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Multiculturalizing Rural Towns: Insights for Inclusive Planning

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Abstract

Many regions of the United States, including the Midwest, have recently undergone significant demographic change. Much of this Midwestern demographic change, particularly in rural areas, has been due to the recruitment of low-paid workers for food-processing industries. Though immigrants remain concentrated in their traditional urban destinations, many are choosing other locales as well, including rural destinations in states that historically have not drawn immigrants. Such shifts have increased the racial and ethnic diversity of many small communities whose formal structures of decision making and planning are ill equipped to deal with the resulting social heterogeneity. The paper points out that much of the inclusive planning perspective is based on the experience of metropolitan areas and large cities. To look at multiculturalism and planning rather through the lens of rural communities, rapid diversification achieves insights useful to the ongoing dialogue in planning scholarship. Through the case study of a demographically rapidly changing small community in the Midwest, the paper highlights the planning challenges and opportunities there and recommends agendas for future research.

Introduction

A key demographic story emanating from recent census data is the growth of the immigrant population in the United States, a group that increased by 58 percent, or more than 11 million people, between 1990 and 2000 (Singer 2004). The majority of immigrants in the United States are from Latin American countries, predominantly Mexico, and from Asian countries, comprising 52 percent and 26 percent, respectively (Bump, Lowell et al. 2005). European and African immigrants comprise much lower proportions of all immigrants to the US— about 16 percent and 3 percent, respectively (Bump, Lowell et al. 2005). Immigrants have increased their presence across the country in recent years. Between 1990 and 2000, immigrant populations

increased by an average of 56.2 percent in states that traditionally have had the most immigrants: California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas (Bump, Lowell et al. 2005). Though immigrants remain concentrated in metropolitan areas, some have moved beyond the traditional “immigrant gateway” cities (Singer 2004) to rural locales or micropolitan areas. Micropolitan areas are newly defined by the Census Bureau as urban clusters with populations between 10,000 and 50,000, in the Midwest and South (Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Lichter and Johnson 2006; Wahl 2007). Latino immigrants, particularly, have been heading to “new” locations including rural areas, micropolitan areas, and larger cities historically lacking a substantial non-White presence (Guzmán and McConnell 2002; Suro and Singer 2002; Arreola 2004; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Millard and Chapa 2004; Saenz 2004; Suro and Tafoya 2004; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005; Frey 2006; Wahl, Breckenridge et al. 2006; Wahl 2007; Vásquez, Seales et al. 2008). Rural Latinos, mostly immigrants, comprised more than one-quarter of total non-metropolitan population growth between 1990 and 2000 and nearly one-half of such growth between 2000 and 2006 (Parisi and Lichter 2007). Consequently, non-metropolitan counties across the nation have experienced rapid population growth due to immigrants, particularly those from Latin America, arriving in the U.S. after 1990 (Jensen 2006; Lichter and Johnson 2006) and preventing population losses in 100 such counties (Kandel and Cromartie 2004).

The highest rates of foreign-born population growth, however, have been in “new settlement states,” with increases averaging 159 percent: Southern states such as Georgia and North Carolina and Midwestern states such as Minnesota and Nebraska (Bump, Lowell et al. 2005). Thus, by 2000 approximately 13 percent of all immigrants from Latin America and 12 percent of those from Asia resided in such non-traditional states (Bump, Lowell et al. 2005).

African and Southeast Asian immigrants, as well, have increased in states such as Georgia, North Carolina, and Minnesota in recent years (Gozdziak and Martin 2005). For example, Census Bureau figures indicate that between 2000 and 2005, African immigrants increased by 29 percent in the Northeast, by 37 percent in the West, by 49 percent in the South, and by 60 percent in the Midwest.¹

As some Midwesterners have left the region for other areas, immigrants have arrived leading to increasing racial and ethnic diversification of many areas. The increase of immigrants in non-metropolitan counties across the country experienced declining native-born and immigrant residents throughout the 1990s (Lichter and Johnson 2006). Scholarship attentive to these phenomena has become important, since the nature of change and of the possibilities and constraints can differ in rural areas from the case in big metropolitan centers that has traditionally attracted most researchers' attention.

This paper presents a case study of a small town in the Midwest that has been changed considerably since 1990 by a large increase in non-White immigrants. The paper will demonstrate that situating the community within its regional economic and political context and historicizing its social demographics are essential to understanding the complexity of its demographic transformation so that new planning opportunities and challenges can be identified.² Indeed, as Jensen (2006) argues, "the effects of immigration on smaller communities must be at the forefront in policy discussions" (27).

In the case of the study community, an important aspect of its dynamics of demographic change is its history as a "sundown town." Those were towns that employed various explicit strategies to keep out African American and other non-white residents (e.g., requiring such workers to be "out of town by sundown") (Loewen 2005). Practices implemented or supported

by local leaders included harassment and intimidation, and local ordinances and zoning that purposely excluded African Americans, Mexicans, and other groups from living within the community's boundaries (Loewen 2005). For more than a century, more than perhaps 1,000 small towns, large metropolitan areas, and suburbs were able to regulate racial and ethnic divisions by keeping African Americans and other "undesirables" such as Jews, Chinese, Mexicans from living in the same small towns, suburbs, and major metropolitan areas as Non-Hispanic Whites (Loewen 2005).

Note that these practices are different from other discriminatory policies such as the federal government's role in regulating mortgage lending that helped create residentially segregated neighborhoods within the same community (Massey and Denton 1993; Charles 2003; Rosenbaum and Friedman 2007). These communities rather established or maintained racial/ethnic segregation within the municipal boundaries by direct use of violence or by warning African Americans to leave the town. Such practices ensured that there were very few non-Whites to isolate via other means. The history of Sundown towns is vitally important for a variety of reasons: this history has been hidden especially to Whites; it is understudied compared with research about other violent practices such as lynching; sundown practices were widespread in communities across the United States; and their presence continued through the 1970's after the Civil Rights Movements; and past patterns of settlement continue to influence the (lack of) racial and ethnic diversity in many areas at the current time (Loewen 2005).

In many small communities, but especially those with sundown town histories, the existing formal structures of decision making are ill-equipped to deal constructively with newly arrived ethnic and racial heterogeneity. Mediating between the interests and needs of residents and the local development processes often goes on in formal channels among engineers,

bureaucrats and politicians; planning agencies may be nonexistent. In the community we discuss here, development decisions are made in executive fashion by the mayor, referred to by locals as the town's CEO, while a growing body of non-profit organizations and community-based groups try to mediate the process of change. Such a process of social and urban transformation, we argue, has features that are important for contemporary planning scholarship on multiculturalism and cities, to consider, whereas such research has heretofore drawn almost exclusively on the experience of large cities and metropolitan centers. The new demographic realities of the United States generally, but particularly the strong immigrant growth — predominantly Latino but also Asian and African— in small towns and micropolitan areas means that we need to think “outside the box”—that is, to think beyond large cities with pre-existing planning structures, processes and practices.

The paper examines an ongoing research project whose focus is transnational processes of change in a small Midwestern town that we call Riverbend. Though the size of the community has remained the same since 1990, at approximately 6,000 people, Riverbend's racial and ethnic composition has changed dramatically: from less than 1 percent Latino in 1990 to more than 30 percent by 2006. As is true nationwide and in non-metropolitan areas, the majority of Riverbend's newcomers are Mexican migrants. Since 2003 the town's primary employer has hired another group of newcomers: Francophone West African immigrants. Thus, this formerly all-white sundown town has become vastly more multicultural than it was in previous eras.

The study relies on a broad range of data: examination of census data (1990-2006) for Riverbend and its county, archival and contemporary newspaper articles from Riverbend and from nearby metropolitan areas; oral histories of community members and nearby residents who reflect on Riverbend's early 20th century history; twenty open-ended interviews with immigrants,

social service providers, church leaders, and city employees; and our observations of the community's landscape. These quantitative and qualitative sources were used to develop a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of this community.

The organization of the paper is as follows: it opens with a brief overview of the inclusive planning debate within planning scholarship. Next, it summarizes the growing body of scholarship outlining explanations for the growth of immigrants, particularly those from Latin America, in rural communities outside of the Southwest. The paper then focuses on Riverbend, outlining changes in its primary employment and racial/ethnic composition, its past history of racial exclusion, the transitions related to the community's changing dynamics, and its structure and process of town decision making. Through this case study, the paper engages with the ongoing conversation on inclusive planning that was outlined in the opening of the paper. The paper concludes by outlining the insights gained from rural towns' experience of multiculturalism and by highlighting important questions for planning research and education in light of this new demographic reality.

Inclusive Planning

Since the 1960s, a large movement within planning scholarship has been building the profession's response to a world much more interconnected and complex, a reality much more "messy", and a society more heterogeneous than conventional planning practice had recognized. Critical planning scholarship has worked at shaking the foundations of a planning approach that assumes universality and the pure scientific neutrality of its knowledge. This movement has revealed how planning practice is not immune to various forms of social bias, but indeed is deeply invested in those, since they maintain social hierarchies on which the profession depends.

The conviction that planning knowledge is not impartial to the knower's particular social position and location (positionality perspective) has given rise to a powerful dialogue on inclusion in the planning literature, tracing the implications for planning's methods of knowledge production, definition of its constituency and realm of responsibility. The scholarship aiming for inclusive and plural planning recognizes the value of ethnographic, participatory and action-based research; has expanded its constituency beyond officials and bureaucrats to include marginalized communities, grassroots and civil society organizations; has redefined its responsibilities beyond rational problem solving to helping communities participate in decision making (participatory planning) (Clavel 1986; Abers 1998; Douglas and Friedmann 1998); facilitates equitable redistribution of resources (equity planning) (Forester 1989; Krumholz 1994); and mediates conflicting interests through communicative action (Healey 1992; Innes 1995; Healey 1997).

A more recent theoretical insight in the field, which recognizes the politics of difference and the cultural as well as the material bases of power, has explicated how planning may (re)produce social hierarchies in multicultural communities (Young 1990; Milroy 1992; Yiftachel 1994; Sandercock 1998; Watson 2006). Aiming for inclusive planning in multicultural societies, this scholarship has exposed how striving to make difference invisible in planning decisions can actually make identity and cultural practices the bases for discrimination, marginalization and dominance in planning. Careful ethnographic research has exposed the cultural bias of seemingly banal planning decisions — e.g., building permits, occupancy rates, street and shopping signs. Thus, in multicultural societies, controversies about planning decisions can indeed be about cultural and material domination/ subjugation. The examples are many; to list a few: the work on multiculturalism and planning in Australian cities by

Sandercock and Kliger (1998a; 1998b) and Thompson (2003); in Santa Ana, California by Harwood (2005); in Vancouver, Canada by Miraftab (2000); or in Toronto by Qadeer (1997) and Milroy and Wallace(2002).

While this multicultural perspective on planning has made significant contributions, in its analytical formation two related shortcomings persist. First, the scholarship on planning in multicultural societies assumes that questions of diversity for democratic planning and governance are the concerns solely of big cities. It is the present *Cosmopolis*, not the small *villes* of the multicultural world we live in, that constitutes the empirical basis of inclusive planning theorization. Few studies have focused on multiculturalism and planning in suburban areas (e.g Clavel and Kudva 2004; Harwood 2005), but perhaps none, to our knowledge, has focused on multiculturalism and planning in rural towns. Second, this debate on normative methods somehow takes for granted that formal planning structures exist in the smaller communities that deal with multiculturalism.

In this paper we shed light on the demographic trend that is transforming formerly all-White small towns into multicultural communities —often where no formalized planning agency is in place. Through the case study, we highlight how this less studied, demographic reality could illuminate the considerations of progressive planning scholars about inclusion and an expanded notion of planning practice.

Explaining demographic change in “new” areas

This paper focuses on a non-metropolitan, Midwestern community with a very large increase of immigrants since 1990, a situation that has occurred in numerous small towns across the nation. As is true nationally, the majority of immigrants in rural America are from Mexico (Fink 2003; Mohl 2003; Jensen 2006), Guatemala, El Salvador, and other Latin American

countries (Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2003; Salamon 2003; Lichter and Johnson 2006). Though Latin American immigrants are the largest proportion of foreign-born in rural areas, African and Asian immigrants also are moving to those in the Midwest (Fennelly and Leitner 2003; Bailey 2005; Fennelly 2005). Population increases in small towns of dozens or perhaps several hundred immigrants in small towns may appear inconsequential, but have profoundly affected all aspects of social life for both the long-term residents and the immigrant newcomers i.e., housing, employment, health care, and education (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Salamon 2003; Millard and Chapa 2004; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). Immigrants in these communities are quite diverse; some have been in the U.S. for many years, have U.S.-born children, have legal status to live and work in the country, and speak fluent English; others have arrived directly from Mexico (Saenz and Torres 2003; Lichter and Johnson 2006).

Though most scholarship about immigrants in the U.S. focuses on larger cities, a growing proportion concentrates on the causes and consequences of international migration to the non-traditional receiving areas (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Gouveia and Stull 1997; Durand, Massey et al. 2000; Grey 2000; Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2000; Grey and Woodrick 2002; McConnell and LeClere 2002; Fink 2003; Salamon 2003; Arreola 2004; Fennelly 2005; Gozdzia and Martin 2005; Kandel and Parrado 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005; Brown, Mott et al. 2007; McConnell Forthcoming, 2008). This work has led to important insights about why new Non-White, mostly foreign-born populations are increasing so rapidly in these areas. One explanation points to small towns dominated by manufacturing. As convincingly argued in Stull, Broadway, and Griffith (1995), food processing industries have implemented a “rural industrialization strategy” of relocating urban plants to rural areas, or reopening rural plants that had closed, to increase their profit by reducing costs. The lower prices

of rural land, shorter distances to the “source” (be it animals or corn), non-union workers, and the tax incentives offered by small communities have encouraged the return or the entry of plants for meat or poultry processing (Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2000; Fennelly and Leitner 2003; Grey and Woodrick 2005); textiles (Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005), as well as other industries (Millard and Chapa 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2005). That corporate strategy has revitalized many small communities, though the dangerous work in many such plants is far less lucrative than it was in previous periods (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Gouveia and Stull 1997; Gouveia and Stull 1997; Fennelly and Leitner 2003; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). Nevertheless, employment opportunities in food manufacturing plants have been important in drawing immigrants to non-traditional, rural destinations (Jensen 2006).

Other factors have drawn immigrants to non-traditional destinations in the Midwest and South. For instance, in Los Angeles and other traditional immigrant locales, the immigrant saturation of the labor market, job displacement, and small downward effects on wages encourage immigrants to go elsewhere (Latapí, Martin et al. 1997; Durand, Massey et al. 2000; Massey and Malone 2002; Donato, Aguilera et al. 2005). In addition, when cities such as Los Angeles have enforced policies on housing, occupational safety, and minimum wages, low-wage employers have left for new places, which then attracted immigrants (Light 2006) . A locality’s intolerance toward its impoverished immigrants can push migration to new areas (Light 2006).

Federal immigration policies and operations appear to have led migrants, particularly those from Latin America, to cross into the United States through deserts and isolated areas and transition from circular migration to settlement in the country. In other words, some immigrants forego traditional destinations for areas with less immigrant surveillance, and have been able to

settle more permanently in those locales (Massey, Durand et al. 2002; Hernández –León and Zúñiga 2003; Orrenius 2004). Then too, the amnesty provisions of the earlier, 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act allowed many formerly undocumented farm workers to achieve legal status; they then had more flexibility in finding jobs in places that previously had had few Latinos (Millard and Chapa 2004; Fennelly 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). For migrants, affordability and the chances for year-round employment in rural areas may be an attraction; others are a possibly better quality of life and more safety for raising children (Millard and Chapa 2004; Fennelly 2005; Zúñiga and Hernández –León 2005). Immigrants who were refugees have been assisted by government and voluntary resettlement agencies to U.S. destinations. For example, African refugees have been resettled in Midwestern cities like Columbus and Minneapolis (Mott 2006; Brown, Mott et al. 2007).

Multicultural formation of the case study rural town

Originally settled in the first quarter of the 19th century by Midwesterners from other areas, and later by German migrants, Riverbend has a strong subsequent history of keeping “outsiders” from settling in the community. In the late 19th century, as more blacks appeared in the area, Riverbenders employed explicitly racist practices to exclude non-Whites (Author and Author 2008) —as did perhaps hundreds of other places in the Midwest (Loewen 2005). As recounted by oral histories from persons born around 1900, some African Americans worked in Riverbend as waiters and porters at the local train station and as domestics and nannies, but were not allowed to reside in the community. They had to leave by sunset. Signs were posted in Riverbend warning, as one White man recalled, “Don’t let the sun set on you in this man’s town.”³ A Black man who lived in a neighboring town said that in the late 1920’s and 1930’s, a

posted sign warned, "Read and run, Mr. Nigger."⁴ Such sundown signs indicated municipal support for keeping the town nearly 100 percent White through much of the 20th century.

Although during the last thirty years the size of Riverbend has been within 10 percent of its current size, its racial, ethnic, and nativity composition has changed dramatically.⁵ Census Bureau data for the community show that in 1990, less than 1 percent of the community were foreign born, but by 2000 nearly 18 percent were immigrants.⁶ Thus the community has changed both in the mix of U.S. natives and immigrants and in racial/ethnic composition. Census Bureau data show that in 1990 the community was 99.1 percent White with only *one* African American; by 2000, though, the town was less than 81 percent White due to the in-migration of Latinos and their children, and there were still fewer than 30 African Americans living there (U.S. Census Bureau). The county-level estimates available for 2006 record nearly 2,000 Latinos, likely to be more than 90 percent foreign-born, in Riverbend (Census Bureau 2006), compared with fewer than 4,000 Non-Hispanic Whites.⁷ Thus in 2006, nearly 30 percent of the community was Latino, mostly immigrants. Qualitative sources support that estimate, with interviewees suggesting that the number of immigrants, about 97 percent from Mexico, has doubled since 2000. The growth in Riverbend's immigrants, nearly all from Mexico, in this short time far outpaced state-level change.⁸ Overall, then, the Latino population within Riverbend has grown by 5,000 percent between 1990 and 2006.

The Mexican immigrant population of Riverbend is predominantly from the states of Michoacán, Guanajuato and the state of Mexico (Estado de Mexico) (interviews 2006, 2007). They are a mix of recent arrivals to the U.S. and those moving from elsewhere within the U.S. For example, of foreign-born Latinos living in Riverbend in 2000, more than half were already living in the U.S. in 1995 (U.S. Census Bureau). It may be from that group that the

entrepreneurs have emerged who run several businesses in the community, including Mexican restaurants, bars and grocery stores that draw both Latinos and non-Latinos. These entrepreneurial Latinos may be secondary migrants who have previously lived in other areas of the U.S. where they gained experience and social capital before arriving in Riverbend.

West Africans constitute a yet more recent wave of immigrants to Riverbend and its surrounding areas. In 2003, Riverbend's meat packing plant began to recruit among Francophone West Africans who have entered the U.S. on lottery visas, which give them access to legal permanent residency. Immigrants from Togo and the neighboring countries of Senegal, Burkina Faso, Congo and Guinea are highly educated, having among them veterinary doctors, engineers and accountants. They come to the area through word of mouth in a network of African men and women, attracted to the guaranteed year-round jobs available at the local plant. 2007 estimates by the State's Department of Commerce suggest that nearly 200 African immigrants are employed at the Riverbend's primary employer, the meat packing plant. Their arrival to a non-metropolitan area is consistent with the increase in African immigrants to non-metropolitan counties across the U.S. African immigrants tend to settle in different areas than those where African Americans live (Lichter and Johnson 2006).

While nearly all working African immigrants in the area are employed at the plant, they do not all reside in Riverbend. Their residential concentration is in a nearby community ten miles away across the county line. Only in the last two years have West Africans started to relocate to Riverbend, living alongside native Whites and Mexican migrants to be closer to their workplace.⁹ The initial concentration of West African workers outside Riverbend was due to how in 2003, the plant's Human Resources personnel directed African recruits to the nearby community by the rental list they provided them (interview 2007). At its best this steering can be

attributed to the plant's consciousness of the town's racist history to and a consequent desire "avoid trouble," and to the limited capacity of the rental housing market in Riverbend, already saturated by the Mexican newcomers.¹⁰ Today, in any case, there is a distinct social pattern of residential settlement within the region. While African Americans, because of the Sundown town history of Riverbend, are concentrated in a town 30 miles away, the Mexican newcomers are concentrate in Riverbend, and the West Africans live in yet another nearby town 10 miles from Riverbend.

Within Riverbend, however, the Latinos, nearly all immigrants, reside throughout the community, comprising between seven and twenty-seven percent of each of seven block groups over three census tracts within the community's boundaries (Author and Author 2008).¹¹ Factors that may explain the residence of Latinos across the community, rather than in one neighborhood on the edge of town, are the lack of enforcement of zoning and of the land use regulation that typically segregates Whites from others, the characteristics of local housing, mortgage lending practices, and the speed of ethnic change within the community (see authors 2008 for a detailed analysis).

The increasing diversity in Riverbend is not surprising, given the dominant explanation for the increase in immigrants to rural areas in "new" destination states: food manufacturing employment. The main employer in Riverbend is a meat packing plant— an industry with a history of recruiting Latino, African, and Asian immigrants to rural communities (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995; Fennelly and Leitner 2003; Millard and Chapa 2004). Until the late 1980s, Riverbend had several factories; now one large plant employs most local adults, with others working in the educational system and the area hospital. This plant exemplifies the "rural industrialization strategy" noted earlier (Stull, Broadway et al. 1995): after a long labor dispute

between the employer and the unionized, White workers over wages and working conditions, the plant closed (interview 2007). It was then sold to another company and re-opened a year later with half as many workers and a much lower starting wage (news service, November 9, 2003). Employee turnover was very high due to low wages, the difficulty of the work, and the high rate of employee injuries. The corporation then began to recruit from outside the area, particularly in border towns in the Southwestern U.S. (news service, November 9, 2003). Many persons who had worked in the Southwestern agricultural industry moved to town to work at the plant because it provides full-time, year-round work with wages that, although low, are higher than for field work, and with more job security than in farm work.

Originally the local factory workforce was predominantly White, but by 2007 about 46 percent were non-native English speakers (city newspaper, March 14, 2007). Of the 2,500 employees, nearly 1,000 are non-White employees, and of those approximately 80% are from Latin America (State Department of Commerce community profile, 2006). The other 20% of non-White workers at the plant are African immigrants, with only a few others Asian. The plant provides job applications in Spanish and English and according to the company website, currently pays more than \$12 per hour. A 2007 *Fact Sheet* from the plant estimates that the average annual salary of its production workers is \$26,000, with a starting wage of \$11.65/hour. The difficult and dangerous work means that the annual turnover rate was approximately 43% in 2007, quite high but still lower than the 80% turnover rate of the 1990s (plant staff interview 2007).

Clearly, new employees are constantly needed to replenish the plant's workforce: a situation that encourages the plant to seek employees outside its local area. In early 2007 an ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raid arrested more than 60 undocumented workers at

the plant. After that incident the need for workers became even more acute; many workers without proper papers have either left the plant in fear of arrest and deportation tearing apart their family, as was the case in the 2007 raid, or have been dismissed (interview 2007). The situation has increased the pressure to recruit workers among populations with work permits yet willing to do this low-rewarding hard work. Hence the plant has actively recruited among Puerto Ricans, who are flown into Riverbend and provided with a month's rent to join the workforce (interview 2007). Several interviewees said that among these new recruits there is yet a high turnover, due both to the harsh working conditions and to conflict with a town population that resents their arrival. The Puerto Rican newcomers are facing not only a resentful White native population, but also a Spanish-speaking immigrant population (predominantly Mexican) that resents their citizenship privileges and legal status.

A complex web of local and trans-local relationships has shaped the unexpected multicultural landscape of this previously homogenous rural town in the Midwestern U.S. and its surrounding area. These include global capital-labor relationships as well as the social history of the specific site. In the section that follows we discuss the formal and informal spaces for citizen participation that mediate the conflicting interests arising in this rapidly changing, rural town. We start with Riverbend's City Council as the main channel for representative governance and follow with the residents' emerging options for public action to facilitate inclusive development and change.

Existing spaces of citizen participation

The main institutionalized space for citizen participation in Riverbend is its representative Town Council, comprising eight aldermen, two for each ward. The town's aldermen cross age groups, are Non-Hispanic Whites and are male except for one White female.

The council members are predominantly blue-collar workers, but two have lower-level, managerial positions. The council meets twice a month in the town hall. Meetings are held in English and usually last less than a half hour, often only about 10 minutes (interview 2007). They are seldom attended by any local residents unless they are bringing to the council a specific issue that they want addressed (interview 2007). In a typical small-town dynamic, locals, that is to say White men, have informal contacts with Riverbend officials, encountering the mayor and other aldermen in the street, at the PTA meetings, the local grocery store and church service or simply stopping by the alderman's home to voice their concerns. Generally, the only people not on the council who occasionally attend the meetings are local newspaper reporters, or the head of a municipal department who is reporting on a specific issue.

In this representative structure the mayor (also working part-time for the Secretary of State office) is important. The mayor, although a non-voting member of the town council, "is the center of municipal government," as noted by a local authority interviewed in 2007. To the recollection of this interviewee, "there has never been a time when the council voted down one of the mayor's proposals in council." The residents (including the mayor) refer to the mayor with his executive style in decision making as "the CEO of the city" (interview 2007). He is currently serving his 5th non-consecutive four-year term. He is a white male in his 60s, who like most natives of this working-class town performed his rite of passage by working at the local plant. He is well known for his outspoken anti-immigrant position. Some of that hostility is fueled by a labor-related resentment, the assumption that immigrants damage the workers' negotiation power. As to having a meat packing factory in town, he states, "I won't recommend them for most communities. . . . workers in 1985 were making equal wages to what they are making now. They take advantage of their [immigrants'] disadvantage in order to keep the wage

scale down” (interview 2007). Elsewhere in an interview for the media, he declared, “If I could wave a magic wand, I’d rather have no Hispanics and have this town be like it was in the 50s. But that’s just not going to happen” (news report, June 7, 2007).

As in most other small towns, in Riverbend there is no specific planning agency or planning entity that makes the development decisions. The City council’s committees, such as the finance committee, the roads and streets committee, and the cemetery committee, are headed by aldermen the mayor appoints. The professional staff of these committees are engineers, none are formally trained as planners. The existing zoning dates back to 1980, was revised in 2003 and approved at a town council meeting, and is enforced by a zoning enforcement officer who used to be the town’s chief of police. The main agency involved in spatial development — namely, infrastructure development or the recent zoning revision to designate specific sites for the town’s growing number of mobile homes — is the Public Works department, headed by an engineer who works at that office only part-time.

In this municipal structure the local plant, although not formally represented, carries an important weight as the main employer in town. The fear of the plant’s re-location is real for the city council members and influences their decisions. As succinctly and sarcastically put by one local official, “there is a 900 pound guerilla in the room. . . Other than that we meet and make decisions like business as usual!” (interview 2007)

To manage change in this increasingly multicultural town, a small but growing number of channels for citizen participation have developed in the last few years. A lot of immigrants in town are intimidated to attend meetings or go near public institutions. Therefore, as an interviewee indicated, the city hall is not where the inter-racial and intercultural dynamics come into play. “There aren’t as many people that go to city hall as they are that come to schools and

library... so I don't know that they [the city workers] understand all the differences that we see" (interview 2007). The existing formal structures of participation are clearly not inclusive of non-White, non-English speaking and, in many case's undocumented residents. The school, churches, library, and local newspaper, however, are becoming important as public spaces that aim to facilitate inclusion and the incorporation of newcomers to the town.

The School District is an important example. Its linguistic demographic change has been of an unusual magnitude whereby, for example, of the 2007 graduating senior class 25 percent and of the kindergarten class 50 percent were Spanish speaking (Radio report June 2007). In response, the school first took a conventional approach, hiring a Spanish-speaking staff in 1998 to serve as liaisons between the school and immigrant families. In 2005, to adopt a dual-language program that divides the teaching day between Spanish and English, activist teachers launched a "teachers' movement" (personal correspondence 2007). White native and Latino immigrant teachers carried out a door-to-door campaign, engaging parents one-to-one about the multicultural experiences of their children in school and the town at large. That year they received the consent of resistant Spanish- and English-speaking parents to adopt a dual-language program at the town's main public elementary school. It is important to note that this linguistic inclusion was accompanied by publication of a Spanish edition of the local newspaper, which since 2001 has been catering to the Latino residents and business. Churches have also been instrumental in the transition of Latino newcomers to Riverbend, assisting them with food and clothing donations and offering limited translation services vis-à-vis the plant and the public service agencies. The Catholic Church, for example, finding the Latinos to be an important constituency has been quick to respond to the town's demographic change by holding weekly services in Spanish and by importing three nuns from Mexico to cope with the emerging poverty

among Spanish-speaking, newly arriving families. In addition to the faith-based organizations and charities, two secular, non-profit groups have started to work in Riverbend, addressing the linguistic barriers in health care by offering translation at the local clinic since early 2007 and at the public health department a few years before that. As yet, French translation services are not available at any of the public or private agencies in town.

Fewer in number, and with their residences split between two communities, West Africans have so far not had the critical mass to influence these transition programs. When enrolled in the school incorporated into Spanish-English dual-language program, interestingly, Francophone children are learning both Spanish and English, simultaneously. To attend church services in French, the Christian Francophone Africans have to go to the neighboring town where they have a greater concentration. And as yet, unlike the Spanish-speaking immigrants, they do not have their own newspapers or own businesses in town. For their familiar foods they often travel 40 miles to the nearest urban center with an African grocery store.

One public space that tries to cater to a multicultural, as opposed to uni- or bi-cultural clientele, is the town's public library. In recent months the library has been proving to be important as an inclusive multicultural space. Hiring part-time French-speaking and Spanish-speaking staff, it has become the host for a nascent "Cultural Integration Action Group" where members of West African, Latino and White residents come together to discuss and outline agendas for action. While it is too early to comment meaningfully on their activities, a longitudinal study of these developments would be useful for understanding the complexity of community-based participatory activities that emerge in the absence of formal inclusive governance, and how they interact with each other.

Reflecting on inclusive planning: insights from a multicultural rural town

In “Planning Theory and the City,” Susan Fainstein (2005) points out a problem in planning education: planning theory is taught as a separate subject from urban theory. She sees that as symptomatic of a trend within planning theory to theorize planners’ role and practice almost divorced from planning’s urban object.

Communicative planning theorists,” she writes “share with progressive political economists a skepticism concerning usefulness of models of rationality.... [They] argue that means and ends are mutually constitutive and thus cannot be rigidly separated as they were in the rational model But somehow, oddly given their acceptance of this proposition, they back away from a concern with ends and aim their spotlight virtually entirely on planners’ mediating role rather than on what should be done or the context in which planning operates (125).

The “obsession with the role of the planner,” she continues:

“is something of a mystery. After all, political theory examines the outcome of governance, not just the activities of politicians; legal theory focuses on the law, not lawyers; economic theory focuses on the economy, not economists. . . . Perhaps this is just a question of semantics. . . . No planning theorist would deny the importance of theorizing about urban development, But the exclusion of urban theory from planning theory leads towards a compartmentalization of concerns, resulting in a failure to understand the relationship between planning and the field in which it operates” (127).

The point that Fainstain makes above calls for reflection on inclusive planning theories as they relate to the emerging urban reality exemplified by the case study here: a previously all-White, multiculturalizing rural town with no pre-existing professional planning staff to mediate its rapid social change. How far do the current normative theories on inclusive planning methods arise from and respond to the urban object presented here? What might the vantage point of these emerging multicultural rural towns offer to the ongoing dialogue on theories of inclusive planning? One point of clarification here is needed. Like Fainstein (2005), in this paper we use the term “the city” or “the urban” “out of convenience . . . [to make reference to] regions as well as any spatially defined unit that constitutes the object of planning.” (121, 122).

As mentioned earlier, two interrelated presumptions underlie much of the received multicultural planning debate: First, although not explicit, is the assumption that multiracial, multicultural dynamics are principally the concerns of large cities and metropolitan centers. Second and consequently, it is taken for granted that the planning profession is omnipresent. All urban objects of the planning theories are assumed to enjoy pre-existing planning processes and structures within which progressive planning professionals can apply inclusive methods. These are troubling assumptions for both planning scholarship and pedagogy, considering that recent demographic trends document the growth of immigrants, including those from Latin America and elsewhere, in small communities across the country. Many of these small towns do not feature in the urban radar of these theories.

This paper proposes that de-centering the urban in the analytical structure of inclusive planning and multiculturalism offers useful insights. It allows us to ask how the possibilities and constraints of multicultural change differ between rural towns and big metropolitan centers—the latter having, so far, attracted most of the planning theorists research imagination, leaving the

former less studied. How does the settlement experience of immigrants in small towns, their newer destination, differ from that of immigrants in the larger cities, their traditional destination? In Riverbend, for instance, the availability of affordable housing has allowed more homeownership among Latino immigrants. In addition, the lack of zoning restricting mobile homes to particular areas has led to a striking mix of site-built and mobile homes on the same blocks. Among other factors these might explain the “moderate” level of residential segregation in 2000 and the likely decrease in residential segregation since that time (Author and Author 2008). Ironically, this absence of pre-existing pockets of poor minority groups in Riverbend is partially due to the town’s brutal and sad racist sundown town history that kept it nearly 100 percent White. Nevertheless this rural town now offers distinct opportunities and constraints for multiculturalism and urban development. These merit theorization in their own right.

Moreover, theorizing inclusive planning practices from the vantage point of rapidly diversifying small towns supports the ongoing advocacy in planning theory of an expanded perspective. In rural towns that undergo such intense racial and ethnic change in a short span of time and in the absence of professional planning’s mediatory practices, we can see the role of “citizen planners” more clearly. Through community-based inclusion in schools, libraries, and churches, community activists have performed the functions of communicative planners facilitating social learning and perhaps social transformation. This emerging urban context illustrates the expanded notion of planning through what Sandercock (1998) could perhaps call a “thousand tiny planning practices.”

Making this new urban object the basis for planning theorization also alerts us to be wary of the uncritical celebration of civil society that has dominated much of planning research’s aspiration to inclusion and empowerment. As we could see in this case study, leaving public

responsibilities to faith-based civil society left the Francophone Moslem and Pagan West African residents excluded from their assistance. Such assistance was their due as a civic entitlement, not as a charity based on linguistic or religious affiliation.

The vantage point of an increasingly multicultural, rural America can also influence theorization of inclusive planning methods by calling attention to the important gap in respect to law and legality. While much of planning theory concerns mediation between the state and society, the schisms within society consider race, gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality, but pay less attention to legal status as a fault line that distinguishes citizens' entitlements not only within a city and town, but even within a single family. In its state-society mediation, planning theory must deal more seriously with the question of legality. In Riverbend, for example, the fear of deportation is a heavy burden that constrains association with undocumented friends and family members. The resulting deep caution is an important factor in immigrants non-participation in the structures of liberal democracy and decision making.

Above all, planning education needs to ask whether its pedagogy is relevant to the current demographic trend. How does the planning curriculum prepare our students to serve as "frontier planners" in these emerging multicultural towns? How does planning education help the next generation of urban planners to work in towns where no planning structure exists? We must seek ways to re-tool planning students to foster inclusive development in these emerging multicultural towns.

In short, the debate on multiculturalism and planning the analytical center should shift from the metropolitan areas that have historically been the destinations of immigrants, to include the emerging, multicultural rural areas that are their future destinations. Those rural towns should be seen not simply as backwaters of cosmopolitan areas, and their citizens' struggles for

inclusion should be recognized not as backward versions of such struggles in the *Cosmpolis*, but as embodying unique dynamics. Once urban areas have been de-centered in the multicultural studies of planning, we can acknowledge that placing difference on the agenda of public policy is not the function of planning practice alone, but of a whole range of citizens' practices by "citizen planners."

In closing, we stress that the current demographic trend towards increased immigration to rural destinations and subsequent racial and ethnic diversity in many places that have previously been homogeneously White is real and that Riverbend's situation is not unique but rather shared by a growing number of towns undergoing similar demographic changes. On that premise, developing cutting-edge planning theory and pedagogy requires serious engagement with the local and global forces contributing to the formation of newly-multicultural small communities. The case study presented in this paper reveals a complex and multifaceted reality that raises many questions deserving careful ethnographic and longitudinal examination.

There are several important questions that larger future research needs to address: In a context in which a single powerful employer directs urban development and influences community members' livelihood, what are the implications of that situation for the long-term revitalization of rural areas? Further, how does the employer's stronghold on a community influence the planning challenges and the kind of planning practices that can be pursued? How could planners intervene in facilitating and mediating conflicting interests of various local and global actors in a context where "a 900 pound guerrilla is sitting in the room"? Could inclusive planning in multicultural rural areas be "dealing with a totally different animal?" Broader questions should also be addressed. For example, what are the transnational relations and networks that shape racially and ethnically diversifying towns in the Midwest and across the

country? What are the variations across ethnic groups within certain localities vis-à-vis their varied trans-local networks and, vice versa, the differences within the same ethnic group across distinct localities with unique social, economic and historic contexts? How do newcomers employ their local and trans-local strategies to access livelihood resources independent of the corporate, civil society and state welfare's institutions? How are the inter-racial and inter-cultural dynamics and tensions negotiated and mediated by different actors in a specific socio-historical context? We have only started a conversation with the readers based on a preliminary study, and we hope that these and many other questions will be addressed in future scholarship.

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Endnotes:

¹The growth rate of African immigrants by region is calculated from the SF3 file of the 2000 census and the 2005 American Community Survey (ACS).

² This is not to ignore the critical importance of understanding the transnational and global context of this demographic change. This paper, however, focuses on the national and regional context of this population in small Midwestern communities.

³Memoir audiotaped in 1972 and transcribed by state university staff.

⁴Memoir audiotaped in 1975 and transcribed by state university staff.

⁵We do not have empirical evidence to speculate on the connection between Non-Hispanic White decreases and Latino increases, though it is possible that a “tipping point” has been reached as noted in Lichter and Johnson (2006).

⁶The most recent quantitative data available about a small town such as Riverbend are from Census 2000. Data sources collected more recently, such as the 2006 American Community Survey do not calculate population estimates for areas with populations smaller than 65,000.

⁷ To arrive at the 2006 figure for the community, we assumed that the approximately the same proportion of Latinos in the county lived in Riverbend as in 2000 (89 percent), and extrapolated from the 2006 county-level estimates.

⁸The state had a larger Latino population base in 2000, therefore the percent change is not as high as in Riverbend, a place with a relatively small Latino population base.

⁹ Qualitative sources suggest that this is occurring, but post-2000 quantitative data about Riverbend is not yet available from the Census Bureau. In the future, it will be possible to use this data to evaluate the numbers of Africans in Riverbend since 2000.

¹⁰ Although beyond the scope of this paper, the larger study of the process of change in this community suggests a concern for inter-racial labor relations as a factor involved in steering African newcomers to live outside of Riverbend.

¹¹Block groups are statistical aggregations of a lower geographic unit categorized by the Census Bureau, the census block. Nearly 400 census blocks cover Riverbend’s place boundaries in 2000.