Garden Springs and other rural Georgians in similar

situations.   By linking my on-the ground experiences and discussions to my engagement

with the literature I have developed three propositions, which offer a possible framework

for answering the question posed in the introduction. The question is repeated here, and

the propositions are listed below it.

Question:

How can policy innovations both enhance the stability of low-income or otherwise marginalized communities, *and* simultaneously foster the maintenance of healthy ecosystems over the long term?

Propositions:

1. Balanced equity cooperative land ownership is a viable policy tool for balancing individual equity, community stability, and ecological protection.

2. Community-based lending is an appropriate financial tool for funneling private and government investments into balanced equity cooperative ownership initiatives.

3. In rural Georgia, investing in cooperatively owned manufactured home communities represents an opportunity for using the above policy tools to achieve both individual financial empowerment and modest ecological conservation. The partnership between the People of Hope and the Georgia Community Loan Fund exemplifies this opportunity.

Because these propositions function to describe models that either do not exist yet (Proposition 3) or are relatively new (Proposition 1 & 2), I will not be testing them using traditional empirical methodology. To do so would be equivalent to testing the usefulness of a new product that has been imagined but not yet made. Energy is better spent on getting the product from the drawing board to the prototype phase and then to the test market. Thus, the bulk of the work that has led to the writing of this thesis has taken place in dozens of meetings, planning sessions, and emails. At this point, it seems likely that the "products" described in this thesis will become realities, after which we will be able to design studies to assess how useful they really are. In this work, my task will be to focus attention on constructing a careful and well document argument in defense of the

first two propositions, and then in Proposition 3 to explore how they might apply to the events in Athens. In discussing the third proposition – which refers to the emerging model's application to a specific case – I will employ the case study approach.

Case-study research (as described by Yin 1994) is a method for attempting to make valid inferences from events that occur outside the laboratory. Yin describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates the subject of interest within its real life context. The case-study approach differs from the experimental method, in which a phenomenon is deliberately divorced from its context so that the attention can be focused on a few variables. In a case study, there is no clear dividing line between the phenomenon being studied and the context it is a part of. This necessitates drawing on multiple sources of evidence. According to Yin, the case study has advantages when the questions being asked are about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control. Given that the ideas presented in this thesis emerged from my participation in real life events as they were unfolding, and that I ultimately found it necessary to draw on insights gained through several means, the case study approach offers an appropriate methodology by which to link the information I gained through direct experience to the theoretical propositions. For this case study, I will draw on my experiences as a participant observer to highlight the relevance of the theoretical model being developed for real world problems, and attempt to highlight how these ideas can be adapted to particular contexts: in this case, a mobile home community in rural Georgia.

In the conclusion, I will develop a new concept that may be useful for conservationists interested in enhancing people's motivation and ability to take care of

their local environments. The concept I define and develop is *greenplace*, which I define

as complementary to the generally accepted (by planners and conservationists, at least)

notion of greenspace. Greenplaces share with greenspaces their institutionally mandated

permanent protection of important ecological values, but they also go beyond greenspaces

by explicitly incorporating human habitation into their designation and implementation.   I

use the concept of greenplace as a means of exploring how the context-specific policy

solutions that are being developed in this thesis may translate to other types of

communities in other places.

INVESTING IN PLACE AS A FOUNDATION FOR
LONG-TERM ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the
human soul.
<div align="right">-Simone Weil: The Need for Roots, 1952</div>

Human beings, along with other living things on planet Earth, are bound in
some way to specific places: more even than earthlings, we are placelings.

<div align="right">-Feld and Basso: Senses of Place, 1996.</div>

<div align="center">

Place as a Subject of Conservation

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One of the fundamental challenges in protecting the environment is to articulate – to

describe in language – what exactly it is that we are striving to protect. Absent such an

articulation, "the environment" is too vague and abstract of a concept to do anything

about. Thus, conservationists have identified various "subjects of conservation" by

which our success in protecting the environment can be pursued and measured. Some of

the subjects of conservation that have been important have included: *endangered species*,

native species, *biodiversity, wetlands, ecosystems, bioregions, riparian zones,*

impermeable surface areas, and *canopy cover* to name a few.   Interestingly, these terms

are not likely to be a part of the everyday parlance of the people who live in, on, or near

the entities they designate.   On the contrary, the designations' technical character limits

the ability of nonscientists or non-environmentalists to relate to them and incorporate

them into their way of life.   Reflecting on the previous discussion, laypeople's disconnection from these subjects of conservation makes good sense: after scientists and/or environmentalists have given a name to that which we seek to protect, our next task is usually to figure out how to keep people – the ubiquitous threat – from harming it.   Reengineering conservation policy to be relevant to local communities, therefore, will necessitate shifting our thinking both with respect to what exactly it is that we seek to protect, and what we seek to protect it from. Ultimately, it will mean shifting to a language that is capable of incorporating the human presence into the natural systems they are a part of (see Norton Unpublished).   That language will have to be constructed so as to be accessible to community members living outside the academic world.

Before I go further, it is important to note that there are certainly cases where the best way to protect environmental values is indeed to protect them from human interference.   For species like spotted owls and mountain gorillas, restricting access to large undisturbed areas may be a crucial conservation strategy. However, many important species are able to deal with the presence of a certain amount of human habitation and activity. A similar point can be made for many ecosystem services such as water filtration by soil, or pollution reduction by trees. What we need, then, is not *only* untrammeled forests, but unpaved ground and healthy trees spread out and distributed over a large expanse, all intermingled with human activities. To achieve such an intermingling requires an ability to evaluate different human activities with respect to their ecological impacts across various kinds of ecosystems. Currently, far too little work has been done in this area: in the 5-year period from 1995 to 1999, only 6% of the articles

written for the leading journal in the field of environmental conservation – Conservation Biology – dealt explicitly with issues of human settlements and their effects on biological diversity. Instead, the vast majority of research occurred in places where there are few or no permanent settlements, where human densities are relatively low, or where human activities are primarily agricultural or extractive (Miller and Hobbs 2002).

One way of moving toward a more encompassing research agenda for conservation ecologists, which could be echoed in our policy endeavors, is for conservationists to join some of their more theoretically inclined brethren in embracing the concept of "place." Over the past several years, geographers, environmental philosophers, and others have made a case for adopting the concept of "place" as a fundamental subject for environmental conservation (reviewed by Norton and Hannon 1998). In contrast to the terms mentioned in the previous paragraph, which demarcate environmental values in terms of their separation from humanity, the idea of *place* embodies the connections that develop between people and specific aspects of their physical environments. By building connections – starting with the very language we use – between important environmental characteristics and values that are important to communities, we go a long way in building a foundation for the integration of ecological and community values. These new designations do not negate the old – biodiversity and canopy cover are still important – rather they expand the discourse to include non-experts: people for whom biodiversity is the view out their window, and canopy cover is the oak trees which shade their homes in the summer.

Delineating and understanding the aspects of a place means looking at the ways people think about, interact with, and place value on land that is part of their direct experience (see Norton and Hannon 1997 and 1998). As mentioned above, it also means scientifically researching the ways in which people living in different ways are impacting their local environments. Armed with a sense both of how people think about their local environments, and how they impact them, we may be able to suggest policies for minimizing negative ecological impacts, and maximizing local people's satisfaction and appreciation of the values that are important to them. Such policies, as opposed to stemming from top-down regulations, will instead be grounded in a more bottom-up, democratic process (Norton and Hannon 1998). If we become sensitive to how people care about the places they live, then this caring can be nurtured to serve as the basis for peoples' active involvement towards preserving the physical and social features that characterize that place (Mesch and Manor 1998). Good policy would thus strive to augment place-oriented caring, and to guide its development in such a way so as to promote a localized sense of long-term environmental responsibility (Norton and Hannon 1997 and 1998).

People and Place in the Modern World

If we choose to pursue a place-based approach to conservation, we will need to gain understanding into people's connections to the places they live as they occur in today's highly mobile and interconnected world. In the literature of environmental psychology, there is much debate concerning the extent to which people living in today's society develop positive emotional connections to the neighborhoods and environments

they live in (see Altman and Low 1992). Some argue that social change in modern societies has increased the geographic mobility of individuals, and has therefore "liberated" communities from the constraints of place. In this view, localized ties are insignificant compared to other kinds of ties, and people have little or no attachments to specific places (reviewed by Mesch and Manor 1998). Other research, however, shows that under certain circumstances people do develop positive emotional attachments to the places they live, and that this attachment drives them to take action to increase the likelihood that the aspects of the place they care about will be preserved (Mesch and Manor 1998).

The conflicting research highlights the reality that each individual will develop a unique relationship to the places and communities they are a part of (see Gustafson 2001). Undoubtedly, many factors – some measurable, some not – interact to determine the extent to which a person develops positive emotional connections to specific places, and whether or not those connections are strong enough to be a basis for people to direct energy towards maintaining their local environment. Some of these factors may include a person's stage in life, their cultural background, their income level, and their experiences as a child. Further research in this area is warranted, but may not be necessary for the development of policy that enhances people's commitments to local places. Instead, current research suggests we may be able to take a more pragmatic approach: a survey of a sample of the general population suggests that the critical variables that are associated with the development of an emotional attachment to place are individuals' social and economic investments in the place (Mesch and Manor 1998). Essentially, what we see is

that there is a positive feedback loop at work: the more people invest in a place

financially and socially, the more likely they are to develop lasting attachments, and the

more likely they are to make future investments (Mesch and Manor 1998).   While some

of the factors that determine the extent of people's investments in a place will be beyond

influence (e.g. culture, early experience), others will be a function of the social, economic,

and political contexts that determine the fate of their investments.   In order to foster local

commitment to local ecosystems, then, what is needed are policies that function to

promote and nurture people's social and financial investments in that place, i.e. that allow

the positive feedback loop to operate.

Place-based Policy for Low-income and Marginalized Communities

The argument for taking a policy approach to achieving place-based conservation

is supported by several authors (Little 1994, Peters 1996, Lynch 1998, Brosius and

Russell Unpublished). However, many of these same authors also provide a strong

warning that in the past many policies that have been developed to support local

communities – particularly with respect to those that are oppressed or marginalized –

have been nothing more than subtle ways for far-away power interests to manipulate and

control local affairs (Little 1994, Agrawal 1999, Brosius and Russell Unpublished).

These authors emphasize that the focus of place-based policies should be on the ability of

local communities to create and enforce their own rules (Agrawal 1999). This requires, at

a minimum, that authentic decision-making power be in the hands of local leaders, and

that those leaders are representative of and accountable to the members of their community (Ribot 1996).

Two policy areas emerge in the literature as in need of being put back in the hands of local communities: **land tenure regimes** (Lynch 1998), and **financial service institutions** (Agrawal 1999, Brosius and Russell Unpublished). The creation of bottom-up alternatives in both of these areas – specifically targeted to the needs of low income or otherwise marginalized communities – has the potential, it is argued, for balancing authentic empowerment of local communities with the long-term protection of ecological values.   The basic assumption in operation is that people will only invest in the health and integrity of their communities and environments if they feel a reasonable amount of control over the future of their investments.   While affluent members of society are able to capitalize on their investments in specific places, those lacking property rights – and the ability to build equity that goes along with them – are likely to be more vulnerable as their land gets more valuable, and are unlikely to be able to capture those increases in value (Geisler and Danecker).   With alternative structures of ownership, and financial service institutions to support them, this – it is proposed – need not be the case.

The Case for Balanced Equity Cooperative Ownership

Although we tend to think of property as the embodiment of a relationship between a landowner and a piece of land, it is more accurate to view property rights as determining relationships between a landowner and other people (Geisler and Danecker 2000).   Thus, to own a piece of property is to have the right to exclude others from it, to

develop or change it without interference by others, to reap any profits that are a result of those changes by selling it, and so on (Abromowitz 2000). The predominant conception of property – the conception that has the most rhetorical weight at least in this country – presumes state-backed control of all of these rights by one owner (Singer 2000). The reality, however, is more complex: in most cases, property rights are split or distributed among several persons or entities (Singer 2000), and these people/entities must work (or struggle) to balance their use of the property in question. Inevitably, one such entity is the government, which – through zoning, laws, and regulations – restricts what we may or may not do on our property and under what circumstances we can sell it. To use environmental regulation as an example, people have the right to change their property in any way they want, so long as they do no harm to wetlands, endangered species, follow tree ordinances, etc. It is the application of these laws and regulations, of course, that tends to alienate private property and free market enthusiasts from environmentalists.

But there are other instances of shared property rights than those between the government and the private landowner. In a limited liability corporation, the rights of a companies' owners' to do as they see fit is balanced with the rights of shareholders to determine decisions made about the future of their investments, which must also be balanced with the rights of the employees to a healthy working environment. Interestingly, while we have no trouble understanding the importance of balancing the various rights in corporations – indeed our refinement of the risk and profit sharing model of the modern corporation is arguably the primary reason for America's economic success – when it comes to land we are stuck in a black and white mentality. Thus, private

property owners rally against "takings" when government actions interfere with their property rights (Runge et al. 2000), and environmentalists funnel money and resources towards conservation organizations to finance the direct purchase of sensitive lands.

By removing environmentally sensitive lands from the market, fee-simple purchases (e.g. by the Nature Conservancy, the government, Ted Turner) protect it from being bulldozed for timber, apartments, or office buildings. In many cases, this is indeed the best strategy for protecting certain ecosystems or species: logic and experience has shown that land in the hands of an economically rational private landowner is unlikely, over the long-term, to be left ecologically intact (see Clarke 1974). However, these types of purchases require large financial outlays and, unless recreation or ecotourism can be designed to be financially sustainable *and* ecologically responsible, there may be little or no (financial) return on these outlays. Yet there may be a middle path: a path that balances individual equity building, the maintenance of long-term community values (such as a healthy environment), and the tendency of the unchecked market to drive land to its "highest and best" economic use. This path, I suggest, is cooperative ownership. In order to understand how cooperative ownership mechanisms can be structured to balance the above forces and goals, we must look back to a seminal paper in the environmental policy discourse.

Garrett Hardin's famous article, "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968) is often used to provide the rationale for privatization of environmental resources, and can be read as a cautionary tale against cooperative ownership. In the paper, individual herdsmen allow their animals to graze in a common pasture; because they gain more by putting one

extra animal on the pasture then it costs them – in terms of their individual share of the loss in the pasture's viability over time – eventually the pasture gets overexploited and ruined. Thus, interpreters argue, to protect environmental resources we are better off putting them in the hands of a single "benevolent owner." Nevertheless, despite the title of Hardin's famous paper, the situation he described was not really a true "commons." The pasture described by Hardin is actually an "open access" resource: one that is external to any decision-making body or process, and is therefore vulnerable to over-exploitation by maximizing individuals.   A commons, on the contrary, is land owned in common and for which cultural and/or legal restrictions control what can and cannot happen there (Abromowitz 2000). Rules governing the commons actively seek to minimize the occurrence of tragedies that can result from problems of free-ridership on the one hand, and problems that can result when a "benevolent" owner decides to sell out on the other.

Around the world, common property regimes have been shown to be effective in certain situations for the management of land and natural resources (Ostram 1990). In the United States, several such legal mechanisms have evolved, often described by the phrase "limited equity," and currently are being implemented across a diversity of urban and rural settings.   These ownership structures have been explicitly designed to meet a diversity of social and individual needs, including equitable access to property, secure tenure, permanently affordable land and housing, resilient communities, farming lifestyle opportunities, open space, natural areas, and ecological integrity (Geisler and Daneker 2000).   In this paper, I prefer the phrase "balanced equity" because, instead of connoting

sacrifice, it emphasizes the rational tradeoff aspect of the choice made by people who

adopt these frameworks. It also points to the fact – rarely acknowledged by those who

wave the "takings" banner in the face of external actions that decrease their land value –

that actions that *increase* the value of a private landowner's property are often the result

of decisions and investments made by the larger community within which his or her land

is embedded. Some examples of this phenomenon are zoning changes that allow a

developer to build at higher density, sewer infrastructure and bus lines that allow a

homebuilder to attract buyers, and the growth of local businesses that leads to a stronger

local economy and thus higher property values. These examples represent "givings" – a

corollary to takings – in which a private landowner *benefits* economically from the actions

of those surrounding him /her (Runge et al. 2000). And no one complains about that!

Currently employed land tenureship models that strive for balanced equity include

community land trusts, limited equity co-ops and condominiums, conservation

easements, mutual housing associations, certain forms of public land and housing, and

some innovative taxation schemes (Geisler and Daneker 2000). Here, I will highlight one,

the community land trust (CLT), which was explicitly designed to maintain the value of

"givings" within the community that actually creates that value. A CLT accomplishes

this by splitting the title of land from the title of housing and other improvements

(Abromowitz 2000). The CLT – a not for profit corporation – owns the land and leases

it the homeowners. Homeowners may transfer the ownership of their dwellings, and the

resale price is configured according to a pre-set formula that balances future affordability

with the growth of individual equity. Thus, individuals can recoup the cost of their

homes plus the cost of any improvements they made, and the increases in value of the

land as a whole is retained by the community.   In a CLT, board members come from the

community, and are assigned the job of protecting the land, keeping home ownership

affordable, and leading the community in adapting to changes over time. The ground lease

is for 99 years, and is renewable and inheritable (StipeMaas, personal communication).

CLTs therefore represent a structure that people can control as a community: they offer a

legally viable and practical mechanism for long-term affordability within the context of

community-generated rules and regulations. Furthermore, they are flexible enough to

accommodate a wide variety of land uses and conservation objectives within a single,

locally controlled legal entity (Matthei, personal communication).

Of course, some will point out that community land trusts and other balanced

equity mechanisms do not allow homeowners to realize the "American Dream" and

capitalize on the full value of real estate. While this is an important issue to take into

account, it is also true that "affordable housing" developments built by developers,

functioning under traditional notions of property, typically only stay affordable for the

duration of one or two owners (Abromowitz 2000). After that, the home reverts to

standard prices. Thus, while government or private investments made in affordability

may have helped one or two families, they do not address the issue in the long run. The

question we should ask with respect to community land trusts (or other balanced equity

mechanisms), therefore, is not are they a perfect solution, but how do they compare to

the possible alternatives?   If they allow an individual to build more equity than other

models that may be available to them, to realize more benefits from pooling some of their

resources and energies with their neighbors, or to live their lives more in accordance with their values, then the loss of their ability to maximize the profit-potential of their dwelling-space may be compensated for.   Additionally, if we can make the case that communities adopting balanced equity mechanisms are more likely to live in ways that are less ecologically harmful than other competing land uses, then these communities may be able to benefit from financial and other resources dedicated by government and private sources towards protecting the environment.   To fulfill this opportunity will require locally based financial service institutions capable of mediating such negotiations.

Social and Ecological Potential of Community Lending Institutions

In order to see the need for alternatives to current financial service institutions, it is useful to assess what is already there.   Most US government programs addressed towards meeting the housing needs of low-income individuals – as well as programs initiated by private banks as a result of the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 (Calomiris et al. 1994) – operate within what we might call the "American Dream" model: work hard, buy a house on your own land, and build equity so you can retire. These programs seek to redress wealth inequities, and the effects of discrimination in lending practices (Lindley et al. 1984, Ladd 1998), by offering interest rate subsidies, down-payment assistance, loan guarantees, and other programs designed to level the playing field (Calomiris et al. 1994).   Through these programs, many families can take part in the "American Dream" who otherwise might not have been able to.   Yet there remains a large segment of the low-income population these programs are unable to reach. Many people,

26

although they may possess assets that are unacknowledged by traditional accounting methods, have incomes below the eligibility cutoff level; some who do have the incomes lack the technical skills, education, or cultural aptitude necessary to take advantage of available programs (Calomiris et al. 1994). Additionally, some people may not have the typical "American Dream," in which property is seen primarily as an exclusively individualized, tradeable commodity. The above groups of people – by virtue of need or commitment – may be willing to accept a balance between the opportunity to build tradeable equity, and the opportunity to put a "stake" in a particular place and share resources with members of a chosen community. With conscious planning, this "stake" can be a centerpiece for long-term environmental responsibility.

What each of the above groups share in common – those with unacknowledged assets, those lacking education, and those with an alternative dream – is that they are in possession of resources and assets that are not currently being capitalized on by dominant financial service programs. The reason for this is not because these people will not be good for loans that might be extended to them, but because it would be too costly for financial service institutions – government or private – to determine the relative risk of people who do not fit neatly into predominant categories (Calomiris et al. 1994). The problem, then – which harkens back to the problem with many conservation projects – is that most financial institutions function at too large a scale to be responsive to localized and particular needs (Calomiris et al., 1994). In order for a financial institution to be capable of identifying untapped assets, of sorting out associated credit risks at smaller and localized scales, and of supplying the appropriate kind of education to support the

value-generating capacity of these untapped assets, a first requirement is that it would need to be geographically based in or near the people it seeks to serve. Secondly, in order to bridge the social and cultural divides that so often prevent people from accessing traditional programs (Calomiris et al., 1994), its administrative structure would have include the people it served. Thirdly, both the financial service institutions, and the property ownership mechanisms that such institutions help people invest in, would need to reflect the constraints, abilities, and desires of those people. Fourthly, because it is likely that there is a tradeoff between the maintenance of social values and the maximization of financial profits (see Morduch 1999) such institutions would need a way to generate a portion of their working capital from sources outside of the communities they service.

Throughout the country, a growing number of organizations, often called Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), are attempting to negotiate a balance between social responsibility and sound investment strategies by offering loans to individuals and groups from at-risk communities for ventures that fall outside banks' normal purview. These loans can be for housing, business development, farming, or cooperative land ventures. As I learned at the annual meeting of the National Association of Community Capital – a sort of clearinghouse for CDFIs – they operate on a wide variety of models and philosophies. Some focus on technical support, others work to keep interest rates to a bare minimum, others focus on finding ways to increase the profitability – and therefore the feasibility – of community-based lending. What they share in common is a commitment to expand the accessibility of capital for the purposes

of building equity as the foundation for personal and community development

(StipeMaas, personal communication).

CDFIs, building on the successes of microfinance organizations in developing

countries (Morduch 1999) operate at a small enough scale to identify the needs and assets

of people overlooked by larger institutions. They can also function as a bridge between

the people they serve and organizations which can provide the educational and technical

support they need to capitalize on their innate resources. By offering loans instead of

charity, they encourage accountability on the part of borrowers (Morduch 1999). At the

same time, as recipients of government and private support, they are often able to offer

the loans at lower rates than banks, which charge higher rates of interest to more "risky"

people and projects (Calomiris 1994). The challenge for CDFIs lies in balancing fiscal

sustainability with the ability to invest in people and projects that may not provide the

maximal return on their investment (Morduch 1999).   Tipping the scale in one direction –

towards maximizing profits – may mean failing to serve the real needs of low-income and

other marginalized groups. Tipping the scale in the other – towards keeping interests

rates low – may mean continued reliance on external funding sources, and the perception

that CDFIs are really glorified charities.

The trick to achieving balance may lie in carefully evaluating not only the financial

profits generated by loans, but the social values they function to promote. Thus, one

way to justify continued subsidization – and this is where long-term environmental

protection comes in – is if the activities and ways of living community based financial

services supported could be consciously designed to encourage the maintenance of

environmental resources that are of value to the larger community. Government housing

programs justify subsidies because they provide homes for people who otherwise might

be on the streets. Government investment in parks justifies subsidies because they

protect resources that might otherwise be destroyed. If socially supported housing

programs and environmental protection programs warrant subsidization, there is no

reason to demand that programs which combine the two be completely self-sufficient. At

the same time, given that a main goal of this idea is to support people in building equity,

CDFI's should set goals for fiscal sustainability, and develop the discipline to meet these

goals (Morduch 1999). In order to see how cooperative ownership, community based

lending, and ecological protection might be linked in a real life context, it will now be

useful to turn to the case study.

SECTION 3
PUTTING THE CONCEPTS IN PRACTICE:
A CASE STUDY OF INVESTING IN PLACE

Having identified innovations in land tenure regimes and funding vehicles for working

towards a place-based approach to conservation, what remains is to implement and

experiment with these policies in specific situations. An opportunity to do this was

provided by a sequence of events in the summer of 2001 near the campus of the

University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Between August of 2001 and 2002, I had the

privilege of working alongside the residents of a mobile home community as they

struggled to deal with the consequences of having their land selected for "upgrading" into a

site for luxury student apartments. Although the residents ultimately lost their land, their

ongoing commitment – to having a place they can feel proud of and invest their care in,

and a community they can be a part of – is demonstrated by the fact that many of them

are currently working together to form a cooperative and purchase new land for a new

community. My personal involvement in their work, as a student activist, a community

development facilitator, and as cofounder and President of the board of a nonprofit

community lending organization, has given me an invaluable opportunity to observe the

theoretical ideas discussed herein in a real-life context. It became, in effect, a case study.

In this section, I will first relate the events that occurred following news of the

sale of the park, and attempt to show how the ways in which the people living in the

park developed attachments to their place and community.   Then, I will discuss how

alternative land tenure and funding mechanisms can – and are being – revised so that

displaced residents can develop lasting and secure attachments to a specific place. In

doing so, I will highlight some of the problems and complexities in applying the

theoretical models described above to a real-life scenario. Finally, I will use the work that

is being done in Athens, Georgia to illustrate how principles of ecological design can be

part of the mobile home park development process.

Setting the Scene: Location and Physical Description

Garden Springs Mobile Home Park was located on North Avenue, one mile north

of downtown Athens and the University of Georgia I say "was" because, although the

location on North Avenue is of course still there, the *place* that was Garden Springs is no

longer.   If one were to drive by at the time of this writing (winter of 2002), they would

see a treeless expanse of land – 22 acres – with a series of two-story apartments nearing

completion. Out front is a sign that advertises: "Campus Lodge Apartments" (see Reese

[January 25, 2002], Shearer [June 18, 2001], Spiva [July 11, 2001], Stroer [July 8,

September 28, October 10, 2001], and Tonge [October 3, 2001] for local newspaper

articles concerning Garden Springs and the following events).

In August of 2001, trees ringed the land, and 108 mobile homes were located on a

series of circular offshoots from a central road in the shape of a figure eight.   The homes

were not linearly placed, like in some mobile homes parks, but seemed to have been

placed in a way so as to avoid clearing or leveling land. A total of about 700 trees grew on

the park's 22 acres: approximately 2/3 hardwoods, and 1/3 pine. The average diameter at breast height (dbh) was 36 centimeters for the hardwoods and 47 centimeters for the pines. The 11 species represented were pin oak, turkey oak, water oak, red oak, black cherry, pecan, American elm, sweet gum, sycamore, locust, hickory, ash, maple, dogwood, hawthorn, and loblolly pine. Several of the trees were quite large, including an American elm with a dbh of 67 cm, a pin oak of 120 cm dbh, many other hardwoods over 50 cm dbh, and several pines over 60 cm dbh. In the center of the park was a common area containing 19 hardwood trees (avg. dbh = 47cm), and 6 pine trees (avg. dbh = 65 cm). The center-area hardwoods were mostly large spreading oaks, along with the park's one American elm.

Most of the homes had short driveways leading up to them, and were on cement platforms or in some cases on cement blocks. Each home had a small yard either in front of or behind it. In the middle of the park, behind the common mailboxes and a notice board, was a large common area that included a grassy section and a run-down basketball court. Other common areas were strewn throughout the park. Each day after school let out, the grassy areas and the basketball courts were filled with kids – aged infant to teenager – riding bikes, playing ball, arguing and shoving and running. Usually, one or two parents were around too, reeling in the kids when they got out of hand. Other parents watched unseen from within their homes.

Social Makeup

A survey conducted by UGA social work students showed that the residents

living in Garden Springs as of August 2002 included 16 black families, 8 white families,

and 52 families who identified themselves as Hispanic. The survey also found that 78%

of the families qualified as 'very low income', with yearly incomes from $10,000 to

$18,000.   Of the remaining families, 18% would be classified as low-income, and 4%

would be classified as low to moderate income (Bedard Unpublished). Despite their low-

income levels, the majority of the residents owned their homes, some for over 30 years.

While several of the residents were living on various forms of social assistance, the

majority of them worked in local hospitals, factories, warehouses, and doing construction

and maintenance. Many of the Hispanic men and women worked at one of several local

chicken processing plants.

Disinvestment and Investment

According to a 30 year resident, over the years that the last owner had managed

the park, the quality of life had deteriorated due to his failure to invest in maintenance and

repairs. The roads developed holes that were not fixed; the playground was removed; the

laundry room burned down and was not replaced; the sewer system developed leaks; the

pool was shut down and became the dumping ground for old air conditioners and

refrigerators.

This disinvestment led several families to move on well before the final sale that

sealed the park's fate.   Some of these families left their mobile homes behind, either

because of their poor condition, or because of a law that only mobile homes made after 1976 can be moved (Spiva July 11, 2001). The abandoned homes had become property of the park's owner, who at first rented them out. But because many of the people renting these worn down homes did not pay their rent, and under pressure of city inspectors who warned that rental units had to be fixed up or demolished, the owner started to sell these mobile homes to families from Mexico and other Latin American countries who had come to Athens to work in the local poultry plants. In contrast to the absentee landlord, these new residents invested a large amount of time and resources into improving the aspects of the park over which they had direct control, their homes.

One resident (JN) whom I spoke with on several occasions told me how he had purchased a broken down mobile home that had not been lived in for several years. It had no door, bathrooms, or floor. He paid $1500 for it in September of 1998, and rented the land beneath it for $165 a month. After work – first in the Conagra poultry plant, and then later as the assistant to the driver of a street-sweeping machine (who also lived in the park) – he would spend four to five hours working on his home, doing all the repairs on his own. He estimates that he and his family worked 4 to 5 hours a day for the months of September, October, and November, and that he invested $3000 into fixing his home.

The Sale

The vulnerability of J N's investments, and of the many others who made similar investments, was made clear in June of 2002, when word began to spread among the families that the park had been sold. Although the park had been bought and sold several

times over the last few decades, this time was different: the new owners – a Florida investment group – planned to demolish the park and build high-end student apartments on the site (Thompson 2001). Because of the park's prime location near downtown, and the continued expansion of the nearby University of Georgia campus, the park had fetched a high price: 1.7 million dollars – more than twice its sale price just four years earlier (Red and Black Editors August, 2001).

After the sale of the park, the residents were told they would have 60 days to move somewhere else. As can be imagined, they felt a range of emotions: anger, because they saw themselves as having been treated unfairly; fear, because of the uncertainty of the future; and sadness at the loss of their community. One resident, A C, moved to Garden Springs in 1972, and had been taking daily walks around the park's perimeter every day for 30 years. When told that she had two months to find somewhere else to live, A C's response, like that of many other residents, bordered on panic: "Oh, my God, what am I going to do? Where am I going?"

A C's home, like many others, was built before 1976, and thus according to Federal law could not be moved. Thus her entire investment, and the investments of those who shared her predicament, would be lost. Moving each of the newer homes would cost between $1500 and $3000, and there were very few available spots in other parks. C I, who had moved to Athens to follow the company she worked with, and to Garden Springs because the owner told her he was going to "revitalize the place," was unable to find a park that would take her brand new single-wide mobile home – even after she got her company-lawyer to help her. "A single-wide," she told me, "as long as you

can take it up and move it somewhere is not considered permanent [so most places won't take them]."

Protests

Many of Garden Spring's residents had become attached to the place and to their community; their desire to stay was about more than money and housing. Thus, the residents of Garden Springs did not submit quietly to the dissolution of their community. Beginning in late June and on into the fall, many of them took to the streets to protest their impending dislocation. Simultaneously, they worked with church and other community leaders to raise funds and resources to insure that, should the move prove inevitable, people would have somewhere to go and a way to get there. The residents' success at crossing lines of ethnicity, culture, and social class to work collectively inspired a great variety of people from the wider Athens community to get involved. Over the next several months, neighbors of the park, students, faculty, and staff from the University of Georgia, members of several local and state-wide churches, service and nonprofit organizations, schoolteachers of the children who lived in the park, business leaders, city commissioners, the mayor of Athens and one of his challengers, a state senator, social workers, lawyers, and several others began to devote large amounts of time and money to support the residents as they responded to their impending dislocation (see References page for more articles from local papers concerning these events).

The joint efforts of these individuals and groups made Garden Springs one of the biggest stories of the year in local newspapers, and succeeded in getting the final move-

out date postponed from September until March.   During that time, people around the state of Georgia learned about Garden Springs on the radio, in the Atlanta Journal Constitution, and on the six o'clock news. One local schoolteacher who took a stand was featured on national television. Over $300,000 in contributions of money and professional services were distributed to help individuals move and to support them in organizing as a community, several part-time jobs were created, and two new not-for-profits were formed and are continue to develop. It is not uncommon to hear Athens residents say that a new mayor was elected because of people's outrage over what happened to Garden Springs.

Fighting to Stay Versus Preparing to Leave

Some of those who sought to help the residents had different, sometimes, conflicting, ideas on what to do.   L C was one of the first members of the Athens community outside of Garden Springs to take an interest in their fate, and the person whom several residents acknowledge for encouraging them to speak up and protest the evictions. She lives on a street just around the corner from the park, and has long been an outspoken critic of Athens' patterns of development.   L C perceived in the loss of Garden Springs the harbinger of a total transformation of that part of town from affordable homes for people who live and work in Athens, into apartments and services geared towards students and University life.   In short, the threat to Garden Springs was a threat to her own neighborhood.

To uphold the claim that the residents should not have to move meant taking the position that either the market mechanisms at play had been perverted to support the sale, or that the mechanisms themselves were wrong and inequitable. The former positions was taken by those who petitioned the Athens County Commissioners for a temporary moratorium on building (Stroer September 28, 2001), which would have provided time and a mandate to reassess the effects of recent zoning changes that allowed for the transformation from mobile home park to apartment complex. Although residents, community leaders – even schoolteachers of some of the kids who lived in the park – spoke passionately in favor of the moratorium, it was defeated by a vote of seven to two. In opposing the moratorium, the majority of the commissioners chose to accept the interpretation of realtors and developers, who spoke out at the hearing, categorizing the proposed moratorium as a "taking" of private property (Tonge October 3, 2001).

Other supporters of Garden Springs, such as ST, opposed efforts to block the move. As the Director of a local social service agency, S T had raised money and coordinated efforts to help move residents of converted mobile home parks before. As a provider of social services, her primary concern was with the potential for massive homelessness of the many residents who didn't have enough money to move, and didn't have any place to go. The organizational and fundraising effectiveness of S T and those who worked with her ultimately prevented any family from going homeless (although some had to stay in homeless shelters or with other families), and diminished the hardships of moving for many people.

Relocation

Eventually, with the help of local community members and service organizations and over $300,000 in government assistance and private contributions, the residents of Garden Springs did relocate. As of this writing, the new student apartments are nearing completion, and the residents of Garden Springs are spread out around several mobile home parks, apartments, and houses throughout Athens/Clarke County. Most of them are in mobile home parks near the perimeter of Athens, farther from the downtown area, and from the location of schools and businesses. In talking with the dislocated residents about what they missed, and how the current setting compared to their previous one, I was able to gain a clearer sense of the elements of Garden Springs which mattered most to them.

A clear finding was that most of the residents – except those few who were able to purchase land or a home – felt that the physical environment of Garden Springs was superior to their current situations. Only one of the new parks has anything resembling a common area, and none have the tree cover. Many of the residents I spoke with, when asked what they missed most about Garden Springs, referred to the trees and other aspects of the natural environment. "I liked Garden Springs," said J N, "it was a place with lots of tall trees, and it was green and splendorous. It was very pleasant; we could hear birds singing in the morning. I liked the squirrels and I was even able to see some deer." J Y told me that he missed the hardwoods but he was glad to be away from the pines, which lose limbs in the rain and mess up his landscaping. And T D, when asked to compare the new place to her old, told me:

My yard is smaller here . . . in the back too. My father said, 'everywhere you go, you have to make yourself happy.' But it's not Garden Springs. I miss Garden Springs. This doesn't have the trees: that's why it's so hot. I like trees: in the evening the sun is out front and it comes right in. Out of my bedroom at Garden Springs there was a cherry tree – it should have been put out back here. . . It made good shade.

Residents also missed the common areas. At a community meeting, one woman asked her fellow displaced Garden Springs residents to raise their hands if their new park had a playground. None raised their hands: "where I live now, people say it's a nice park," she said, "But to me it's not a nice park. It would be a nice park if I didn't have kids." C, age 10, summed up the impression I got from most of the children I talked to about the move, who spend far more time indoors now that there are no common areas in which they can play: "I hate it here," he said of his home in a makeshift park behind a liquor store on Commerce Avenue, "it's just a hill."

Future residents of the land will not enjoy the environment residents of Garden Springs left behind. Shortly after the last resident moved out, bulldozers reduced the 22 acres of Garden Springs Mobile Home Park into a treeless patch of bulldozed earth. Future residents will not enjoy the benefits of being part of a long-standing community such as Garden Springs either. As a community of students, the residents will turn over completely every 3 to 4 years.

Lessons from Garden Springs

The history of Garden Springs contains within it a message that relates to the need for an expansion of the conventional wisdom of conservation biology. Although no one outside Garden Springs realized it, until a group of ecology students from UGA surveyed the site, **there were trees and open space worth protecting there**. The mobile homes had long co-existed with these trees and the open space; the high-density apartments that replaced them required that the land be cleared and leveled. Given this great difference in co-existence between people and the larger ecosystem, does it not make sense to see the people who lived in Garden Springs as caretakers of the trees, topography, and open space that is now gone? If so, might protecting the interconnections between people and land in communities such as Garden Springs be a viable form of ecological and cultural conservation?

Although tragic, the uprooting of a community provides a unique opportunity to better understand the link between land and people and to envision a framework within which the needs of at-risk communities and healthy ecosystems can be united. In order to do this, it will first be useful to discuss the unique vulnerabilities – and possibilities – of mobile home parks, and then to show how certain policy changes might provide a foundation for meeting both ecological and social objectives.

From Trailer Park to Sustainable Manufactured Housing Community

> When I first started out, I rented [my trailer] for a long time. When [the owner] offered to sell the trailer, I … bought what a lot of people call a dream home, you know? It seemed like a dream home because [it was the biggest thing] I ever purchased. I bought a car before, but my trailer is a home.
>
> - J Y, former resident of Garden Springs Mobile Home Park

Manufactured homes are currently the single fastest growing form of housing in the country (Genz 2000). Therefore, even modest improvements in their ecological impacts may – if propagated – have large effects.   Yet including sustainability and manufactured housing in the same sentence may seem like an oxymoron to some. Myths and prejudices about "trailer parks" abound, including the notion that mobile homes have no value, that they are inimical to the goal of building strong communities, and that the people who live in parks are incapable of taking care of their land or capitalizing on their investment in their homes (Beamish and Goss 2000, Genz 2000). The premise of this thesis is that many of the current problems associated with manufactured homes are a function not of the people who live in them, or of the nature of the structures themselves, but of the inequitable ownership structure that predominates in most manufactured home communities, and of the state policies that fail to provide adequate protection for owners of manufactured homes. In order to understand this, it will first be useful to discuss some basic facts.

Although manufactured housing comes in many varieties, what sets them apart from other forms of housing is that they are built off site and transported to a temporary

or permanent lot. Manufactured homes are built on a permanent chassis, and although

they can be moved after their original placement, this is in fact quite rare. Nationally,

only 5% of manufactured homes are ever moved from their original site (Fetto 1992).

Thus, from its origin in the 1930s as a temporary form of shelter for people on the move

(Wallis 1997), manufactured housing has slowly but surely been transformed into its

current role as permanent dwelling for a growing number of people.   In 1974, this shift

was acknowledged by Congress when the Federal Manufactured Housing Construction

and Safety Standards Act was passed, which mandates that all new manufactured homes

meet national safety and design standards (Apgar et al. 2002).

For potential buyers the most appealing feature of manufactured homes is their

affordability (Beamish and Goss 2000, Genz 2000, Apgar et al. 2002). Despite popular

notions (see Beamish and Goss 2000), their affordability is not a function of their inferior

quality as compared to site built homes: studies have indicated that manufactured housing

built after the congressionally mandated standards are comparable to site built homes in

terms of safety and structural performance (Warner and Johnson 1993, Gordon and Rose

1998). Instead, the affordability of manufactured housing stems from the reduced

construction costs inherent in centralized manufacturing. This includes cost savings from

the economies of scale generated by high volume purchase of materials, the use of

assembly-line techniques, the standardization of materials and design, and the lack of

delays due to weather and government bureaucracy that can be associated with on-the-

spot construction (Apgar et al. 2002).   These production savings result in a final product

that is 20 to 30% cheaper – even after the home is transported to its destination – than an equivalent-sized site built home (Apgar et al. 2002).

The relative affordability of manufactured homes opens a way to home ownership for people who might not otherwise have this option (Genz 2000, Apgar et al, 2002), and makes them an increasingly popular choice among people with low incomes. A 1997 study showed that manufactured home occupants had a median income of $23,417, as compared to the US median income of $37,005. Furthermore, manufactured housing offers high rates of home ownership to minorities (Genz 2000). In the United States as a whole, manufactured homes are the single largest source of unsubsidized low-cost housing, and their numbers are growing: between 1993 and 1999, manufactured housing accounted for more than one sixth of new homes. In rural Georgia, the numbers are even higher (Genz 2000).

While the majority – 79% – of mobile home residents own their homes, only about half own the land on which their home is placed (Genz 2000). Not owning their land makes mobile home owners extremely vulnerable to the whims of park owners and the changing landscape of the town or city the park is located in. Park dwellers throughout the country are subject to neglect of roads, sewer systems, and common areas, and to being forced to move after having their land sold out from underneath them. When the latter happens, the misnomer of "mobile" in the phrase "mobile home" becomes clear: nationally, only 5% of mobile homes are ever moved from their original site (Fetto 2002). When a mobile home park is sold, therefore, residents are liable to lose their entire

investment in their homes (Genz 2000, Halpern 2001, New Hampshire Community Loan Fund Website 2001, Bedard 2002).

In the current structure, mobile home park owners, who sometimes call parks "cash cows," view parks as investments rather than places people live, and often have little incentive to redirect profits towards improving park conditions (Bradley 2000). Individually, there is little a resident can do to overcome the problems inherent in owning a home on rented land: because homeowners are disadvantaged in the market by not being able to "vote with their feet" and move freely (as they might when renting an apartment) the balance of power is tipped towards investor-owners (Bradley 2000).   Several researchers and practitioners maintain that mobile home parks have the potential to provide people with a good home in a stable community (McCarthy, personal communication, MacTavish and Salamon 2001). However, under the current institutional structure mobile home ownership cannot be seen as a sustainable affordable housing strategy (Bedard 2002).   As we have seen, one weakness of mobile home ownership is that the ownership of homes is separate from ownership of the land. However, with the right financing, there is no inherent reason that the homeowners in the park could not pool their resources towards purchasing a park, and towards the creation of a legal framework that is designed for the purpose of managing the park for the benefit of the residents both now and in the future. In order to further explore this possibility, it makes sense to turn back to Garden Springs.

Balanced Equity Cooperative Ownership and the People of Hope

> The People of Hope are people that are looking to create an opportunity
> for our families by getting involved with our communities, by making
> friends, and by finding a place for our families to grow within a society
> that we are a part of. Together, we hope to build a more secure future for
> each one of us. . .
>
> . . .This will be a difficult challenge. Some of us speak different languages
> and come from different cultures. Some of us have never had security for
> our families: the security of housing, the security of community, the
> security of land. The People of Hope are the people who have the desire
> to overcome these barriers.
>
> <div align="right">- People of Hope Newsletter June/July 2002</div>

When a local community economic development lawyer and an intern from

University of Georgia's school of social work proposed the idea of a cooperatively

owned park to the residents, it made perfect sense. Their recent experience had

emblazoned into the residents' minds the importance of being able to control one's own

future on the land.   Their initial hope was to purchase Garden Springs back from the new

owner. Collectively, they paid over $10,000/month in lot fees. They hoped to leverage

this into a mortgage, and to subsidize it with help from outside supporters: already, over

$100,000 in grants and contributions had been raised by the residents for the specific

purpose of buying and developing their own land.

After the new owner made it clear that he had no interest in selling the park back

to the residents (Stroer October 10, 2001) the residents' energy became split between the

immediate goal of finding a place to live and the long-term goal of building a stable

community. Still, a number of residents spent an inordinate amount of time envisioning a

mobile home park that would work for them, and enlisting others in order to strategize

towards meeting this goal. Calling themselves "The People of Hope," these residents – in

addition to moving themselves and their families, and with no financial compensation

above and beyond that received by other residents from charitable organizations –

devoted countless evenings and weekends to training and developing themselves, and to

laying the groundwork for the creation of the first resident owned and operated mobile

home park in Georgia (Rees January 25, 2002).

One of the first things they did was to articulate their core values. In addition to

developing a value-oriented vision, the leaders also had to communicate this vision to

others, and to negotiate a process of enhancing their own leadership ability while ensuring

that they remained representative of and accountable to the larger community. One of the

early challenges they faced was in defining membership of that community: was it

anyone who ever lived in Garden Springs, anyone who lived there at the time of the

eviction, anyone who had come to a meeting, anyone who might share their vision now or

in the future? Answering these questions was important and complex, given the large

amounts of money and resources that were at stake.

Beyond questions of community membership, there were differences in defining

priorities. Some of the People of Hope felt that the primary concern should be political

advocacy – working to protect other parks from meeting the same fate. "We want to

make sure this will not happen again . . . [we shouldn't just] worry about one group . . .

there's gonna be other parks" said former resident B D, who after the move spoke to

several organizations around Athens, and traveled to Atlanta to speak at a senate hearing on the rights of mobile homeowners.

Others saw the main priority as the land: "without land, we have nothing . . . we're back to the beginning", said J N at a meeting. "[With a cooperative], you have something for the future for your son or your daughter, and nobody can say this is my land get out," said C F. "Why invest in a place when you're future isn't secure," A Z told me, after he had witnessed the destruction of years of investments in planting and landscaping on his lot in Garden Springs.

Yet others saw the People of Hope as a powerful structure for directing funds and support towards increasing the capacities of individuals and families to meet their needs: they wanted job training, small business development, a daycare and community center. As J N said, "The Athens community knows who we are. I think that due to the popularity and prestige we acquired because of the Garden Springs issue, people from Athens would be interested in contracting our services . . . community businesses owned by us would bring diverse sources for our own economic development."

The differences in residents' priorities were compounded by the differences in the philosophies and agendas of those who sought to help them. With limited time, money, and resources, not all agendas could be followed. On several occasions, the residents' different agendas and the different agendas of their supporters clashed. The different philosophies underlying these clashes of opinion show us that the heart of the matter is the perceived importance of place and community in maximizing the opportunities of the individual. Agnew (1984) points out that many social investment strategies treat the

goals of strengthening people and strengthening communities and places as distinct from

each other. Other strategies, however, operate on the assumption that the prosperity of

individual people is inextricably connected to the prosperity of the place and community

they are a part of. Agnew is worth quoting here at length:

> Previously unexamined assumptions made by planners about people and
> places reveal a bias against people in social contexts in favor of an
> atomized and reified view of people in locations that are treated solely in
> terms of their 'optimality' from capital investment and cost-benefit points
> of view. Thus people are not seen as ends in themselves . . . but as pawns
> in a game of economic growth directed by those engaged in disinvestment
> from one place and new investment elsewhere . . . In [taking this atomistic
> view] and developing policies accordingly, therefore, it is not just places
> which lose, but people also.

In my perception from speaking with them at length, the ex-residents of Garden

Springs who stepped forth and are taking the risks and doing the work to provide

leadership are doing so both because they believe it is in their own best interests, and

because they are out to provide benefits to their community. In my view, the greatest

threats to the unfolding community and leadership development process occurred when

outside funding sources prematurely emphasized the possibility of job and business

development for individuals. While such economic opportunities are very important, they

are often most accessible to those individuals who are community leaders. Thus, it

becomes too easy to target gifted community leaders and to direct investments toward

their personal development, which might help them "move up" as individuals, but it

would leave the vast majority of those with whom they share their community in the

same old place.

As I saw it, the main leaders of the People of Hope placed community values at the heart of their work. B D: "[Personally] I am interested in a home health care business . . . [but in working on the board of the POH] I was thinking about the community." This commitment to focusing on community does not stem from some naive romanticism on the part of the residents, but from a practical appraisal of their opportunities and resources. Seeing their success at working together to generate outside funding and support, many residents concluded that working collectively provides their best hope to further their individual financial needs: "the idea of a community [is really the best way we have] for looking for our private profit," said J N.

A Role for the Georgia Community Loan Fund

While the People of Hope are working to identify and build on their own financial and social resources, like anyone else interested in purchasing land, they will also require outside financing assistance, as well as additional training and development in managing a cooperative. In New Hampshire, The New Hampshire Community Loan Fund has pioneered the extension of low-interest loans to mobile home park residents for the express purpose of the purchasing and managing resident-owned parks (Halpern 2001, NHCLF website 2001). As of now, 10% of the Mobile Home Parks in New Hampshire are cooperatively owned (Halpern 2001). Not one of these parks has faced foreclosure (Halpern 2001), and anecdotal evidence from park residents seems to indicate that making the switch from a landlord owned to a resident owned mobile home park brings great gains in the areas of family safety and financial security, sense of community, and the health

and safety of the mobile home environment (Bradley 2000, Halpern 2001, NHCLF website 2001, Knox 2001). The success of the park residents in New Hampshire has unleashed a national inquiry into the viability of cooperative ownership as a means to make mobile homes a better strategy for affordable housing and asset building (McCarthy, personal communication).

In Georgia, The Georgia Community Loan Fund (GCLF) was created as a result of the efforts of many who had worked to support the residents of Garden Springs in fighting for their community. Its aim is to work with community based initiatives, like the People of Hope, to invest in projects such as affordable housing and/or environmental conservation. The creation of the GCLF was catalyzed by an earlier organization called TRUST, founded by several students in the Institute of Ecology who wanted to re-direct their "tax relief for America's Workers" checks to a worthy cause. After exploring several issues, the students decided they wanted to be of service to the residents of Garden Springs, and to do so in a way that addressed the underlying issues. As of January of 2003, the GCLF has a board of directors, has received its 501c3 status, and is currently undergoing strategic planning and fundraising development.

Those working with The People of Hope and the GCLF hope to transform the legal and financial structures that currently prevent mobile home parks from being a sustainable housing strategy. Although it is still on the horizon, these changes have the potential to lead to other changes in mobile home park development and design, and even in their construction. There are several reasons to believe that, with some creativity and investment, this type of dwelling could be a part of be a cutting-edge ecological

community: first, the minimal need for on-site construction allows for minimal destruction of trees, and centralized manufacture means that any innovation in energy efficiency can be replicated at a large scale; second, parks can be designed to maximize greenspace and minimize impervious surface areas, and provide a perfect setting for innovative and efficient small-scale water treatment strategies.   Currently, the People of Hope are working with a local landscape architect to explore some of these possibilities in developing their new park. In New Hampshire, the NCHLF is working to develop the nation's first mobile home park where all the homes are certified by the "Energy-Star" program, and where the layout incorporates principles of ecological design (Bradley, personal communication).

The above innovations, if applied at a small scale, would make a positive difference for the inhabitants of the parks they are applied in. Applied across several mobile home parks, they have the potential to make improvements in a region's overall ecological character.   However, for the kinds of innovations described above to become a reality, it is important that we find ways to transcend our prejudices about "trailer parks," and that we do so not only through grassroots efforts, but also through top-down policy changes.   Because current zoning laws often relegate mobile homes to the outskirts of town between commercial and industrial areas (Knox 2001), or discriminate completely against mobile home parks, it is difficult for residents wishing to form cooperatives to gain the financial and structural support that is necessary.   In New Hampshire, mobile home park residents benefit from a "Right of First Refusal" law, which gives residents the first option to buy their park if the land is put on the market.   Laws such as this in

Georgia and other states, in addition to policy changes at the local level, can go a long way

towards making mobile home parks a sustainable housing alternative.

SECTION 4
CONCLUSION: FROM GREENSPACE TO GREENPLACE

Planners have recently adopted the idea of Greenspace as a useful concept to be

employed at the regional level for protection of land resources in the face of rapid

development. Greenspace is land that is set aside from certain kinds of development and

permanently protected.   Regionally, the connection of localized greenspaces can provide

for an interconnected system of protected land. One application of the work in this

thesis is to develop a sister concept to that of greenspace. In addition to demarcating and

protecting grenspaces, we may want to start demarcating and protecting *greenplaces*.

Like a greenspace, a greenplace would enjoy institutionally mandated permanent

protection. The protections, however, would be based not on the ecological value of the

land in itself, but on the relationship between the land and the people living or working on

it. The rationale for protecting these relationships would be grounded in a societal value

for people to determine their own future. The benefits for protecting these relationships

would not just be for the people within that community, but would be consciously and

creatively linked to the social, economic, and ecological systems within which that place

is embedded.

To further define a greenplace, it will be helpful to look at three aspects, each of

which must be explored for each site as part of the process towards making it a

greenplace. The three defining aspects of a greenplace are that they must be bounded, grounded, and linked.

Bounding Greenplace

A greenplace is *bounded* by virtue of it being recognized as a *place*; this entails there is some institutional framework for recognizing and empowering relationships between the land, the people who are living on it, and the community they are a part of. In developing such institutions, we must take care not to confuse *place* with *community* (Agnew 1984). As several researchers, primarily anthropologists, have pointed out, it is all too easy to take an overly simplistic view of local communities (Little 1994, Li 1996, Borrini-Feyerabend Forthcoming, Brosius and Russell Unpublished). Like emotional attachment to place, identification with a particular community is variable and depends on a variety of factors. We must acknowledge that communities are made up of individuals with a variety of different interests and concerns, and that what benefits one person or group – for example, conservation initiatives – may harm another (Borrini-Feyerabend Forthcoming, Twyman 1998).   As we work to define structures that will define and "bound" the extent of a community, it will be important to try to understand as best we can the complex dynamics that are always at play when people come together.   The challenges of the People of Hope in identifying the extent of their community attest to this.

Grounding Greenplace

A greenplace is *grounded* when the people living or working there have a commitment to the place, to their community, and to maintaining the identity and character of that place over time.   If the land is seen as an integral part of people's quality of life, then people will begin to develop the commitment to take care of it. This is a very different approach to the current means of economic valuation, in which local resources are given values as a function of their exchange value in the global context. A greenplace explicitly acknowledges the value of the resources in question for the community that interacts with them on a daily basis, and functions to insure the maintenance of that value even in the face of larger scale economic fluctuations.

This kind of commitment, and the relationships to support it, will not develop overnight. In many cases, groundedness may not emerge until people can trust the security of their relationship to the place as mediated by the operative policy institutions. However, there will usually be local cultural practices already at play that emphasize the connections between people and the land. To empower old practices and/or encourage the development of new ones that emphasize the importance of place, it may be necessary for innovations in legal and financial institutions be complemented with innovations in educational institutions. Currently, education may have the tendency to contribute to our alienation from places (see Berry 1977). A place-based approach to education could empower people living in places to build on and conserve the resources in that place, while realizing their fullest potential within a global context.

Linking Greenplace

> In Mexico, there are communities very well integrated: little small towns where everyone knows and helps each other, but they are not connected to the outside world - J N

> Models to describe environmental problems should . . . be "place-based" . . . but a preference for home place must also be . . . balanced with a sense of the larger space around the place (Norton, 2003).

A greenplace is *linked* when te legal and financial mechanisms that connect a community to the larger political, economic, and ecological contexts promote sustainability over time. Due to advances in technology and the increasing interconnectedness of global markets – to what Massey and others call "time-space compression" (Massey 1991) – the boundaries between the local and the global are blurred in modern society. Place-based realities are thus determined by causes that are "universally diffuse" (Patten, Unpublished), and influence and are influenced by forces arising at different spatial scales (Norton and Hannon 1997).

If we are going to develop an approach to place based conservation that is sustainable, we thus must find ways to do so – as must the people we are working with – with an awareness of the constraints of the larger social, economic, and political systems those places are embedded in.   In the context of our exceedingly interconnected world, several authors emphasize the importance of gaining a sense not just of our relationship to the people and other living things we share the same locations with, but of finding ways to expand our perceptual boundaries and to develop a sense of "place in space" (Tuan,

1977, Massey 1991, Norton 2003). Linking a greenplace means being conscious of the

interconnections between the place we are working to protect and other places, and

between that place and systems occurring at larger spatial scales.

The Role of the University

> Don't get me wrong: I like UGA and some day I hope when my son grows
> up he goes there. But they are building up fast. I have lived in Athens all
> my life: we used to live in a three-bedroom house and pay $60 a month.
> Now, right around us, there's more and more complexes going up.

-Former Resident of Garden Springs

The kinds of questions we will need to consider in re-establishing the importance of place

defy disciplinary boundaries. To ask and attempt to answer such questions, we will have

to expand the academic discourse to include those disciplines built on direct experiences

with people, communities, and places. We will also need to include disciplinary

perspectives which allow us to take a macro perspective and understand the broader

"political ecology" in which communities exist and in which conservation takes place. As

theoreticians who can stand back and take a macroscopic and historical view, and as

practitioners who get into the nuances of the local and the particular, our challenge will be

to articulate ways in which the experiences of humans living in one place may be relevant

to those living in other places.

Reclaiming place, whether pursued in the political or academic arena, is not a

neutral undertaking. Increasingly, universities are a major force in determining patterns of

development in towns throughout the United States (Calder and Greenstein 2001). As a

land grant college, the University of Georgia has a mandate to be of service to the community it is located in. If we are not afraid to take an activist approach when it is called for, we may be able to play a role in forming and implementing public policies which tip the current non-localized scales of power back towards the local, making effective and equitable conservation more likely in the long run. If we choose to take on the challenge of place-based conservation, however, we must keep in mind the differences between empowering community as a means to an end and as an end in and of itself. As several conservationists have pointed out (see, for example, Terborgh's Requiem for Nature (1999)) there is no guarantee that people and communities with the power to determine their own destinies will choose to take care of their local environments. The approach articulated in this thesis is not meant as a substitute for more traditional approaches to conservation, nor is it proposed as a panacea: we need to protect all the land we can, and that will require a diversity of strategies and approaches. However, by resituating conservation within the context of the social and economic struggles many people are dealing with, this kind of work may have the added benefit of building broader constituencies for conservation than currently exist (Brosius and Russell Unpublished).

At heart, both social justice and ecological conservation are issues of value. The work presented herein is grounded in the value that trees, green spaces, and biological diversity are not just important because they are a part of healthy ecosystems, they are important because they improve the quality of human life. And vice versa.

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