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Sustainable Tahoe : bridging the economic gap

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SUSTAINABLE TAHOE: BRIDGING THE ECONOMIC GAP

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty and the Department of Mexican American Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements of the Degree

Masters of Arts

by

Gabriel Reuben Valle

August 2009

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SUSTAINABLE TAHOE: BRIDGING THE ECONOMIC GAP

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ABSTRACT

SUSTAINABLE TAHOE: BRIDGING THE ECONOMIC GAP

by Gabriel Reuben Valle

This thesis addresses the topic of sustainability in the Tahoe area. It examines the impact of environmental policy and economic development on low-income residents of Tahoe. This study of the area's triple bottom line, the area's inevitable connection between economy, society, and the environment, is essential to understanding the importance of the area's cultural, economic, and environmental issues.

Research on the sustainability of Tahoe reveals that many residents, political figures, environmentalists, and organizations want to create a more sustainable future. However, this research shows that many in the area have different ideas of what sustainability means. To the redevelopment agencies, sustainability means greener and more environmentally friendly development. To family resource centers and low-income locals, sustainability means better living conditions, better transportation, and a better quality of life. Using data obtained through interviews and observation, I have concluded that a more collaborative community is needed.

This study explores how the area may find a sustainable future with the community at the center.

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I also would like to thank the dozens of Tahoe locals who have given me the interviews and insights of the issues. The Truckee Family Resource Center and the South Tahoe Family Resource Center have been overwhelmingly helpful in my research. Through this process, their passion, heart, and struggle for community has become my inspiration. I would also like to thank the San José State University Research Foundation who helped fund this research.

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Introduction

The greatest threat to human existence is not the ecological crisis, the environmental exploitation, or the economic meltdown at present. The greatest threat to our endangered planet, our endangered home that is pushed to the limit each day, resides in something deeper. Is it possible that human individuality has blinded us from the interconnectedness of our world? Do we not understand how our lifestyle affects the well being of other beings? Maybe it is our individual consciousness that does not understand the human responsibility? Are we too caught up in celebrity gossip and reality TV to acknowledge our responsibility to the earth, to our brothers and sisters, and to our past and our future? Perhaps it is human ignorance to not see beyond ourselves into a universe of infinite possibility. We can either take the path that leads to environmental degradations, social inequalities, and economic expansion at the cost of humanity or we can take the path less traveled. For mainstream culture the path will be unknown and uncomfortable, but this path has the possibility for mankind to see past its petty differences to a common future. This path will not be easy to find and it will not be easy to take. Those who have benefitted from the status quo may not like this research, nor will it be liked by those who find it difficult to choose a new way. But it is this path, this alternative to our current way of life that must be taken in order for us to reach a sustainable future.

The research for this study takes place in the greater Lake Tahoe basin. The objective is to explore the way human development has affected the area's ecosystems, marginalized local people, and brought corporate greed to the top of the food chain.

What began as a simple study on the ways that immigrant communities around the lake live and survive has expanded into an examination of the area's economic, social, environmental, and cultural worlds. This research views the world through a holistic view rather than solely focusing on social, economic, or environmental issues. Many people have questioned my reasoning on the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues. Many residents, Anglo and Latino, do not see the correlation between the environmental policies of the area and the marginality of the Latino community. Many do not see the connection between economic expansion and environmental degradation, or the need for social equity in order to achieve an ecological resilience. Yet the reality of this research is that social justice, economic prosperity, and environmental quality are essential to the understanding of marginalization and the human experience.

In today's world, environmentalism is closely associated with environmental ethics, which both Aldo Leopold and John Muir preached about in the past. Environmental ethics can be defined as: "A field of moral philosophy that focuses on the effects and quality of the relationship between humanity and nature."¹ Through conservation and environmental laws, environmentalists are imposing regulations and marginalizing those who do not fit into mainstream environmentalism. On the other hand, environmental justice can be defined as: "The abolition of racial discrimination in environmental laws and regulations. This includes elimination of patterns of

¹ Devon G. Peña, Mexican Americans and the Environment: Tierra y Vida (Tucson: University of Arizona Press 2005) 194.

disproportionate environmental risk and harm based on race.”² In a way, these two movements counter each other; however, if used together, they could be liberating.

One of the most influential texts in Chicana/o Studies, Devon Peña’s, *Terror of the Machine*, helped me to construct the analytical and methodological framework for this study. Peña demonstrates that the economic expansion and industrialization of the border region affects the people of the area far more than was anticipated. In his final chapter, Peña discusses the importance of environmental action. He argues that ecology is essential to the understanding of marginalized communities,

My commitment to social justice for Chicanos leads me to use working knowledge of environmental sciences not just to explain ecological destructiveness in theory, but to challenge it in practice. It is here that ecology, specifically restoration ecology and ecosystem theories, proves invaluable to my work in the maquilas.³

He makes the case for an analysis that focuses on marginalization resulting from the maquila system and its impact on social and economic groups. Moreover, he argues that the maquiladora industry is a threat to people in the places where they live, work, and play. His work has been my inspiration for examining the impact of development on the marginalization of Tahoe residents. Obviously, there are many differences in the conditions at the El Paso border and in the Tahoe area. However, cheap labor, bad living conditions, environmental degradation, economic expansion, and social marginality occur in Tahoe on a daily basis. Tahoe residents and officials consciously and subconsciously

² Ibid 195.

³ Devon G. Peña, *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin, Tex.: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 1997) 284.

cover and ignore these inequalities with a new “green infrastructure” so visitors and locals will not see this “separate” reality.

Outline of Thesis

The first chapter presents a critical review of the literature review. I give a review of the principle and most influential texts that have helped me to create an analytical framework. This effort is critical reading of the complicated nature of the research I reviewed, and that address the concepts related to environmentalism, environmental justice, urban planning, social justice, and sustainability.

Chapter Two places the Lake Tahoe area in context, and reveals the area’s history of exploitation and expansionism. Understanding the development of the Tahoe area as a history of exploitation, struggle, and urbanization, is important to the presentation of my research findings. I explain how the Latino community is used as an exploited resource useful to the corporatization of the area. Chapter Two also focuses on the conflicting interests between mainstream environmentalists and environmental justice advocates in the Tahoe area. The research shows that there is a huge push to create more “green living” conditions. The ski resorts in the area have used this motif to gain ridership and support in their actions to create ski villages. Redevelopment agencies have been created by cities and counties to carry out changes designed by environmentalists and to help remove old and worn out buildings and homes. Transportation, mixed-use developments, and water clarity have become important issues to community members. The protection of open space and preservation of the area’s natural resources have also become part of the area’s everyday environmental struggles. At the same time, environmental justice

struggles have become more prevalent. Employment, health care, affordable housing, safe streets, poverty, and many other issues associated with the area's Latino communities have also become areas of struggle for environmental justice. This has put differently positioned groups in antagonistic relations. Some environmental groups are looking to stop growth while others are looking to restore Lake Tahoe's famed blue water, while environmental justice struggles are closely associated with housing and a livable wage. It appears as though each time one of these groups makes a step towards progress, they push the others back. Furthermore, Chapter Two explores how environmentalists and environmental justice groups want to work together, yet their unwillingness to shift from their single-focus agenda has hurt both. Chapter Two focuses on not only how these struggles have countered each other, but also how they could work together for the benefit of the community.

In Chapter Three I explain the qualitative methodology used for this study. The data-gathering approach involved in-depth conversations with locals and organizations. Specifically, I contacted various locals and city employees. In my quest to be thorough I sought participation from competing interest groups. Specifically, I focused on environmentalists and environmental justice advocates to determine how development affects the community and how the community has engaged in struggles for social justice in this highly idealized region of California.

In Chapter Four I examine the development policies and practices in the Tahoe area. My findings reveal how minority and low-income groups suffer from the side effects and unintended consequences of redevelopment. At the center of this discussion

lie the area's ski resorts, which trigger development and redevelopment through the creation of ski villages designed to drive up costs and land values. The domino effect that this trend has created not only marginalizes the Latino community, but also the larger local community. Many local businesses have been forced out of downtowns and ski areas because of the redevelopment that has taken place. I first discuss the reasons and presumed benefits of redeveloping projects in the area. Then I discuss the objections to redevelopment from various local points of view. This then leads to a discussion of the consequences of redevelopment including, side effects, and the domino effects that it creates.

The sustainability movement has the potential to not only be an environmental movement, but also a social justice movement. In Chapter Five I discuss what sustainability is and how it is misperceived, romanticized, and co-opted by capitalist interest. I focus on the structural inequalities of race and class that must be overcome before sustainability is accomplished. Next, I raise the argument that the struggle for sustainability has the potential to open political spaces for marginalized groups. Chapter Five demonstrates how locals in the Tahoe area are using sustainability to find space in order to address issues of importance to their communities. I also look at how the City of South Lake Tahoe is in an interesting position in terms of sustainability. With the city's new sustainability program city officials and developers have a chance to achieve greatness or perpetuate inequalities while purporting to be more sustainable. Understanding and overcoming the structural inequalities that exist in today's world will create a link that will bond environmentalism and environmental justice. It is essential to

overcome this gap if sustainability is a goal.

Lastly, in Chapter Six, I use all of the empirical evidence gathered in my field research to summarize how all of these issues help to create links among identity, agency, and place-making. Chapter Six focuses on how the Latino community sees the affluent White community, and how the affluent White community sees the Latino community. This analysis advances our understanding of the community's struggle for justice. Many of the people that I interviewed did not describe their struggles as environmental justice; they simply saw it as improving their quality of life. This idea is important because it is possible to learn from a community how perceptions of life, identities, and agency, exemplify how people struggle for the quality of life they wish to attain, which includes their ideas and construction of place and self.

Many people visit Lake Tahoe at some point during their lives. For many of these tourists, Lake Tahoe holds a mystic beauty that can only be experienced in person. When most of us visualize Lake Tahoe, we picture an enormous lake with stunning deep blue water, clear skies, and endless mountains. Many of us can remember the first cabin we stayed in, or the first time we saw the snowy peaks from the top of the chair lift. We remember the crisp summer mornings as we camped on the shoreline or a warm cup of cocoa after a long day in the snow. Some of us can picture lying in the sand at Sand Harbor or dining at Gar Woods while watching the sunset over the Sierras. Developers have capitalized on the idealized beauty Tahoe presents to establish a strong emotional attachment to the place. However, as visitors drive around in their SUVs with "Keep Tahoe Blue" stickers on their cars they seldom wonder about those who help maintain

Lake Tahoe as a resort community and that it is in large measure tourism that is actually destroying the very environmental qualities that they have come to admire.

Economic expansion, urbanization, and corporate control have forced the Latino and some middle-class communities around the lake to become second-class citizens while they cater to wealthy tourists. This trend has a dual personality for the Latino community. On the one hand corporate enterprises generate employment, albeit for a low wage, while at the same time this trend has priced some residents out of the area and left others living hand to mouth. These new developments, however “green” they may be, have neglected to understand the complexities of the area in which economy, society, and environment are forever tied.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

Several different areas of study are embedded into this research. In many respects, the diversity of methods was needed in order to better understand the current issues surrounding the Lake Tahoe region. This study explores the concept of sustainability, which is grounded on economic justice, environmental justice, and social equity.

I began this research with the idea of relating our social and economic worlds to our environmental world. This revealed the connections we have to place, to people, and to the environment. Demonstrated in Devon Peña’s, *Terror of the Machine*, and Laura Pulido’s, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice*, low-income residents are often more susceptible to the negative side effects of economic development. Often times, low-

income communities suffer from bad living conditions, unhealthy water, inadequate heating, and unreliable public transportation. All of these conditions have a profound effect on a community's role in the greater society. However, these two texts also demonstrate the agency and the social movement mobilization of Mexican and Mexican American communities in their pursuit to improve their quality of life. Their struggles manifest into labor struggles, environmental quality, health care, education, and much more. My research in the Tahoe area reveals this same outcome.

As I further investigated the field of sustainability I came to the conclusion that in many respects sustainability is a utopia where those fighting for sustainability are not looking at the reality that many low-income residents face daily. Chaia Heller examines this in her text, *Ecology of Everyday Life*. She comes to the conclusion that if we continue to romanticize about sustainability and our human/nature relationship we will never be able to attain sustainability. We cannot continue to view nature as pristine and untouched simply to be used for ascetic purposes. Roderick Nash looks at this in his study, *Wilderness and the American Mind*. In his research he sees the American mind as a collective consciousness rooted in history. His fear is that we are loving wilderness to death. We set up wilderness reserves and national parks so we can know that there is still wilderness somewhere. By this we designate the grizzly bear to Alaska and the bison to Wyoming. The history of American expansion across the west has demonstrated to the American mind that wilderness is just that, wild, and if tamed, it can be controlled for the benefit of mankind. As we have begun to realize the importance of wilderness, Nash points out that while it appears that we are allowing wilderness to be wild, it is just a pond

in the American landscape where wilderness reserves are controlled at the expense of wilderness itself.

Given the persistence of wilderness in the American imagination, we can begin to understand how places like Lake Tahoe sell themselves as the “gem of the Sierra’s” and into a situation where development destroys the very scenery and environmental qualities everyone “loved.” Understanding the development tactics used by developers in resort communities is essential to understanding the economic gap that resides in the Tahoe area. *Downhill Slide*, by Hal Clifford explains how the corporatization of the ski industry has destroyed the character of many ski towns. By creating the ski village at the base of the mountain, ski resorts have altered the housing market. Thus, creating a domino effect that starts with higher land value and ends with a higher cost of living, which inevitably prices many residents out of the area or well below the poverty line. This phenomenon, as told by Clifford, has spread across the West to benefit wealthy second homeowners by creating fake villages, which lack authenticity and character. Redevelopment agencies, tourism, and the housing market reap the benefits of this new development strategy while the local community is left to fill the remaining service jobs.

The research of this thesis is based on the principle of place. How important is place, and why do we need place, and more importantly, how does space become place? Timothy Beatley and Kristy Manning examine this concept in depth in their research, *Ecology of Place*. In this text they look deep into the issues that every town, city, or metropolis have when creating a sense of place. Beatley and Kristy believe that by creating a sense of place in the cities in which we live we can solve many of our

economic, social, and environmental issues. By creating a sense of place people learn to care for the city they live in, the land they walk on, and the people that help make the city unique. Therefore, residents shop local, support local causes, help local food banks, and volunteer to help the local environment. David Holmgren goes a step further in his text *Permaculture*, a term that he co-founded. Permaculture is when we (people) are rooted in a place deep enough to have a connection to it. Holmgren claims that once we are grounded in a place we begin to create local cultures of place, which in the long run benefits the community. Holmgren's idea of permaculture is similar to Beatley and Kristy's theory on place, by creating a sense of place, by being grounded in a place, we become more aware of our surroundings. We do not fly through life at the expense of everyone else. Rather, we actually become more social beings, we become more caring, and in turn we become more of a community. However, in spite of all these two books add to the discourse of place and place-making, they are over simplifying the concept because they neglect to acknowledge the inequalities that exist within our institutions.

John Elkington's foundational work, *Cannibals with Forks*, has helped me create a framework for the study of the Tahoe area. He argues that twenty-first century exploitative businesses must change their current trends and claims that by creating a business model that is responsible for one's actions and is grounded in economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social equity, businesses will become role models for other businesses and the trend will spread. He believes that all companies must realize the concept of the triple bottom line, the idea that everything is dependent on

people, profit, and planet, in the twenty first century if we are to create a sustainable future.

Regional planning has been perhaps one of the biggest concerns in many resort towns. Some of the questions that resort communities ask include: How to develop, how much to develop, and how to maintain the character of the town? Laid out by Joe R. Feagin in, *The New Urban Paradigm*, are ways in which our city planners went wrong. He discusses the root cause of social issues in the city by examining the urban design of our cities. His argument about public transportation is that where ever efficient public transportation is created, the area then becomes priced out for many of the people that depend on it. Our sprawling cities have gutted the inner city leaving it out-dated and run down. Michael H. Long views the gentrification of the city in his text, *Gentrification Amid Urban Decline*, as perhaps one of the most important issues of the twenty-first century. He argues that without a just system of redeveloping the inner city, low-income residents will be left out and put in worse shape then before. Long believes that we need a redevelopment system that does not displace residents, but rather provides jobs, housing, and a better quality of life for both wealthy and poor residents.

En route to understanding how the Mexican American community fits into the social and political landscape of the Tahoe region I focused on several different themes. I first focused my attention on social justice struggles by the Mexican and Mexican American communities. Tomás Almaguer's text, *Racial Fault Lines*, helped me to better understand the history of racial issues in California. *Mexican American Women Activists*, by Mary Pardo influenced my framework by explaining how community interaction,

activism, and participation help to create identity and define class, race, and gender notions of place. The ways the Mothers of East Los Angeles saw their struggles for a better quality of life was similar to the views of many Tahoe residents. The historical aspects of immigration have created a common identity of fear among many undocumented immigrants. Nicholas De Genova's text, *Working the Boundaries*, explores how the Mexican community in Chicago lives with this fear. Their vulnerability of deportation and the struggle to create place discussed by De Genova are similar to the struggle of the Tahoe area's Latino community. Combining the ideas of identity, culture, and community, this eclectic combination demonstrated by my thesis is the root of my understanding of the Tahoe communities.

With an awareness of the complications that the Tahoe region has had in developing a stable economy and how the Mexican population has filled the need of the area's current labor market, we can then begin to see the connections between past, present, and future relationships between the Latino Community and the general public at large. The texts listed here have each found a special and necessary place in my research. As influential as each genre of literature was, my research would be incomplete without a thorough holistic understanding of societal issues, cultural production, and environmental equity.

Chapter 2. Lake Tahoe: In Context

To understand the Tahoe area's attempts at creating sustainable communities we must first examine their past. In these failed attempts to create a stable economy we can

begin to uncover the overexploitation of the area's natural resources and how this has altered identity and place as locals continue to search for the quality of life they wish to live.

For over a century, the Tahoe region has struggled to create a stable economy. In each attempt wealthy interests from the Central Valley and the Bay Area have corrupted and overexploited the area's resources. The first road accessible road through Tahoe was created in 1857 and development in the Tahoe basin began in the 1860s with the discovery of the Comstock Lode in nearby Virginia City, Nevada. The first year-round residents settled in South Tahoe. The completion of the Central Pacific Railroad through Truckee in 1868⁴ opened the region up to the rest of the world. Between 1870 and 1900 various lumber companies were able to completely alter the ecosystem of the region by destroying ninety-five percent of the basins forests.⁵ This had devastating effects on the economy and the environment of the region. Not only did this slow the Lake Tahoe's economy, which was dependent on timber and logging, but it also removed topsoil, altered sediment running into the lake, increased mudslides, and altered the natural growth of the forest floor. Once the basin's forests had been clear-cut, these lumber companies picked up and left. Unstable as the economy was, the early part of the twentieth century brought hope to the fishing industry, as they believed that Lake Tahoe held more fish in its water that could ever be consumed. Unfortunately, before the roaring twenties, local fishermen realized that they had pushed the native Lahontan Cutthroat trout to the verge of extinction from Lake Tahoe and its surrounding streams

⁴ Douglas H. Strong, Tahoe: An Environmental History (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) 19.

⁵ Strong 30.

and rivers.⁶ As war proliferated in Europe, the commercial fishing industry was completely shut down around the basin. However, post war America brought wealth to many cities across the country, and the Tahoe region, too, played an important role in providing for the good life by catering to the wealthy. During the Great Depression the Tahoe region hardly skipped a beat. With the legalization of gambling in Nevada in 1931⁷ the Lake Tahoe area bloomed. In the 1930s the construction of the CalNeva Club on the North Shore brought never before seen development to the area. Wealthy Bay Area and Central Valley residents began to vacation at various resorts around the lake.

Amid the 1950s the area prepared for the 1960 Olympic games at Squaw Valley. This spurred the 1950s development of the Tahoe Keys⁸, which provided the wealthy residents and visitors of South Lake with a romantic Venice like atmosphere with canals and bridges complete with a rustic Tahoe setting. The Games brought high acclaim to the area for which the El Dorado Planning Commission approved a plan to allow for 200,000 South Lake Tahoe residents by 1984⁹. The 1960s brought unprecedented development to the Tahoe region. With Frank Sinatra's acquisition of the CalNeva Lodge in the 1960s came his starlet circle of friends including Marilyn Monroe, John F. Kennedy, and Dean Martin. The highlife was noticeably on display for the wealthy to come and play. The Gross family opened Harvey's Wagon Wheel, which in the 1960s was the biggest development devoted to gambling in the world¹⁰. The creation of new casinos at Stateline, Nevada, the development of the Tahoe Keys, and the creation of the Tahoe

⁶ Strong 20.

⁷ Strong 49.

⁸ Strong 54.

⁹ Strong 52.

¹⁰ Strong 125.

Donner subdivision, were all catalysts in creating a new dynamic in Tahoe. The casinos opened the basin up to the delicacies of gambling. At the time of its creation in the 1960s, the Tahoe Donner residential development was one of the biggest of its kind in the U.S. Advertisement of the Sierras as the New Alps brought the elite flocking to the area in herds in order to stake their claim in this new and exciting development. “Most local people expressed more interest in the acquisition of land for profit than about the basin’s protection.”¹¹ The creations of Heavenly Ski Resort and the booming casino industry helped Lake Tahoe continue up the economic ladder well into the 1970s.

The 1980s economic recession slowed development in the area as many life long residents were forced to leave. The mid 1990s dot-com boom then created immense wealth in the Bay Area and many Baby Boomers decided to build second homes in the Tahoe area. Thousands of homes were built in the region in the 1990s alone. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) attempted to control growth around the lake by allocating 300 new residential homes a year. In Truckee, just north of the lake and out of the TRPA’s jurisdiction, building had no limits. During the 1990s around 275 homes were built per year in this small town of only 12,000 full time residents. Everyone was employed, and in many cases, over employed. Local elementary and high schools expanded and two lane highways became four lane highways. Life was good. But if anything is certain in the economy of the Tahoe area, overexploitation of resources was bound to bring about change.

¹¹ Strong 57.

A post 9/11 nation had a hiccup. The dot-com bust had finally hit Lake Tahoe. Building soon stopped. The town manager of Truckee recently stated that, “We will be lucky if we build seventy-five new homes this year.” The collapse of the housing market was a devastating hit for an economy built upon growth.

Today, with roughly sixty percent of all the houses in the Tahoe area being second homes, these vacation subdivision communities were left empty and incomplete. East West Partners, owners of Northstar and creator of several subdivisions designed for the out of town elites, such as Lahontan, Old Greenwood, Gray’s Crossing, and Coyote Moon Golf Course, started to create their empire during the boom of the 1990s. Now, developers are suffering as real estate sales drop. “While tourism can represent a healthy and sustainable approach to economic development, like the environment, it has its own carrying capacity, which should be respected and not exceeded.”¹² The fear that many locals have is that the carrying capacity might have been reached. Amid the dry summer backdrop of the Sierra Nevada, various corporations have created numerous lush golf courses many designed by notables such as Greg Norman, which today are left unused. These private extravagant golf courses were created for the homeowners in these new private communities, however, with the majority of these new developments inhabited by outsiders, locals were left without the ability to play them while suffering the strain these courses put on their existing water and electrical grid. They are left with playing the roll of grounds keeper, caddie, and a myriad of other services for the benefit of this elite class.

¹² Timothy Beatley and Kristy Manning, The Ecology of Place: Planning for Environment, Economy, and Community (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997) 156.

The impact and strain the of urban sprawl and the over development of the late nineties has put on local residents can be felt in the increase of utility prices such as water, gas, electricity, roads, parking, and many other city services. The “development at the levels now practiced by these corporations is unprecedented and unsustainable.”¹³ These developments were created to stimulate the local economy. As one woman told me, in the late nineties “...jobs were so good here [in Truckee] that we had day laborers coming in from Kings Beach and Reno.” Today, as building has slowed, and in some cases stopped, “we now have laborers that were once working forty to fifty hours a week [and today] now working only twenty.” This has separated the Latino community from the rest of the community. With the lack of work, many families face the daily threat of deportation. With the cost of living still rising around the basin, the Latino community is left without the resources to acquire the desired quality of life. “While *all* people desire a better quality of life, the question of who has the freedom to fulfill these desires is largely informed by global questions of power and privilege.”¹⁴

2.1. The Rise of the Mexican Work Force

The booming housing market brought increased numbers of immigrants to the Tahoe area during the 1990s. One Latina told me, “When we first moved here in sixty-five, there were only five Mexican families here [in Truckee], and today, because of all of the construction, there are more than ever.” As the Latino workforce has filled the positions of day laborers, housekeepers, maids, cooks, busers, custodians, and many more

¹³ Hal Clifford, Downhill Slide: Why the Corporate Ski Industry is Bad for Skiing, Ski Towns, and the Environment (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2002) 17.

¹⁴ Chaia Heller, Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature (Montréal; New York: Black Rose Press, 1999) 2.

service positions, they have become the backbone of the Tahoe region, however, they still lack the recognition and respect of the general community. The Latino community has suffered the brunt of the negative side effects of economic development, which threatens their environmental health. Because of the unequal development that took place in the last decade there was an overrepresentation of corporate control within the area and a lack of local agency. This corporate control has marginalized local business by raising rents to a point that only chain stores and high-end boutiques can survive.

The Latino community suffered and still suffers from the unequal burdens of insufficient housing options, traffic congestion, unsafe streets, neglected roads and parking lots, inadequate playgrounds, and a limited and unpredictable public transportation system. All of these issues are grounded on social equity, economic mobility, and environmental justice because this neglect applies unequal burdens on the Latino community. The streets cannot be fixed because the community lacks the social/political power and the economic means to gain social/political power. The children's playgrounds are often deteriorated parking lots where worn-down cars hibernate over the long winter months leaking everything from anti freeze to motor oil. The public transportation is designed to allow affluent tourists to make the easy transition from town to the resort, but leaves the local Latino mother walking her five-year-old a mile to school in the snow. The income gap in the area seems to grow by the hour as low-income Latino families are forced to live in an area that isn't friendly to their economic situation. All of this affects the community's health – economically, socially,

and environmentally. For sustainability, “Access to affordable housing – and, more generally, to an affordable lifestyle – is a critical element of this vision.”¹⁵

2.2. Environmentalism v. Environmental Justice

For years the environmental movement and the environmental justice movement have struggled against one another. In the early phases of the environmental justice movement, environmentalists believed that the two groups were struggling for different causes. Environmentalism was fighting for “wilderness,” national parks, open space, and endangered species. Where as the environmental justice movement was focused on employment, clean water and air, safe streets, health care, education, and the quality of life. In past environmental justice struggles communities have fought for land grants, habitat and watershed protection and restoration. It hasn't been until recently that people have begun to see a correlation between the two struggles even though they are still not on the same page. In order to get on the same page, the two movements must ask the question, “How can the environmental movement and the environmental justice movement extend beyond what divides them to what unites them?” “There are ample opportunities for joint efforts in the cause for environmental health, sustainability, and integrity.”¹⁶

In the Tahoe area these two movements have been in constant struggle for decades. Many of the residents support local mainstream environmental groups such as the League to Save Lake Tahoe, the Tahoe Conservancy, the Sierra Club, and the Sierra

¹⁵ Beatley and Manning 189.

¹⁶ Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: the Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007) 1.

Nevada Alliance. All of these groups are determined to protect the quality of the area's forest as well as the native flora and fauna. They are committed to the restoration of streams, wetlands, and the preservation of open spaces. On the League to Save Lake Tahoe web site, they state that, "For over 50 years the League to Save Lake Tahoe has advocated for strong protection of the Tahoe Basin's natural resources and the restoration of its famed clear water."¹⁷ The Sierra Nevada Alliance has a goal to "protect and restore the natural resources of the Sierra Nevada for future generations while promoting sustainable communities."¹⁸ The mission of the California Tahoe Conservancy is to "preserve, protect, restore, enhance and sustain the unique and significant natural resources and recreational opportunities of the Lake Tahoe Basin."¹⁹ Perhaps the most famous of all environmental protection groups is the Sierra Club, founded by John Muir in 1892. They are "America's oldest, largest, and most influential grassroots environmental organization."²⁰ All of these organizations have done, and continue to do great things for the environment, but what they neglect to address are the social implications of their actions. Administrators of these organizations might argue that claim. However, history has shown that these organizations put the environment above people. The problem with this is that, as Roderick Nash writes in his classic, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, is "...wilderness is in danger of being loved to death."²¹

¹⁷ Keep Tahoe Blue Online 2006. The League to Save Lake Tahoe. 22 Jan. 2009. <<http://keeptahoeblue.org>>.

¹⁸ Sierra Nevada Alliance 2008. Sierra Nevada Alliance. 28 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.sierranevadaalliance.org>>.

¹⁹ California Tahoe Conservancy 2003. State of California. 27 Jan. 2009 <<http://tahoecons.ca.gov/>>.

²⁰ The Sierra Club 2008. The Sierra Club. 8 Jan. 2009 <<http://sierraclub.org/>>.

²¹ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 4th ed. 2001.) XI.

From the vantage points of the environmental justice movement, this is truly a problem. Without a restructuring of power, economically and socially, oppressed groups will continue to struggle for justice. “Poor people’s environments can rarely be improved without acquiring more power.”²² This is because environmental inequalities are structured along power, control, and oppression. Marginalized peoples want to gain environmental justice, and this can be seen primarily through their drive to improve their communities. In the Tahoe region, local family resource centers are attempting to improve the communities well being by allowing more access to resources such as jobs, housing, health care, and food for their residents. This means creating affordable childcare, establishing safe neighborhood programs, and pushing for more affordable housing. However, without the help of larger public organizations, local and small family resource centers cannot create this change.

One of the strongest cases that the environmental movement has made on the American public is creating the idea of “wilderness.” In many environmentalist texts authors stress the need for wilderness, the need for the unknown, the need for the imaginative. John Muir described wilderness as, “Beauty beyond thought everywhere, beneath, above, made and being made forever.”²³ The American public has become positively engaged in recent issues such as climate change, smart growth development, local and organic food, renewable resources, and eco-tourism. However, this has also created romanticism about issues of sustainability. “Romanticism is a way of knowing

²² Laura Pulido, Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Struggles in the Southwest (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996) XIX.

²³ John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierras (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1987) 14.

which is wedded to ignorance.”²⁴

We as a society have learned to commodify nature, “Nature lost its significance as something to which people belonged and became an adversary, a target, merely an object for exploitation.”²⁵ An argument could be made that the main reason why many organizations throughout the U.S. want preservation of “wilderness” is to use it for recreational purposes, which entails an economic profit. “If the environmental movement does not adopt the human-centered perspective of the environmental justice movement, they will be unable to make hard decisions that increase human suffering, that require putting other beings and ecosystems, not humans, first.”²⁶

It is essential for the Tahoe area, as well as many other resort tourist driven areas, to consider the social and economic aspects of environmentalism. Is it attainable for the environmental and environmental justice movements to work together? And if they can, what are the benefits for the quality of life? What is important to note when considering the implications of environmentalism in the Tahoe area, similar to many Mexican American communities explained by Devon Pena, *Mexican Americans and the Environment: Tierra y Vida*, is that “The wilderness is also woven into local people’s identities.”²⁷ Regardless of class, age, gender, culture, language, or race, these mountains, vistas, streams, and waters around the Tahoe area are special to many residents. Vine Deloria, in *God is Red*, explains the need for establishing sacred places amongst a society because it creates identity. “Every society needs these kinds of sacred

²⁴ Hellar 16.

²⁵ Nash XIII.

²⁶ Sandler and Pezzullo 34.

²⁷ Peña, *Mexican Americans and the Environment: Tierra y Vida* 117.

places because they help to instill a sense of social cohesion in the people and remind them of the passage of generation that have brought them to the present. A society that cannot remember and honor its past is in peril of losing its soul.”²⁸ If the Tahoe communities cannot remember what this place was like, if the residents can only remember the economic benefits, then the area will continue to struggle for identity.

2.3. Environmental Struggles: Tahoe going “Green”

The first organization to realize the need to preserve the Tahoe area was the Save Lake Tahoe Association that was created in 1934.²⁹ Unfortunately, because of the timing of the organization they were unable to control the over-exploitation of the area. In 1957, seven years before the city of South Lake Tahoe was incorporated, the League to Save Lake Tahoe was created. This was the first group that was able to create an atmosphere of conservation and preservation on the lake. By 1967, the goal of the lake communities was to “preserve and maintain the physical environment of the Lake Tahoe region, including its natural endowment for recreation and residential purposes, and thus to encourage the economic stability of the region.”³⁰ Unfortunately, this too was extremely complicated. The Tahoe Regional Planning Association (TRPA) officially began work in 1970³¹ and was forced to deal with two different competing ideologies, the development driven gaming industry of Nevada, and the preservation and conservation of California. This issue has still not been resolved, as residents in California and Nevada don’t see eye to eye. A recent example of this is the resignation of the TRPA’s director of the land-use

²⁸ Vine Deloria Jr., God Is Red (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973) 276.

²⁹ Strong 106.

³⁰ Strong 140.

³¹ Strong 147.

regulatory agency. The *Tahoe Daily Tribune* stated the reason he left was the mental and physical demand took on him, "...the grind of a job tugged by the competing interests of environmentalists and developers."³²

"In 1982, TRPA adopted nine environmental threshold carrying capacities (thresholds), which set environmental standards for the Lake Tahoe Basin and indirectly defined the capacity of the Region to accommodate additional land development."³³ The goal of this was to not only create the restrictions around the lake, but also to chart the progress the basin was making in terms of restoration and preservation. "The nine thresholds are water quality, soil conservation, air quality, vegetation, wildlife, fisheries, scenic resources, noise, and recreation. Many of the environmental thresholds will take generations to achieve and a sustained commitment to conservation is imperative."³⁴ Because of the delicate ecosystem to the Tahoe area, the TRPA has focused a lot of their attention on education and awareness within to Tahoe communities. A TRPA spokesman said, "There has been 700 restoration projects since 1997, however, only 250 of those have been completed."

As the education of environmental responsibility continues to grow within the communities around the lake, there is a thirst for more information. "We are focused on public outreach and education rather than fining the public." The TRPA Spokesperson told me, "...we want to focus on environmental improvements not fines." It is important for local residents to understand and be aware of conservation and protection because

³² Martin Griffith, "TRPA Chief John Singlaub Resigns," *Tahoe Daily Tribune* 26 Jan. 2009: A3.

³³ Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Restoration in Progress: Environmental Improvement Program Progress Report (Report Published by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, 2007) 10.

³⁴ Tahoe Regional Planning Agency 10.

ultimately it is up to the public to maintain the environmental quality of the region.

“With education people will notice the wounds and want to see them heal.”³⁵ However, because of American individualism, individual focus on what can benefit “me” the most, “There is a clear tendency in America conservation to relegate to government all necessary jobs that private landowners fail to perform.”³⁶

Many organizations in the Tahoe area are attempting to reach out to the public about environmental conservation and protection. Organizations work with schools and city governments to create a forum where residents can learn about the environmental issues around the lake. This is one of the biggest avenues used in the Tahoe area for environmental education and awareness. Today, ski resorts have hopped on the bandwagon to “go green.” Resorts have attempted to retrofit their lodges to be more eco-friendly and to reduce their carbon footprint. However, what they are neglecting to tell the skiers is the cost of early-season, man-made snow.

Few skiers probably know or think deeply about the environmental implications of their sport (although many consider themselves to be environmentalists). Yet paying to ski on man-made snow - to take a single illustration - supports an extraordinarily destructive set of environmental practices.³⁷

As the ski industry strives to achieve early season skiing, resorts have gone away from their goal of protecting nature, to destroying nature. Hal Clifford explains it as, “...snowmaking is a form of alchemy, of turning coal into snow.”³⁸ The root of the

³⁵ Reed F. Noss, Michael A. O’Connell, and Dennis D. Murphy, The Science of Conservation Planning (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997) 20.

³⁶ Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, 1949) 213.

³⁷ Clifford 181

³⁸ Clifford 184.

problem is the ski resorts drive to maximize profits. Skiing and the ski industry are not too different from any other industry that is associated with recreation and the outdoors. Around the Tahoe area, residents have bought boats to cruise the lake, ATV to travel deep into the woods, and snowmobiles to reach the backcountry, all of this, at nature's expense. "Recreation," as Aldo Leopold stated sixty years ago, "is commonly spoken of as an economic resource."³⁹

Perhaps one of the most influential environmental groups has been the League to Save Lake Tahoe. Driving in any major city throughout California, one is hard pressed to not find a bumper sticker on a car that says "Keep Tahoe Blue." It is encouraging that people want to protect the lake, because it does need protection, but as tourists visit the area and drive around in their gas-guzzling SUVs, that protection goes out the window. When I attempted to make contact with the League to Save Lake Tahoe to inquire about an interview, I was told I could not have one. "We are not permitted to allow for interviews," the receptionist told me. However, as I interviewed community members, especially with the Latino community, I began to realize that the League to Save Lake Tahoe was like many other conservation organizations, that is, an elitist organization. They are one the area's most visible and influential public organizations but they do little to actually help the community. When I asked about the organization during an interview with a Latino citizen, she responded, "What do they have to do with me, or any of us? All they care about is the lake." The League to Save Lake Tahoe blames the depletion of

³⁹ Leopold 167.

the water clarity on bad transportation, development, urbanization, and a deregulation of the environmental law by the TRPA. Their website states that:

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency seems determined to continue its incremental dismantling of the environmental policies that have historically protected Lake Tahoe. The recently adopted Shorezone Ordinances, designed to add thousands of additional buoys and other moorings to the Lake, are the latest example.⁴⁰

On their website they claim that the organization is attempting to work cooperatively with other organizations and the public to counter the TRPA. However, when I discussed this with local South Tahoe residents most residents could care less. One Latina said, “The TRPA and the League to Save Lake Tahoe, come on! The only thing they do is blame the public for our environmental problems. But I’ve never once seen them do anything that was inspirational.” This is not because the area doesn’t possess the knowledge of how to enhance the environmental quality of the lake, some of the best and brightest minds live, work, and study in the Tahoe area. It is because the public, the federal, state, county, and local agencies cannot break from their own agendas to work collaboratively. “Environmental policy now lags significantly behind scientific understanding, probably more so than any time since the 1960s.”⁴¹

2.4. “Poverty With a View”

Perhaps the biggest struggle between environmentalism and environmental justice is between the TRPA and the City of South Lake Tahoe. The TRPA is the governing body that oversees all the development that takes place around the Tahoe basin. Inside the TRPA guidelines there are regulations on density restriction. A City of South Tahoe

⁴⁰ Keep Tahoe Blue Online 2006. The League to Save Lake Tahoe. 22 Jan. 2009. <<http://keeptahoeblue.org>>.

⁴¹ Noss, O’Connell, and Murphy 23.

spokesperson told me, “One of our biggest struggles is with the TRPA. We want to put in more affordable housing, but because of the density restriction of the TRPA its not enticing for developers to do it.” What the spokesperson elaborated on later in the discussion was that if there is not an economic incentive to do the project, most developers look the other way. If the City of South Lake Tahoe could increase the density of certain areas in the city they could persuade more developers to create more affordable housing at a reasonable price. “Right now, the land is too expensive and you need too much of it to create enough affordable housing.” If the city could create denser affordable housing, the spokesperson told me they would be able to create two or three times as much as they currently have on the same piece of land.

Similar to affordable housing and density are the ambiguities of the community enhancement program issued by the TRPA. The Community Enhancement Program document states, “The Community Enhancement Program is seeking net gain solutions for the Lake Tahoe Basin which implement environmental improvements, enhance the quality of life for residents, improve the visitor experience and contribute to the long-term economic vitality of the region.”⁴² In this enhancement program, the TRPA is using place-based program goals. This means that with the advice of the local communities they hope to implement different strategies in each area. Thus, the objectives of this program could be used differently in Kings Beach, Tahoe City, Incline, or South Tahoe depending on the need and wants of the community.

One of the many problems with the community “enhancement” program is that

⁴² Tahoe Regional Planning Agency – Community Enhancemnt Program (N.p.: Regional Planning Partners and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency 2007)

often times these community “enhancements” only enhance the lives of the wealthy. For example, the community of Kings Beach will have devastating effects if the community enhancement project does not get carried out justly. As a TRPA representative told me, “social equity in out of our jurisdiction.” Through the Kings Beach Commercial Core Enhancement Program, the TRPA points out and recognizes the housing issues at hand. In a 2007 door-to-door survey conducted by the TRPA, concludes that of the residents living in Kings Beach:

- 96% live in the Lake Tahoe area year-round
- 86% work in the Tahoe area year-round
- The median annual household income is \$32,500 compared to the Placer county median of \$67,200
- 36% have annual incomes below \$25,000
- 64% have children living with them
- Over 40% in Kings Beach live in overcrowded conditions⁴³

Because of the seriousness of the living and working conditions of many of the Kings Beach residents, many low-income Latino families fear the possibilities of getting priced out of the area. The goal of the enhancement project is to create a more sustainable community, which means creating a sustainable lifestyle for its residents. The study states that the existing conditions of the area have:

- Lack of Best Management Practices (BMPs)
- Over-covered Sites
- Dilapidated Structures
- Substandard Housing
- Poor Land Uses
- Haphazard Parking⁴⁴

⁴³ “Pathway 2007 - Community Enhancement Program,” Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, 2008, 10 Jan. 2009 <www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/CEO/Redevelopment/~/_media/ceo/redev/images/documents/TRPA%2008.ashx>.

⁴⁴ “Pathway 2007”

Within the Kings Beach Commercial Core Enhancement Program project area the TRPA is striving for the, “Construction of Environmental Improvement Program improvements, removal/replacement of substandard housing, adherence to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria.”⁴⁵

The agency plans to create, “Sustainable housing design, seventy four rental units, forty-two new units, low- and moderate-income housing.”⁴⁶ The environmental benefits of this vision are definitely an improvement on present conditions. However, if the agency does not take in to full consideration what this “enhancement” will do to the low-income Latino community of the Kings Beach area, it will become a center for gentrification, which will further marginalize some residents over others.

The Kings Beach Commercial Core Enhancement Program is still in the planning phase. However, as I spoke with Kings Beach locals I began to understand their fear and excitement. One local Kings Beach Latina expressed it this way, “We are a service community. We benefit from construction and the casinos. But we also know that with too much development we won't be able to live here. So what do we do?” One of the main things that Kings Beach locals have begun to stress to the TRPA is the need for transportation. Many low-income locals don't have cars and are forced to get around by an unpredictable and unreliable transportation network. “We need better road service [snow plowing] in the winter, we need more [street] lights on our roads, and we need a place to go.” By stressing the need for a community center where locals could congregate, this resident was expressing the need for opportunities to develop a sense of

⁴⁵ “Pathway 2007”

⁴⁶ “Pathway 2007”

place.

Many of the environmental justice struggles in the Tahoe area are directly associated with the environmentalism that has taken root in the area. Many wealthy residents see the need to redevelop old worn out neighborhoods and replace them with new and “green” developments. But in many cases, this prices low-income residents out of the area. “Gentrification must be controlled so that it does not sweep out virtually all lower income renter households as well as make life insecure for lower income homeowners.”⁴⁷ Although many wealthy residents have become blinded by the concept of “going green,” it is important for city planners, residents, and community organizations to understand that, “A city cannot become green by shifting its burden to some other part of the world,”⁴⁸ or in the case of Lake Tahoe, some other area around the lake.

As the TRPA is constantly seeking net gains, meaning better and greener environmental improvements they have also gained public support. They claim there are social improvements as well. However, like many of the low-income residents in the area, if the “enhancement” programs are designed to create a higher cost of living, then the low-income populations will be affected disproportionately. The social “enhancements” will in fact further marginalize low-income people in this area. “Immigrant communities cannot be made society’s sacrificial lambs.”⁴⁹ And even as

⁴⁷ Michael H. Lang, Gentrification Amid Urban Decline (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1982) 39.

⁴⁸ Roelofs 122.

⁴⁹ David R. Diaz, “Environmental Logic and Minority Communities,” in Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: the Metamorphosis of Southern California. Eds. Marta López-Garza and David R. Diaz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001) 430.

most of the Tahoe region understands this, they are blinded by “green.” “Green values extend beyond concern with the built and natural environment and resource use; they also include social justice in the broadest sense.”⁵⁰

This is constantly a struggle in the Tahoe area. Because the area is fueled by tourism, wealthy local business owners feel that the low-income housing needs to be “enhanced.” However, they do little to address the problem. Many wealthy business owners distance themselves for the issue because of the complexity of this dichotomy. Tourism depends upon cheap labor and low wages, which entail low-income residents. However, wealthy business owners neglect to engage in this dialogue because they need high-end development to entice tourism. Without raising wages, business owners can then pass the burden on to the city government without taking sides. A common perception is that the low-income neighborhoods that are the work force of the region need to be hidden behind the hotels. This current trend has serious consequences to the social lives of those who live the life of the hidden workforce. Often times, community enhancement means economic enhancement for wealthy residents and displacement for low-income residents. “What we have created here,” a family resource director stated, “is poverty with a view.” The struggles for a good transportation network, adequate affordable housing, more walkable and safe streets, as well as a more livable life are a challenge in today’s mountain wonderland.

⁵⁰ Roelofs 6.

2.5. Struggles for Environmental Justice: The Building Blocks of Community

Across the Tahoe area Latino residents, families, and community organizations have begun to take action against economic expansion. The development of extravagant homes in the area has marginalized some residents well below the poverty line. Today, local family resource centers in South Lake Tahoe, Kings Beach, and Truckee, have begun to take their future into their own hands. The local family resource centers are constantly busy with helping and educating community members. One of the family resource center directors of the Tahoe area told me that, “our goal is to demonstrate to the families how to use the system to their benefit.” This means these organizations are helping families find housing, health care, employment, education, food, and clothes. In the process, these family resource centers have also created a community with the resource center as its hub.

As I talked to family resource workers and volunteers I realized that these centers are just as much the center of the community as the church is. Similar to how Mary Pardo documented the struggles of women activists in Los Angeles in her book, *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities*, “...women identified and communicated community needs to public officials responsible for allocating resources.”⁵¹ As explained to me by a center director, “We focus on informing and educating the moms because they are the ones that pass the knowledge on to the husbands and children.” By engaging in this chain of knowledge, these family resource centers are using moms as a means to spread knowledge and information.

⁵¹ Mary Pardo, *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and resistance in two Los Angeles Communities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) 172.

Historically, Mexican immigrant women have been used to spread information to their families. Explained by George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, Mexican immigrant women were used to spread ideals and values. “Mexican immigrant women were targeted for a variety of reasons. First they were assumed to be the individuals primarily responsible for the transmission of values in the home.”⁵² The director told me that, “...by educating the moms, we help alleviate some of that fear that they have.”

The family resource centers believe that by providing a safe place for education and participation, the Latino communities around the lake would feel less susceptible to the “power” that the general contractors hold over them. Historically, “Subcontracting and cash payments... make it easier for employers to skirt occupational safety and health regulations, minimum-wage laws, and other worker protections.”⁵³ During one of my interviews with a local Latino construction worker, it was evident that he had a fear of being deported. “Last fall, three of my cousins were pulled over on the way home from a job,” he told me. “All of them got deported because they didn’t have papers. The bosses know this, and pay us less.” The fear of deportation has historically rendered the Latino populations subject to the will of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Fear is the biggest and most powerful weapon that has been used against the Latino community throughout history. Immigrant workers have consistently been seen as a commodity, utilized as a tool for cheap and expendable labor. However, hidden

⁵² George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 1993) 99.

⁵³ Douglas S. Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002) 123.

beneath this common societal view, immigrant workers are actually the life force of the nation. Their under-valued contributions to society in terms of construction, food, culture, and language demonstrate that they are far from cheap and expendable, but rather, deeply rooted in the history of America.

One local Latino told me, “There is always someone who is going to do it [work] for less.” One of the community resource workers said, “A lot of the Latino community is in survival mode.” Some are willing to work for far less on the simple fact that they do not believe that they can get anything better. One local Latino construction worker told me, “I get paid less because *el patron* pays me in cash.”

Similar to U.S. immigration policies, the Tahoe region has a love-hate relationship with immigrant workers. “U.S. immigration policies have consequently swung back and forth between recruitment and restriction, acceptance and exclusion.”⁵⁴ Currently, the Tahoe area is one of the hardest places to find a steady job. Contractors aren't building, ski resorts are struggling, and the gaming industry at Stateline, Nevada is also at a low point. Thus, the Latino community has become susceptible to being blamed for the lack of work in the area. “Whenever they feel there is too many Mexicans working here, they call *la migrá*,” a family resource director told me. “Last fall,” she continued, “*la migrá* was here for a week. The family resource center had to bring food to families because they were too afraid to go outside.” Fear, this powerful weapon has been used to shape the Latino community because, as a family resource director told me, “...they are taught they don't have a voice, and that's what we want to change.” Low

⁵⁴ Massey 8.

wages, constant immigration raids, and an inevitable fear of deportation are rooted in immigration and border politics. The Latino community has, as a local contractor put it, “apathy, nothing is going to change.” However, this feeling doesn’t sit to well with many of the Tahoe area’s family resource centers who are struggling daily to bring about that change.

What was on the mind of many of the family resource directors that I talked with was the importance of creating a better quality of life in the Latino community. This was explained to me as,

...that is the piece that we are still looking for. That is, how does this all relate to their health, and the health of the community. The barriers are in place because it doesn’t make sense that we have all of this natural environment that is truly positive for people that want to do outdoor stuff, but there are barriers for people to access them, if you don’t have transportation, that’s a big one, and then of course, financially, money to pay the daily [fee] for of something like skiing.

A general perception of Tahoe residents is that everyone in the area skis. With ski prices going up each year, now topping sixty, seventy, and even eighty dollars a day, to many Latino families skiing is not even an option. For the majority of Latino families in the Tahoe area not only is it too expensive for a family to go skiing, but it is also too expensive to attain the equipment needed for the day. To ski means you need a warm jacket, gloves, ski boots, skis, poles, and other equipment. That is the main reason why Hal Clifford believes, “skiing may well be the whitest and least integrated popular sport in America.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Clifford 32.

Today, with prices raising, and wages falling, especially in the Latino community, “...skiing for the less-than-wealthy is truly becoming a thing of the past.”⁵⁶ As I talked to one Latina about her experiences skiing she told me, “...it was a privilege, and it is too bad, because doing things like that can open up different worlds for these [Latino] kids.” Without the ability to explore the outdoors, the Latino community then struggles with the health issues as a result to being inside cramped and neglected housing.

“The other environment piece we are really connected to is affordable housing,” one resource director told me. Relieving some of the economic tensions felt by these families by providing affordable housing, these families will see community health grow. In the town of Truckee, affordable housing has another issues; it is too far away from public transportation. Much of the public transportation around the Tahoe area is simply to get skiers to the mountains. In South Lake Tahoe, one ride on the BlueGO, the local transportation network, can cost three dollars, but to get to Heavenly Ski Resort from anywhere in the city is free. The TRPA cannot set up a consistent transportation network around the lake because of the lack of ridership. As a result, a new ferry system is in the planning phases. However, this network is again designed to bring tourist to various attractions around the lake, and again choosing the tourist over the local.

In Truckee, as result of the lack of nearby efficient public transportation, many residents that moved into these new affordable housing units end up moving back into their cramped and deteriorating trailers because from the trailer park they can walk to the store or to the school, which from the affordable house this was not an option. Truckee is

⁵⁶ Clifford 32.

in the process of creating a more walkable and bikeable community. To follow up on this, the Truckee Family Resource center has combined with Tahoe Forest Hospital in its efforts to create Truckee Health Challenge. The director described it to me as:

We are improving people's health and creating community leaders who will become stakeholders and gatekeepers in changing the system. So they have a voice. The process is challenging the existing system, working with Latino community members to get power and to help to find a voice to make systems change in the town.

Cities around the lake have attempted to create a new atmosphere by adopting New Urbanism values. "Today, green-oriented planners and the proponents of 'urban villages' believe reducing automobile dependence to be the most important urban design consideration."⁵⁷ In the communities around the lake, urban design has been in important point to rally around. Through New Urbanism planners are focusing their communities around public transportation, creating walkable and bikeable communities, and creating affordable housing near these areas, the low-income communities of the lake have a better chance of establishing, maintaining, and perpetuating a healthy community.

My discussions with the Latino communities around the Tahoe area raised my awareness of many of the issues, such as community health and safe streets, that are important to the community. Much of the literature dispersed by the county office of health was in regards to children. As I walked the halls of the county health office, I found that much of the literature was also in Spanish, many of the clients that were sitting in the waiting room were speaking Spanish, and the two receptionists at the community health clinic and the receptionist at the county health office were bilingual. The

⁵⁷ Joan Roelofs, *Greening Cities: Building Just and Sustainable Communities* (New York: Bootstrap Press, 1996) 14.

pamphlets that I picked up about health were translated in both Spanish and English; they were available to community members at the county office of health, the community health clinic, and the family resource center. It was evident that affordable health care was important to the families and communities within the Tahoe area. “We want healthy, strong, and committed families,” one resource director told me.

In the Latino community established around the family resource centers, many of the Latino families are able to find important information about health and the health of the community. “One of the biggest issues that we deal with here, is mental health,” stated a South Tahoe family resource employee. The grants the family resource center receives from the state for mental health are today in danger of being lost. “Until California passes a budget,” the family resource director told me, “I’m not sure how we are going to make it.” Without this family resource center, many Latino residents will be left in the cold and be forced to take on the individual responsibilities of learning the system. “I worry what is going to happen this year. First a recession, then the budget, and now the weather [no snow]. What do I say to them?” The family resource center has the ability to fight for the environmental justice the community deserves because it helps in creating a social identity the community can share and rally around. “The idea of social relationship is integral to the idea of social *structures* - non-hierarchical structures that facilitate *meaningful* cooperative social relationships in all areas of our lives.”⁵⁸ Even without the family resource center, the Latino community will look toward other avenues to support its push for better living conditions, transportation, employment

⁵⁸ Hellar 92.

opportunities, and education. One director of a family resource center told me, “In this community, if you reach out, often times someone will lend you a hand... Unfortunately, bureaucracy can get in the way.”

2.6. Developing the Mountains

Politicians, policy makers, and developers often look at redevelopment as an important instrument in the restructuring of a community. In some cases, redevelopment can be unitized to improve a community’s economy, to enhance the area’s quality of life, or to better the area’s environmental standards. All of these outcomes can be beneficial to any community. However, without examining both the redevelopment process and the consequences of redevelopment, developers can often neglect to recognize the marginalizing effects that redevelopment can have on a community. In the case of the Lake Tahoe region, redevelopment has altered, not only the face of the communities surrounding the lake, but also the identity and character of these communities. The once rustic mountain towns that filled the shores and surrounding areas of Lake Tahoe are now posh five-star resorts. Gone are the days of twenty, thirty, or even fifty dollar ski tickets as the ski mountain villages have brought in million dollar time shares. As redevelopment money poured into the region during the 1990’s economic boom, savvy real estate developers created massive subdivisions where affluent Bay Area residents bought and built dream homes in the mountains.

As second homeownership became trendy in the Tahoe region, residents have seen growth at an unprecedented rate. The late 1990’s development trend was to create the makeshift château at the base of large ski resorts. Designed after their European

ancestors, the château is simply a façade to an empty community. Vail, Colorado was one of the first mountain towns to fall victim to this fate. Today, small mountain towns where ski villages are present claim that they do not want to become the next Vail. “This reality - that on-mountain development drives off mountain real estate prices and creates the initial attraction around which the New Ski Villages are constructed - is embedded in the business strategy... of every ski resort now trying to build a base village.”⁵⁹

The side effects of development are increased land values and urban sprawl, while at the same time development has created a system that perpetuates economic, social, and environmental inequities. Increased development is also an aftershock of redevelopment as the area becomes more and more popular. This is not an entirely bad phenomenon, especially for an economy such as Tahoe that is built on tourism and development. However, if a city or community fails to recognize that redevelopment must enhance the quality of life for *all* its residents and not just wealthy investors, people will question the city’s intentions. Is the goal of the redevelopment agency to improve the quality of life for the area’s residents, is it to improve their environmental well being, or is it to line the pockets of an already elite class? Moreover, through the process of redevelopment, locals are left questioning the authenticity of their mountain town. With a recession at hand, many of these handcrafted villages created for second homeowners are left unfinished, leaving the community empty. South Lake Tahoe’s future convention center, or as locals call it, “the hole in the ground,” near Stateline, Nevada, has seen construction stop during the foundation phase as the developer is on the verge of bankruptcy. This

⁵⁹ Clifford 56.

“hole in the ground” has become an eye sore for locals and a reminder of the area’s economic vulnerability. Vacant commercial and residential units have flooded resort communities in the past few years.

How can the residents of Lake Tahoe take back their community while at the same time allowing there to be enough resources for *all* of the area’s residents? Due to the higher prices that the out-of-town elites have created, the Mexican American community has seen more prejudice, more segregation, and more inequities than ever. At the same time many of these communities have become more bonded. As they become more marginalized socially, politically, and economically, they have become a closer and more autonomous community. Meanwhile, they are the invisible workforce that is maintaining the elite’s playground that is Lake Tahoe.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This is a qualitative research project, specifically done through interviews, participant observation, and field research. I also collected primary documents from various governmental and non-governmental agencies and environmental organizations. The perception of community around the Lake Tahoe area is that everyone is part of the community, everyone is invited to go skiing, and everyone is living the life of the tourist. As I interacted with the local Latino community this reality was turned upside down. The information that I collected based on the daily lives of the locals showed me that life in the Tahoe area is not the kind the tourists see. The Latino communities do not have the money to go skiing, do not live in comfortable settings, and are confined to low-paying

jobs. Many residents around the lake understand the Latino community as a transient community in which residents move here seasonally and fulfill the open service jobs. But what I found was quite the opposite. Their stories, tours of their communities, and insight gave me extensive knowledge to the conditions in which they create community, agency, and identity.

The process of this research began in the summer of 2008. My first interaction with the field of research began with the study of the Slow City movement (Chapter five), which explained for alternatives to our common belief of development and progress such as smart growth practices, transit oriented development, and social centered communities. After that, much of what followed was sustainability and environmental science research. Put together with my Chicana/o Studies background I was able to create a framework with Chicana/o scholarship at the center. I used three interview schedules, which were used as my guideline for developing most of the questions I asked. The interview schedules addressed three different groups: elected and appointed officials, Latino Affairs Commission, and local Latino residents. Each interview set had questions of social conditions, environmental conditions, and economic conditions. I also created a Spanish version of the Latino Affairs Commission and local Latino resident's interview schedules for those how did not speak English or for those who felt more comfortable speaking in Spanish. The majority of the fall I spent in the Bay Area traveling to the Tahoe area collecting data through interviews and field observations. In November of 2008 I realized if I was to be able to truly understand the lives of the Latino community of the area I needed to move there. I grew up on the North Shore, and I was able to network

with people in the community in which I used to live in. I rented a place in South Lake Tahoe, where I could get to know a community. In December I was able to go into the field almost everyday. By living in the area I was able to meet and converse with locals at the supermarket, at town meetings, and family resource centers on a daily basis. This experience was influential to my work and understanding of the area's Latino community.

For the interviews I used a snowball method to identify subjects. I relied upon my connections at Truckee Elementary to identify locals on the North Shore to involve in my study. Due to the high population of Latino residents in Kings Beach much of my focus on the North Shore resided around Kings Beach. After an interview I was usually asked why I was interested in this type of research, in which case I often answered, "Because no one else is." I asked each participant if he or she knew of someone who might be interested in my research. Through this method I interviewed teachers, administrators, documented and undocumented local day laborers, family resource center directors, and even city council members. Locals pointed me to the most powerful local governing bodies in the region. I contacted them through e-mail and later by telephone to schedule interviews. On the South Shore I identified people to interview through my field and participant observation. My approach began with attending city council meetings. Through the meetings I met one city council member, whom I contacted through e-mail and then by telephone to schedule an interview. I also met one of the seven Latino Affairs Commissioners. I contacted him via e-mail and then telephone to schedule an interview. I later learned that he was also the head of the local contractors union. After

the interview with him I asked if I could sit around and ask questions to those who walked in to talk with him. He had no problem with this. During the time that I was there, I met and interviewed with two local Latino contractors. One man informed me of his undocumented wife and her extended family, he also pointed me to others who might be interested in participating in the study. During my time at the local contractor's union I was also told about the South Lake Tahoe Family Resource Center. I scheduled a walk in appointment, which was scheduled later in the week.

I interviewed people from multiple backgrounds and languages. I interviewed a total of thirteen residents. My participants consisted of four elected and appointed officials, two from the North Shore and two from the South Shore, all of which were Anglo. I also interviewed a total of nine Tahoe Latinos, three South Lake Tahoe Latino residents, three North Lake Tahoe Latino residents, and four Truckee Latino residents. I interviewed one Latino teachers, one Latino administrator, two Latino family resource center directors, one Latino custodian, and three Latino day laborers. The locals ranged in age, most of them were in their late to early thirties. One woman had been living in the area since 1965, and a day laborer had just brought his wife here from Mexico a few months earlier. Two of my participants could not speak conversational English, in which case my interviews were conducted in Spanish. I was only able to get into contact with one member of South Lake Tahoe's Latino Affairs Commission, in part because the commission is currently electing new officials. He was a Latino man in his fifties and was also the head of the local contractors union.

All of the participants in my interviews agreed to share information about their lives. Before each interview began I assured my participants that all of the information I used would be solely used for my research and all quotes and comments could not be directed back to them. Regardless, most participants did not care about keeping their names safe. One told me, “I don’t care, I want them [the general public] to know of my life.” This was a common message received from most of the participants.

In the process of trying to contact local conservation organizations for my research I was unable to schedule any interviews. I contacted the Tahoe Area Sierra Group, the League to Save Lake Tahoe, and Placer County Redevelopment Agency, all of which either neglected to return my call, or said that they could not allow for an interview. I believe this is because of the focus of my work; these organizations felt that my research was not in the best “interest” of the organizations. Unfortunately, this was not my intention. The purpose of conducting interviews with these organizations was to get a better understanding of the ways environmentalism and environmental justice can coexist.

The question for which I received the most interesting answers was the last question, “What is progress to you?” The diversity of my interview pool was also represented in the responses to this question. This question allowed for the participants to discuss what was important to them and to point out their own interests. Some responses had to do with traffic, some jobs, and others social equality. Many of the officials discussed creating a “greener” city. This question also helped me form my guidelines for the ways I would direct the research and my questions to future

participants.

Fortunately, this question also led to further discussions that had an effect on my interviews. In most cases, after this question, many community members brought up different points and then elaborated on them. One man told me the reason why he moved to Tahoe as he discussed this question. Another woman talked a half hour about how important the inauguration was of President Obama to the future of social movements. However extremely interesting, this led to a long and trying process of transcribing these interviews.

Aside from my interviews I went to six community meetings. I went to two South Lake Tahoe council meetings, two Tahoe Regional Planning Agency meetings, one South Lake Tahoe Latino Affairs Commission meeting, and one local Latina youth group meeting. These meetings were more influential than some of the interviews. The meetings involved a collection of people talking about issues that were important to them. Some of them focused on sustainability, city planning, social equality, transportation, green building, local jobs, and even buoy restrictions in Lake Tahoe. During the meetings I took elaborate notes on the discussion related to this study. The input from the local interviews with the combination of meeting discussions brought into light what was important for the local communities around Lake Tahoe.

Ultimately, this topic morphed into something that was too big to cover in this research project. What started out as study to understand how the immigrant communities around that lake were able to survive in the Tahoe area, turned into how environmentalism and environmental justice can coexist in the area through sustainability.

Issues such as education were too expansive to take on for this research paper. Several schools around the lake have dual language immersion programs (Chapter Five). This is important in constructing community and place, but in order to understand how this program works and doesn't work would require a complete analysis of the program. Another issue that was beyond my research scope was how gangs have become prevalent around the lake because of the disparity caused by the current economic structures in the area. This would have to encompass all communities around the lake, including all social issues of education, employment, and social condition.

Trying to find recent documentation of the social conditions of people around the lake has been very difficult. A local research firm, Tahoe Integrated Information Management System, claims to conduct research on all areas of the lake. But when it comes to social aspects and how the current trends around the lake affect the ways of the local community, they state, "The consideration of Socio-Economics (SE) is necessary to understanding the linkage between environmental regulation, economic activities and the community."⁶⁰ However, in the following statement they then state, "To date there has been little formal research and analysis of SE topics and issues on a basin-wide scale."⁶¹ These two contradicting statements are then followed by, "In order to provide more informed management and policy development, it is critical to understand the dynamics of Lake Tahoe Basin's social and economic environments."⁶² The majority of the researchers, politicians, and public, were more concerned about "being green" than they

⁶⁰ "Demography and Economy." 2007. Tahoe Integrated Information Management System 13 Jan. 2009 <http://tiims.org/getdoc/658134a7-4082-4829-9b52-b4ce616a6ac2/Demography-and-Economy.aspx>.

⁶¹ "Demography and Economy"

⁶² "Demography and Economy"

were about using this new “green” trend to help out those who are less fortunate.

Understanding the social conditions of the Latino communities required extensive field research, conversations and interviews with locals, intimate discussions with politicians and policy makers, and insight from teachers and family resource directors. Piecing together the different aspects of life in the Tahoe area became the fabric of the community. The community’s openness and willingness to help by telling me their stories and their realities were important in guiding my research. Many of those who were part of my study invited me back to share with them what I have found.

3.1. The Illusion of Objectivity

As a qualitative researcher the rules of the game appear easy. One observes, interviews, analyzes, and then reports the findings. We examine our surrounding world and reflect our findings on the page. Yet, the reality of research is that there is no such thing as easy research. There are always conflicting interests by those who observe and by those who are observed. That is because we as humans are all different; we all have different beliefs, cultures, languages, nationality, heritages, and ways of interpreting. “The truth is that man is simply not designed by his evolution to entertain objective knowledge.”⁶³ Perception is what makes objective research near impossible to convey due to the fact that our perceptions are closely tied to our social positionality. On one hand, the researcher is open to his or her surroundings, and on the other, the researcher is always influenced by his or her past. We all have a perception of what is common knowledge, how things work and why they work, but as soon as we researchers leave our

⁶³ Edward Goldsmith, *The Way: an Ecological World-view* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998) 80.

comfort zone, we are then dependent on our perceptions. Edward Goldsmith claims that, “...the building up of knowledge requires more than the accumulation of individual observations.”⁶⁴ That is because we know the world through our social realities and we cannot separate them.

The difficult tug-of-war between perception and reality is a struggle for the researcher. Research that reflects the reality of marginal groups goes against the common perception. “For if knowledge is only accepted to the extent that it fits the paradigm, any knowledge that does not fit, however true and important it might be, is by the same token ruthlessly rejected.”⁶⁵ Any research, regardless of how objective the researcher tries to be, is intrinsically subjective. A researcher’s passion for their research will affect the way they interpret their writing. This isn’t to say that a researcher’s findings aren’t true or don’t hold value, but rather that as researchers we must realize that perhaps we cannot truly reach objectivity. As a researcher, my passion for both environmentalism and environmental justice were in constant conflict. I understood my position as a social environmentalist, where environmental value was held at the same level as human value. This was prevalent in my research for many reasons. I understand the need to redevelop and create more environmentally friendly infrastructure, but I also understand the desire for the local community to keep the community local. Both of these areas were affected by my passion and perceptions on what environmentalism and community could be.

As Romano states objectivity “tends largely to be influenced by time, place, and

⁶⁴ Goldsmith 52.

⁶⁵ Goldsmith XIV.

culture (nationality)”⁶⁶ we must understand that perhaps there is no such thing as “universal truth.”

In a way, a researcher can only hope to use his or her research as a tool for dialogue. By creating lasting relationships between the researcher and the researched, these two opposing parties can begin to learn from each other. This relationship allows for the researched subjects to have a voice, it allows them to tell their story. By the researcher allowing the subjects to judge themselves, the researcher is engaging in decolonizing research. In many instances, the objective of the research is to judge, categorize, and appropriate the subjects based on what the researcher already knows – “in other words, he [or she] insists they be understood by Europeans [or mainstream] in the same terms Europeans [or mainstream] understands themselves.”⁶⁷ It is only by giving the researched subjects a voice that the voids of understanding between the parties will begin to be understood.

Even though I grew up in Tahoe and spent more than half my life there, much has changed. In a way, the locals I interviewed, talked with, and observed were my co-investigators. Without their insight of the issues that are important to them, the research could not have been done. This, I hope, will bring to the foreground their understanding on the importance of my research. However, I understand the difficulties that lay in front of me. Lake Tahoe is my home, and even though I have moved several times in the past decade, I still feel a connection to the environmental and social well being of the area.

⁶⁶ Octavio Ignacio Romano-V., “Social Science, Objectivity, and The Chicanos.” Voices: Readings from El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought, 1967-1973. Ed. Octavio Ignacio Romano-V. (Berkeley: Quinto Sol Publications, Inc., 1973) 33.

⁶⁷ Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (Hoboken: Taylor & Frances, 2007) 43.

However important my connection is, I have been forced to learn that I am not the story here, I am only the storyteller. It is also my belief that my passion for the research also helped me to seek a deeper and more explainable reality.

Chapter 4. Development: From Run Down to High End

The first question that any resident, politician, or agency must ask is: Why redevelop? The answer one receives is often short and avoids the real issues at hand. Through my research and interviews some of the answers that I received when I asked that question were: “it tends to bring more money into the community as a whole and to the city’s general fund as well,” and “there is an increase of employment opportunities with the bigger projects.” But the agencies do not ask themselves: How does redevelopment help *and* hurt the community, especially low-income minority residents?

“For local governments in California, redevelopment is one of the principal tools available for revitalizing areas that are physically or economically blighted.”⁶⁸ This means that local government can dictate what needs to be redeveloped by declaring it “blight.” Once declared, “blighted” the city hands the matter over to the redevelopment agencies to create a plan of redevelopment. “A redevelopment plan provides the agency with powers to take certain actions such as purchasing and selling land within the area covered by the plan (project area), improving dilapidated facilities, and using tax

⁶⁸ Grant Boyken, Rethinking Redevelopment Oversight: Exploring Possibilities for Increasing Local Input (Sacramento, CA: California State Library, California Research Bureau, 2007) 1.

increment financing.”⁶⁹ In this model, once the area is considered “blight” it passes to the redevelopment agency where they then propose projects.

The South Tahoe Redevelopment Agency (STRA) was created in 1988 by the City of South Lake Tahoe to give the dying Stateline area a facelift.

The Project Area for the South Tahoe Redevelopment Agency (STRA) was adopted on June 28, 1988 by Ordinance NO. 746. The Project Area is located in the northeast portion of the City of South Lake Tahoe and encompasses approximately 174 acres. Major land uses include tourist facilities and commercial development. The Project Area generally runs along Highway 50 from just west of Ski Run Boulevard to the California-Nevada border.⁷⁰

The goal of the agency was to enhance the natural beauty of the City of South Lake Tahoe. The SLRA told me that during the late 1980s their discussions and community workshops with local community members informed them that what the community wanted was a center for tourism. Once constructed, this first attempt at redevelopment would forever change the identity and character of the city. Heavenly Village would now become known as the staple of the tourist industry around the Tahoe basin. The development was uniquely organized and constructed with mixed use and transit-oriented development. A member of the SLRA stated that,

...the ski buses do transportation, [vacationers] can go to their hotels, catch Heavenly ski bus, go to the transit center [at Stateline], get off and ride the gondola and go up to go skiing. So there are those benefits, transportation, water quality for sure... and then plus you have the natural new or more advanced products.

⁶⁹ Boyken 5.

⁷⁰ South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Agency 2004, City of South Lake Tahoe, 28. Jan. 2009 www.cityofslt.us/redevelopment-housing/redevelopment.html>.

Since the projects completion in 2001, the Stateline area has seen a “20% reduction in vehicle traffic at the Park Avenue and U.S. Highway 50 intersection...”⁷¹ where the Heavenly Village currently stands. This means less sediment runoff into the lake, less CO2 emissions, and less traffic. Their goal was to create a more walkable atmosphere centered around Heavenly Ski Resort where visitors could go shopping, eat dinner, and spend money while being outside.

There is a very compelling power dynamic in regards to the redevelopment agencies and how they function within the city. For the most part an upper elite class holds the power to determine blight and the plan of redevelopment to be carried out. For example, in the City of South Lake Tahoe, residents were excited about the new development at Stateline. However, what was not mentioned was how this redevelopment would impose corporate control of essentially the entire city because of their dependence on Heavenly Ski Resort and tourism in general.

Under the law, redevelopment agencies are required to form a project area committee [PAC] if: (1) ‘ a substantial number of low- or moderate-income persons, or both, live within the project area, and the redevelopment plan will give the redevelopment agency the authority to acquire residential property by eminent domain;’ or (2) ‘the redevelopment plan contains one or more public projects that will displace a substantial number of low- and/or moderate-income persons.’⁷²

That being said, community participation is very important in regards to redevelopment and redevelopment policies. While democracy has claimed open involvement in PAC participation, Environmental Justice struggles have often time resulted from an inability

⁷¹ Restoration in Progress: Environmental Improvement Program Progress Report (N.p.: Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, 2007)

⁷² Boyken 9.

of community participation and not from a lack of wiliness to participate. For the City of South Lake Tahoe there has been several different community workshops were the agency works with local residents to help create the community they wish to see. “Redevelopment agencies can be molded into what you want them to be,” the SLRA told me. In this sense, community connection is important because “PAC membership is limited to elected representatives of residential owner-occupants, residential tenants, business owners, and existing organizations within the projected area.”⁷³

It is also important for the locals to not neglect the PAC, because once the plan is passed to the redevelopment agency the plan can change from their original plans without the community’s knowledge. The power dynamic established by these elected representatives determines how a community either interacts with its neighbors to benefit the whole, or to benefit an individual.

For the environmental health of the Tahoe area it is important for redevelopment to take place. Many of the old sites are out dated and are insufficient considering Tahoe’s delicate ecosystem because they were built as car-oriented places, which increase sediment into that lake and neglected health codes in old housing units. Agencies, developers, and politicians hold a powerful place in the dynamic of city planning when they are to weigh out the social, economic, and environmental benefits of any given re/development.

⁷³ Boyken 9.

4.1. Objections to Redevelopment: A Local Perspective

In the majority of cases, redevelopment takes place in low-income areas where residents have historically had a limited role in city policies. This is true in the Lake Tahoe area, however, what is important to note when considering redevelopment in a resort town, is not how and who the redevelopment affects directly, but how the domino effects of redevelopment create economic disparity among the area's citizens. As a result, the Environmental Justice movement has seen redevelopment as a ploy to not only "enhance" run down areas of the city, but to also further displace low-income residents. In the case of South Lake Tahoe, the redeveloped Heavenly Village displaced long-term local businesses by replacing them with trendy boutiques and chain stores. A TRPA spokesperson I was explained that, "The TRPA cannot address maintaining local businesses because it is out of our jurisdiction. We prefer to see local businesses that care about the community go up, however, often times big money fills the spots." The SLRA also pointed out that "we are not coming in with an idea of what to do with the financing, we are coming in as a financier." Their claim is that based on the advice that they received from the community through their workshops; the public wanted a high-end tourist destination for their Park Avenue development. What the SLRA neglected to tell me was that the majority of the workshops the redevelopment agency held were during the day. Most low-income working people in the South Shore cannot afford to take work off to go to a meeting at ten in the morning. The agency also held two meetings at four in the afternoon for the Park Avenue development, which the few residents who were done working could not afford a babysitter, making it near impossible to attend. One Truckee

family resource representative informed me that, “They [Latino families] are working two jobs, and if they are a couple, one of them is working and the other does childcare, so that is the reality. If you are working at minimum wage and you are going to a meeting, you are going to have to hire a babysitter, and that doesn’t compute [economically].”

Many Latino residents are so busy trying to survive that the topics at these meetings seem irrelevant to their daily lives, which does not give them much incentive to participate. A local Latina expressed her frustration when she stated, “I just don’t get how this relates to me and my situation.” Her argument demonstrated the divide between the service working Latino community and the business oriented Anglo community.

Due to the redevelopment process, the Tahoe area is changing its image from a run-down mountain town to a trendy vacation spot, and in this process it has become a resort destination. “As a town becomes known as a resort, prices rise, which leads some to sell their property to outsiders drawn by the resort, making it more cosmopolitan and boosting the resort’s image, thus causing prices to rise, and so on.”⁷⁴ This process is what makes living in Tahoe essential and near impossible at the same time. There is need for a service workforce. However, because of the exorbitant cost of living in the area, many workers cannot make ends meet. The STRA states that one of the benefits of redevelopment is the creation of more employment and job opportunities. During the construction process of Heavenly Village, the agency estimated that there was a need for 700 construction jobs, and since completion, it has created 500 new jobs, mainly in the restaurant and retail industry. These new developments were essential in supporting an

⁷⁴ Clifford 96.

economy built upon development. An official spokesperson of the Town of Truckee stated:

...they [developments] create employment... you know construction, some high end employment and a lot of labor employment. There is a lot of service workers out there, they take care of the golf courses... all those kinds of things. I think these supper high-end, Lahontan was the first [high-end residential development just outside of Truckee], and now Martis Camp is the next high end [development], has created stronger psychology of economic stratification in this community. But I don't think it's positive.

As the development around resorts became more prevalent, the economy boomed and the demand for land grew. A Truckee city council member explained that as:

We had the best of plans...even though they were fairly basic in the early and mid 90s, and what we had... really starting about 1999 was a kind of land rush. Closely associated with the dot com boom... we had the top one percent of the people in the Bay Area clamoring to buy a piece of the mountains. And so our property land values went through the roof, construction went wild... and we rode that. Even the dot com bust didn't slow that down, maybe leveled it a bit. But we kind of just went right through that. And so we have had almost ten years of a very robust construction/development related economy. So that's good... everyone was kind of over-employed and doing well. However, that phenomena priced most of the working class right out of housing in Truckee.

This Truckee representative was extremely concerned about what these implications meant for the authenticity of the town. As many residents were forced to leave the area due to high rent and cost of living, the homes became filled with second home owners, which only vacation there only a few weeks a year. "The town could be doing great economically and this place would not necessarily be better off for it. We might do a bang up job plowing the roads, but if all of our employees live in Reno then the heart is really ripped out of this community," he said. It wasn't until recently that city planners and developers began to see this a bad thing. For most planners, progress means

growth. “Simply put, cities and planning are reflections of capitalism and at the same time help to constitute it.”⁷⁵ By allowing special interests and development agencies to dictate planning for economic advancement, many of the communities are now split along class and racial lines. “The existing divisions of class, race, gender, and other socially constructed differences can generate conflict and dissent with the collaborative community”⁷⁶

There are many ways in which redevelopment agencies work above the law. Some residents in the Tahoe area feel that redevelopment agencies are more powerful than the city itself. In many ways that is true because they work as separate legal entities. One South Lake Tahoe council member told me:

[Redevelopment agencies] ...can do two big things, which I feel are unacceptable and have fought against for fifteen years... number one is that through the process of condemnation and taking, using eminent domain, they take property and condemn it. That is one of the things that has happened in this town that has split the community wide open.

When using eminent domain the city is forced to relocate residents that were once living in the housing being redeveloped, however, the city is not forced to relocate businesses who were once located on the newly redeveloped area, which leaves them outside looking in. “The second thing they do,” the council member told me, “which from my standpoint it is totally unacceptable, is that they can create public debt through selling municipal bonds.” He then later claimed that South Lake Tahoe’s debt was because of redevelopment practices.

⁷⁵ Philip Allmendinger, Planning Theory (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 68.

⁷⁶ Devon Pena and Joe Gallegos, “Local Knowledge and Collaborative Environment Action Research.” In Building Community: Social Science in Action Ed. By Philip Nyden, Anne Figert, Mark Shibley, and Derryl Burrows (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1997) 88-89.

Currently there are several new developments that have changed the Tahoe area. In the North Shore, the Village at Squaw was completed in December of 2003 with 285 condominiums suites, six restaurants, twenty retail shops, and a spa. The Village at Northstar is in its final phases of completion. Homeowners enjoy the amenities of the up-scale communities near Truckee, Grey's Crossing, Old Greenwood, and the Northstar Highlands. There is also a proposed re/development at one of the last small scale ski resorts on the lake. Homewood Resort has now expressed interest in building a four-season resort. If the plan receives the approval of the TRPA, and other governing boards, the development would include a north base development, a south base development, and a mid-mountain redevelopment. Homewood's claim is that it will enhance the environmental standards and increase job opportunities on the West Shore. The development would include about 300 new units, both hotel and ownership. That number of units is almost the total population of the community of Homewood. During the community workshops that took place over the past months, residents told developers that the main thing they wanted from the development was to maintain "consistency with the scale and character of Homewood, California."⁷⁷ Is that possible with a development of this size? How will this development affect those who will not benefit from the increases of skiers or the increase of tourism? If projects do not take into consideration what will happen to these communities there is a good chance that there will be more people priced out of the Tahoe area.

⁷⁷ "Homewood Mountain Resort Master Plan Project Notice of Preparation," Placer County and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, 2008, 9 Dec. 2008 <[http:// www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/CommunityDevelopment/EnvCoordSvcs/EIR/~media/cdr/ECS/EIR/Homewood/NOP.ashx](http://www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/CommunityDevelopment/EnvCoordSvcs/EIR/~media/cdr/ECS/EIR/Homewood/NOP.ashx)>. Internet Accessed 9 December 2008>.

4.2. “We Cannot Solve our Problems with More Cabins in the Woods”

The Chicano communities as well as other low-income minority communities have been at the center of the gentrification of urban redevelopment for decades across the U.S. The gentrification of these communities “usually happens in three phases: (1) the deterioration of life and housing conditions; (2) a transitory period characterized by renovation of housing and ‘beatification’ usually by Anglo outsiders; and (3) a final phase where only former homeowners among the original residents remain in a mainly Anglo neighborhood.”⁷⁸ This process of redevelopment and beautification displaces low-income minority groups from a neighborhood while replacing them with an upper class, mainly Anglo neighborhood, thus segregating the two communities based on class. According to Joe Feagin, “Corporate investment and disinvestments are linked constantly to state action and have major economic, social, and political effects on urban households and communities.”⁷⁹

Through these practices our country’s socioeconomic gap will continue to grow. Policies that are designed for an entrepreneurial atmosphere will continue to neglect class differences. By allowing already upper-class groups of entrepreneurs to restructure and redevelop low-income communities, we are allowing this elite class to rule our city policies. “These newly adopted policies aim at encouraging private enterprise to make up for government disinvestments through a policy of preferential taxation to favor free enterprise in certain urban areas and the promotion of inter-city revitalization with

⁷⁸ Emmanuelle Le Taxier, “The Struggle Against Gentrification in Barrio Logan.” In Chicano San Diego: Cultural Space and the Struggle for Justice (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007) 209.

⁷⁹ Joe R. Feagin, The New Urban Paradigm: Critical Perspectives on the City (Lenham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998) 26.

community involvement.”⁸⁰ Yet, in most cases, the Chicano community is unable to compete in the redevelopment arena because of the lack of representation and money. “The haves-versus-the-have-nots reality has bitterly split ski towns and, in combination with theological schism over land use, has deeply faulted the socioeconomic and political landscape in many mountain communities.”⁸¹ A Truckee representative stated:

Progress for me is making the town a better place that’s a result of the development that will occur here. Now that doesn’t mean bigger... that means better services, better housing opportunities for our residents, better schools and public facilities, that better... more seamless mix of people... breaking down cultural barriers that is White-Latino. That’s progress.

This Truckee representative’s idea of what progress means demonstrated his conflicting views. Does progress mean development? Does progress mean growth? Does it mean social equity, economic prosperity, or environmental quality? This is a constant struggle in the Lake Tahoe area because tourism is a consumption-based economy. While city government might be guided and influenced by social and moral justice, will big money and big business prevail?

A common aspect for all of the redevelopment agencies around the lake is affordable housing. Their focus is not only how to acquire affordable housing, but also because of the restrictions in place, where to put affordable housing. “The income gap is almost the sole reason why affordable housing and transportation have become the biggest, most complex, and most contentious issue in ski resorts around the country.”⁸² As with many resort towns, the struggle for affordable housing is not seen by the

⁸⁰ Le Texier 211.

⁸¹ Clifford 104.

⁸² Clifford 192.

tourists. The Tahoe basin lacks adequate affordable housing. The STRA spokesperson told me that once a redeveloped area is in progress or complete, the "...redevelopment gets a part of that increase in property tax, ...20% of that goes to the housing department which helps out the low-income housing programs that we have." However, according to a local Latina, "...in housing, they don't think about the Latino community. They talk about affordable housing, but affordable for whom? They are expensive, one thousand dollars a month... most of us are only making eight or ten dollars an hour." Therefore, many in the Latino community cannot afford affordable housing and are forced to live in, as a local called them, "slums," which were described to me by a South Tahoe council member:

Because of the nature of the workforce being primarily service oriented, we're talking about minimum wage jobs. That prohibits good housing. And because of the service industry we have here a very large "immigrant" population. I don't care which term is used, "Hispanic", "Latino", whatever. What I have seen happen over the years... we have apartment complexes that were considered nice housing when we came here [48 years ago]. What we have done because of the impact of this population that I spoke of and the low wages, we have created in my mind slums.

Often what is not understood by the general community is that these "slums" are a result of the development that has taken place in the area. City governments have focused the attention not on improving the quality of life of these residents, but rather on where to simply put them. Regardless, if as a tourist, or a local for that matter, you do not walk back behind the five star hotels of South Lake Tahoe, across the tracks of Truckee, or down the back roads of Kings Beach, you will feel that this is paradise.

In the resort town these disparities are even more evident. The root cause of this

is not the redevelopment itself, but rather the development that is a side effect of redevelopment and reinvestment because money and investments are then funneled into these areas and thus further neglect the needs and resources of low-income communities. Realtors, developers, and special interests thrive off of new development selling wealthy Baby Boomers a piece of the mountains. “The message here implies that the buyer will purchase a life, but in truth all that’s for sale is a lifestyle; a pretty stage set to entice visitors and buyers, and a nice second home.”⁸³ Across the basin the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) estimates that about seventy percent of all the houses around the lake are owned and used as second homes. Because of this phenomenon, residents have lost a sense of place. Downtowns are seen as “where the tourists go” according to one resident. “I don’t want to critique what Placer County is doing,” said the Truckee council member, “but whatever they do has a huge impact on us.” Truckee is situated on the border of Nevada and Placer counties. The town of Truckee does not allow for gated communities, however, because some of the newer more recent developments are just outside of city limits in Placer county, developers do not need to follow Truckee codes and allows for gated communities. This creates an interesting dynamic by those inside the gated communities and those in the town of Truckee. Truckee cannot control what Placer County does, regardless of the effect on the town. This elitism and segregation has brought wealthy residents to the mountains because “more people wanted to taste the magic of these [mountain] towns.”⁸⁴ Once completed “Life in the ski town starts to look

⁸³ Clifford 90.

⁸⁴ Clifford 39.

a lot more like the daily rat race anywhere else.”⁸⁵ Many of the newly revitalized downtowns are designed for tourists and second-home owners. “High end tourism meant more money, which attracted more people, and those people wanted more things, and the spiral of impossibility began.”⁸⁶

The high rent in downtown areas make it near impossible for local merchants to remain for long periods at a time. Chain stores and high-end boutiques have taken over the downtown corridors of the Tahoe area. “The survival of local merchants helps to preserve the character of communities, and the personalized attention they provide is vital to maintaining not only quality service, but also the types of connections that constitute the fabric of community.”⁸⁷ Today, Starbucks, Jamba Juice, Pete’s Coffee, and high-end art galleries have replaced the stores that were once owned and operated by local families.

In the past decade and a half the Truckee region has seen tremendous development. The main company that has joined in on this assault on the local industries has been East West Partners. The company has up-scale developments in four states including Colorado, Utah, South Carolina, and California, as well as one in Canada. This organization has completely altered the dynamics of Truckee. One local stressed, “There has been a big change here [in Truckee], but little benefit for the community.” That is because East West has put a price tag on the area and it’s community. “It’s a fucked up thing East West did to Truckee, they turned it into a dollar sign,” he told me. “And worst

⁸⁵ Clifford 59

⁸⁶ Clifford 102.

⁸⁷ Beatley and Manning 149.

of all, because the H2B workers that they use, locals can't find a job." Because the Tahoe area is dependent on tourism and development for its economy many did not see the lack of work for contractors as an issue. Recently large construction companies began to monopolize construction in some of the new residential developments and only then did locals realize the severity of the situation. Every day Tahoe loses more and more of its local contractors because of the lack of work, and every day these large corporations exploit H2B workers with the few construction jobs left in the area.

The H2B workforce that has migrated into the area might be one of the hardest hits to local construction workers. The H2B is a work visa issued to employers by the federal government to allow for a cheap, foreign, and "legal" workforce. However, as a member of the local contractors union informed me, "They are like a form of indentured servants, but worse... like slaves." He went on to say, "These huge companies bring these guys here from Latin America, from Eastern Europe, from Asia, and they don't pay them well, they don't treat them well, and worst of all, as soon as they are done with them they deport them." Because of this workforce East West has been able to create an empire built upon the shoulders of cheap and "expendable" foreign labor. In January of 2008, Midwest Drywall, a Wichita company, who also subcontracted houses for East West, was caught not paying their workers. In an article from CBS Denver, "Sixty-five contract workers from Mexico are seeking more than \$177,000 in damages after they came to Colorado on the promise of jobs that never materialized..."⁸⁸ This is a great example of how big business has set up H2B workers to create a dual-wage labor market.

⁸⁸ Solomon Banda, "Suit: Immigrants Stranded After Jobs Fall Through" Associated Press. 22 Jan. 2008 CBS Denver <<http://cbs4denver.com/local/immigrants.stranded.jobs.2.639922.html>>

In a sense, big business sees them as less costly than undocumented workers because they are “temporarily” legal. Companies can pay them far below the minimum wage and do not have to worry about them being deported until they have finished with what they are needed for. In my discussion with the local contractors union, one member told me, “I wanted to see how easy it was to find workers, I called, told them I had work and needed workers, and all they asked was how many.” In many respects this program is similar to the Bracero program of the mid-twentieth century. The only difference is these workers cannot be used for agricultural purposes, but as I was explained, “ski resorts use these visas, construction companies, and even the casinos” to fill their labor needs. All of this at the expense of local workers. “My son graduated from Cal Poly, he wants to work at the ski resort, but because of the cheap labor they use, he can’t even work as a lift operator,” one Latino mother told me. “Small mountain towns will keep ending up as what they don’t want to be until the people who live in them control the levers of power.”⁸⁹

As Baby Boomers are set to retire in the coming years the Lake Tahoe region will most likely change as well. A South Lake Tahoe city council member told me:

Some of the folks that own those residential properties, and I’ve heard it from quite a few, is that eventually they plan to live there. So it is a second home deal and when they retire they plan to live here. The consequence is that Tahoe is becoming, if it is not already, a retirement community. That has serious ramifications.

His fear, and the fear of many other locals, is that this new retirement community will not be engaged in city politics or vote against taxes for public education, community

⁸⁹ Clifford 237.

infrastructure, and other tax hikes needed to preserve the community. “If you are going to talk about local government,” he said, “are those folks going to be interested at that age... they are retired and they don’t want any hassles. So just how active will they be in the community, is a big question mark.” As this group becomes continues to grow in the Tahoe area there is an increasing amount of disparity between them and the low-income Latino community. Wealthy retirees are moving to the mountains to enjoy the outdoors, to ski, and to be left alone.

Many Tahoe residents feel that they are losing control over their community. Special interest groups such as the Tahoe Visitor Authority (TVA) has profound power in the region. The purpose of the TVA is to generate tourism form outside the Tahoe area. The surrounding communities around Lake Tahoe give money yearly to the TVA in order to advertise the area, which one way or another helps to create a Tahoe identity. In other words, they create the perception that visitors have on the Tahoe area through a wide rang of public media. Because of the area’s dependence on tourism and development as a means of commerce, many cities and organizations willingly donate to the TVA. Locals, unaware of the agency’s true intentions fear who the real beneficiaries are - wealthy out-of-town investors. “Vast wealth not only corrupts democracy; its accumulation usually degrades the environment - superprofits are maintained by constant growth in production and consumption, aided by planned obsolescence.”⁹⁰ Special interest organizations, such as the TVA, have no problem moving through the legal roadblocks of the area. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) has become, as one resident put it, “a fee and

⁹⁰ Roelofs 2.

fine organization.” They are no longer worried about putting in place policies for the betterment of the area’s communities; rather, organizations that work with the TRPA have the ability to push an agenda through because they have the money.

The city of South Lake Tahoe is attempting to embrace smart growth policies in their general plan for the future in order to gain local community control. Smart growth policies concentrate on expanding the range of transportation including more walkable and biker friendly communities. They also promote equitable distribution of the costs and benefits of development. The smart growth principles are modeled after the slow movement lifestyle of Europe called the Slow City Movement. The Slow City (*citta slow*) Movement grew into popularity in the late 1990s when American corporations began to destroy local community economies. This new wave of urbanism as a way of slowing down allows its citizens to connect with each other, which in turn, allows for local economies and communities where businesses and jobs can boom. The goal is to create new “approaches to urban development that do not merely focus on community-based economic development, but also on issues of sustainability and social equality.”⁹¹

By doing this, development and redevelopment happens with the best interests of the community in mind and not those of the developers. “The leading explanation about the process and content of mainstream urban development in the United States focuses on the dominance of business interests and the dependence of public policy makers on corporate-centered/mainstream economic development policies.”⁹² In this way,

⁹¹ Heike Mayer and Paul Knox, “Slow Cities: Sustainable Places in a Fast Word,” Journal of Urban Affairs (Sept. 2006, Vol. 28 Issue 4) 321.

⁹² Mayer and Knox 322.

corporations are taking away the “community” from the community and placing it in the hand of policy makers that are driven by dollar signs and not humanity. South Lake Tahoe is having difficulty fully dedicating to the smart growth principles because the economy is dependent upon tourism, which relies on development and redevelopment run by big business and big money, which in turn creates economic, social, and political disparity within the community.

Devon Peña explains the importance of urban renewal and sustainability for the Chicano environmental justice movement as:

[It] is important to the future of the Chicana/o environmental justice movement because most Chicanas/os live and work in cities. Issues related to the politics of urban planning; gentrification; brownfields reclamation; access to affordable and safe housing, public health, and equitable mass transit; police brutality and racial profiling; urban agriculture and local foods security must continue to demand action in the environmental justice movement.⁹³

A problematic situation that often occurs in the U.S. is that those in power do not want to lose their power. Because of power relations “...most of us will not change our beliefs and behaviors because some of us benefit from how these systems are organized.”⁹⁴ The willingness to allow others access to power is what is needed to create sustainability in all areas of life. “The Western Model of Development is contrary to an emphasis on human development and ecological balance. It results in the depletion of resources, the despoliation of the environment, and the massification of society (i.e., atomized citizens

⁹³ Peña, *Mexican Americans and the Environment: tierra y vida*. 186.

⁹⁴ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lenham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. 2nd ed.) 221.

maintained through mass marketing, resulting in loss of distinctiveness).”⁹⁵ For slow cities, the “community economic development is focused on smaller-scale areas such as neighborhoods and it attempts to benefit groups that have traditionally been left out of the mainstream economic system (homeless, minority, immigrants, etc.).”⁹⁶ For example, minority and low-income communities will no longer be left out because they will have created a space where their community relies on the local economy rather than on corporate dependence. “What local ownership really accomplishes is to put a community more directly in charge of its fate.”⁹⁷ This model explains how “the creation of a local product glues together the local economy, employment opportunities, and the area’s environmental assets... It is out of these connections that alternative spaces emerge.”⁹⁸

Due to the growing expansion of the Tahoe area it is more important than ever to reconsider our redevelopment policies and how they affect everyone involved. The corporatization of our redevelopment policies has created an atmosphere where the local economy cannot survive.

As skiing has become more capital intensive, ski towns have become ever more dependent for their livelihood on outside corporations and their publicly raised capital. No local entrepreneur can raise the sums of money necessary to compete at the top levels of today’s ski industry.⁹⁹

It is impossible for us as a nation, or as a global community, to view sustainability as a viable outlet for development and redevelopment without guaranteeing our policies to be

⁹⁵ Rubén O. Martínez, “Social Action Research, Bioregionalism, and the Upper Rio Grande,” Chicano Culture, Ecology, Politics: Subversive Kin, ed. Devon Peña (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998) 64.

⁹⁶ Mayer and Knox 224.

⁹⁷ Clifford 236.

⁹⁸ Mayer and Knox 224.

⁹⁹ Clifford 55.

just. By allowing minority communities access to their community through employment, affordable housing, health care, and all the other amenities that redevelopment brings into a neighborhood, we can begin to incorporate all citizens so that everyone can benefit.

Redevelopment can be a great thing for a low-income community. It can bring new life into the area. Unfortunately, in the United States the “free market economy has come to mean the pursuit of profits at the expense of human and natural resources, and material aggrandizement at the expense of human dignity, well-being, and developmental growth among workers and the poor.”¹⁰⁰ What is needed is cooperation between the redevelopment agencies and the community. By incorporating local contractors into the redevelopment, giving the tax breaks to the local restaurant owners, and circulating the wealth of the redevelopment within the community, redevelopment agencies will be able to create sustainable environments where the local community can thrive.

The TRPA estimates that the entire basin will be built out by 2028. According to a TRPA spokesperson, “...however, with environmental net gains of new environmentally friendly advancements, there is a possibility that it could be later as the maximum carrying capacity of the region will grow. If the development isn’t hurting the environment, then we have no reason to stop growth.” By increasing the carrying capacity of the lake, the environmental thresholds that were established by the original Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) signed into effect by President Bill Clinton in 1997 will be challenged. Based on the history of the Tahoe area, residents are weary of the TRPA’s intentions to control growth and stimulate growth at the same

¹⁰⁰ Martínez 64.

time. As one Truckee spokesperson said, “Everyone wants a cabin in the woods... but we cannot solve our problems with more cabins in the woods.”

Chapter 5. Creating a Sustainable Tahoe

Before we can conceptualize the idea of sustainability in all of its ambiguities, we must first define what its goal is. In many discourses, the goal of sustainability is to enhance the quality of life of its residents. This raises the question: What is quality of life?

Unlike many cities, where economic growth is the imperative for its own sake, or where quality of life is itself defined just in terms of the quality of employment and average family incomes, or where there is merely an assumed relationship between economic growth and quality of life (i.e. more growth means better quality of life), sustainable cities seek to manage economic growth and development to be more consistent with their visions of what kind of community they desire to achieve.¹⁰¹

In order to understand the quality of life in the Tahoe region we must begin to interpret how sustainability is perceived in the area. “Sustainability is a concept that is fairly abstract and broad, subject to a variety of understandings and meanings.”¹⁰² The dominant sustainability paradigm, ushered by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, states that “sustainable development is developed to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹⁰³ In mainstream culture, sustainability is sometimes simplified and misperceived by governments and local agencies by focusing on preserving the natural environment for

¹⁰¹ Kent E. Portney, Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously: Economic Development, the Environment, and Quality of Life in American Cities (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003) 101.

¹⁰² Portney 3.

¹⁰³ World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 43.

aesthetic purposes. In many respects, preservation is simply so the mainstream community can believe in the “wild” and untamed West with picturesque mountain ranges and untouched forests.

In turn, ecology has taken on a romantic dimension. For privileged peoples within industrialized capitalist contexts, there is a tendency to desire a ‘pure’ or ‘innocent’ nature that is prior to or outside of society. Such ecological discussion can range from a longing to protect the ideal ‘mother nature’, to a yearning to return to a golden age that may have never existed.¹⁰⁴

This romanticism “fails to challenge the ideologies and institutions of social domination that legitimize social injustice.”¹⁰⁵ The concept of “go west young man”, has found itself in sprawling communities and metropolises of almost every city in the west. Mainstream culture’s desire for wilderness has brought wealthy second homeowners into small mountain towns and quaint beachfront communities producing devastating effects. The shortsighted, individualistic planning motifs of the Baby Boom generation has destroyed the authenticity of many of these communities by forcing them to compete with outside wealth, thus, changing the economy of the area by making them dependent on outside revenues. By promoting the “self” and relegating the “community” wealthy second-home owners have assumed that their self-interests of owning a second home outweighs the interests of the local community. Their “I can do anything” attitude has neglected the community and left it searching for an identity.

This loss of community stresses the need to create the ‘new local’. One who is engaged in the community, one who cares not only about the economic well being of the

¹⁰⁴ Hellar 1.

¹⁰⁵ Hellar 13.

community, but also for its environmental and social well being, which is essential for sustainability. “Wherever we live, we must become new indigenes”¹⁰⁶ because through this process we can create place. David Holmgren, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability*, explains this concept when he states:

I take them simply as evidence for getting on with the practical business of creating local cultures of place, which will eventually create a new global biological and cultural diversity. This can only be done when we become rooted to a place and community, rather than the global culture of no-place, which both accelerates the losses and leaves people mourning the direct or indirect consequences of past losses.¹⁰⁷

As we become rooted in a place, community, or location, we begin to appreciate the importance of maintaining its sustainability. It has always been seen as “an enduring problem in the politics of environmental impacts assessments is how to involve the local citizenry.”¹⁰⁸ Through establishing local place, local citizenry will become engaged in the politics of the community.

Today, the general public is concerned about saving and preserving native species, though not because of the complex interwoven nature of ecosystems, but rather for the comfort of knowing that there will continue to be wild buffalo roaming the plains, bald eagles soaring high, and polar bears fishing the arctic. This neglect of the interconnectedness of our ecological world dislodges us from reaching sustainability. Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, explains built and natural communities as a system of entangled relationships, “Everything is connected to

¹⁰⁶ David Holmgren, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability* (Hepburn, Australia: Holmgren Design Services. 2006) 211.

¹⁰⁷ Holmgren 220.

¹⁰⁸ Peña and Gallegos 85.

everything else.”¹⁰⁹ One cannot view sustainability as solely an environmental issue. For if a person did, surely his or her futile attempt would fall short in spite of their good intentions. "Sustainability is the principle of ensuring that our actions today do not limit the range of economic, social, and environmental options open to future generations.”¹¹⁰ In that sense, true sustainability is a community where social equity is attainable, economic mobility is achievable, and environmental integrity is rooted. Grounded in three principles: People, Profit, and Planet – the triple bottom-line – is the concept of sustainability and must be a holistic world-view.¹¹¹ In order for a sustainable environment to exist, a sustainable economy and society must coincide.

As developers, policy makers, locals, and regional governments of the Tahoe region begin to acknowledge the limits this economy has created, they begin to see a new world where development has encroached on native habitats threatening the area's biodiversity. The distribution of wealth has created an extreme economic gap. In the area's attempt to create a “high end” playground for the elite, locals have been left with empty communities, which lack their once renowned ‘mountain-town’ characteristics.

“Only through gaining more power to change their conditions can oppressed people live in dignity and work towards social equality.”¹¹² As local organizations move towards establishing local industry and participation, locals have begun to take back their communities. Many communities are beginning to see how sustainable economy and environment are related because here, as one local put it, in Tahoe “...the environment is

¹⁰⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 76.

¹¹⁰ John Elkington, *Cannibals with Forks* (Gabriola Island, BC; Stony Creek, CT: New Society Publishers, 1998) 20.

¹¹¹ Elkington 12.

¹¹² Pulido XVIII.

the economy.” However, many still do not fully understand the need for social equity. This is because social sustainability, which is social equity, is often frowned upon because it does not follow the capitalistic ideology of “grow or die.”¹¹³ In many respects, this neglect will not allow for a community to reach sustainability because sustainability is against the current institutions in place. “For example, few... [in the mainstream public] would engage in a social movement or in personal practice that would rock the foundation of the status quo and the everyday lives.”¹¹⁴ However, true sustainability must be against the status quo because it is against our present conception of economic development at the cost of social equity and environmental justice.

As minority groups are left out of the city planning and the distribution of city resources, their marginality makes them more susceptible to the negative side effects and unintended consequences of economic development. When minority and low-income groups are marginalized to be only spectators in city politics, their communities often suffer. This suffering then affects the physical and economic health of the community. Without the money needed these communities are left without the resources to improve social well being, economic well being, and environmental well being – in other words, they are left without a sustainable future.

5.1. Structural Inequalities: The Realities of our Worlds

Before the triple bottom line can be accomplished in the sustainability model, which means all three of the principles of People, Profit, and Planet can coexist, we first must look at the structural inequalities that exist in each of the three areas. By ignoring

¹¹³ David Schweickart, After Capitalism (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002) 157.

¹¹⁴ Bonilla-Silva 214.

these inequalities, mainstream sustainability is denying the existence of race. “This ideology... denies the salience of race, scorns those who talk about race, and increasingly proclaims that ‘We are all Americans.’”¹¹⁵ In mainstream sustainability theory, the triple bottom line is seen as a footnote, but these “*Structured Inequalities* – such as differences in income, poverty, education, access to health care, or political enfranchisement – result from economic and political changes that displace and marginalize local cultures and threaten their livelihoods under the pressures of the global capitalist economic system.”¹¹⁶

Often, mainstream theorists do not believe that a community or city should guide policies for social equality to accomplish sustainability. However, “To restore the balance, we need to build a better understanding of ‘long time’ - and switch from extractive models of business to modes which, over time, actively rebuild economic, environmental, human, and social capital.”¹¹⁷ In many instances, the city is seen entirely as a facilitator for economic growth and determines its policies based on cost benefit analysis of environmental impacts. For example, cities will often choose to build and develop a new neighborhood or suburb because it will stimulate economic growth; however, what is often overlooked or mitigated is how this new development will impact the environment and the local society. A Tahoe Regional Planning Agency spokesperson explained it as, “We are trying to change our philosophy from ‘do good’ to ‘do no harm.’” Many locals look at this philosophy as an easy way out so the TRPA doesn't have to repair what was done in the past. “Our goal,” stated the spokesman, “is to create

¹¹⁵ Bonilla-Silva 184.

¹¹⁶ Pena 30.

¹¹⁷ Elkington 316.

environmental net gains through the process of our developments.” The development might create more erosion and alter the watershed of the area, it might increase traffic congestion, or it might strain the existing electric, water, or sewage infrastructure increasing the cost of living. Moreover, what is also often neglected is whom this development will benefit. The TRPA blames the South Lake Redevelopment Agency (SLRA) for the corporatization of the South Shore. The question many locals are asking is do these re/developments simply line the pockets of the wealthy by offering short-term low paying jobs to locals, which in the long-term creates an economic gap, often times dividing communities along ethnic and class lines? In that sense, does this new development create short-term economic benefits at the expense of the quality of life for the local?

According to Kent E. Portney, *Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously: Economic Development, the Environment, and Quality of Life*, there are four types of city regimes. First, the maintenance regime, “is primarily focused on the basics of city governments, routine service delivery,”¹¹⁸ this means that the city simply maintains the city infrastructure by supporting road, water, garbage, electric, and other daily city services. Second, the development regime, “seeks to marshal local resources and coordinate local institutional elites for the purpose of pursuing traditional economic growth and development,”¹¹⁹ in other words, using the existing system to maintain the status quo of wealth and poverty. Third, the middle class progressive regime is “focused on such measures as environmental protection, historic preservation, affordable housing, and the

¹¹⁸ Portney 26-27.

¹¹⁹ Portney 27.

quality of urban design, affirmative action, and linkage funds for various social purposes.”¹²⁰ This regime is guided by the quality of life for all of the community members. Finally, the lower class opportunity expansion regime, “seeks to achieve substantial equity and resource distribution at levels not found in very many U.S. cities.”¹²¹ Portney goes further to claim that if a city is to truly take sustainability seriously, the city must either be a middle class progressive regime or a lower class opportunity expansion regime. Although a maintenance or development regime city might claim to have a sustainability element in their general plan for the future, their focus will be guided by economic development in the hopes that it creates green building and entrepreneurialism, however, they neglect to create a balance of wealth in the city. “If we fail to address wider political, social, and ethical issues, the backlash will inevitably undermine progress in the environmental area.”¹²² Therefore, our cities and communities must be influenced by the principles of the triple bottom line.

Major class and income inequalities, major imbalances in political power, racial exclusion in matters of housing, struggles over air and water pollution, conflicts over siting of large development and utility projects – all these reflect the ‘normal’ problems of the elitist systems we call capitalism.¹²³

Under the acknowledgement and understanding of the triple bottom line local communities can then establish local control, which by “Keeping money circulating locally, whether for goods, services, or investment, will increase local wealth.”¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Portney 27.

¹²¹ Portney 27.

¹²² Elkington 84.

¹²³ Feagin 207.

¹²⁴ Roelofs 147.

In many cases, the consequences of economic development are often times negatively felt by minority and low-income families and residents. “Their economic and social marginality has stunted them so that they encounter environmental issues with the context of domination simply because environmental issues and circumstances are structured along power relations.”¹²⁵ This concept is stressed in a true sustainable community. The ability to have a society that can coexist economically, environmentally, and socially, not only with each other, but also with the built and natural environment in which they live, is essential to sustainability. Timothy Beatley and Kristy Manning describe the sustainability planning process as:

Planning for sustainable communities is not simply a matter of avoiding a few wetlands, or saving a few acres of open space, or putting in place a few non-point best management practices. Rather, it requires considering ecological limits and environmental impacts at every step of community development and in every aspect of community design, from the energy efficiency of building to the regional transportation system to how the industrial and commercial sectors in the community go about business. Planning for sustainability means reorganizing the social, physical, and political-economic landscape in very fundamental ways.¹²⁶

This requires, as Laura Pulido claims, minority and low-income groups to create a redistribution of resources rather than simply countering oppression. “Because of the interconnected nature of this reality, these movements [for justice] extend beyond environmental and economic concerns to include issues of gender, ethnicity, cultural production, and political autonomy.”¹²⁷

Throughout the history of U.S., Mexican-origin communities have struggled with

¹²⁵ Pulido 191.

¹²⁶ Beatley and Manning 28.

¹²⁷ Pulido 16.

social injustice, racism, Americanization programs and many more, all of which have created structural inequalities that exist today. We cannot look at the structural inequalities that exist without an understanding of ways in which the U.S. has set up a hierarchy against the “non-American.” Murray Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, explains that, “Hierarchy is not merely a social condition, it is also a state of consciousness, a sensibility toward phenomena at every level of personal and social experience.”¹²⁸ This has historically been an obstacle that many minority groups have faced. Tomás Almaguer’s examines this in his historiography of the creation of the ideology of white supremacy in California, *Racial Fault Lines: the Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*. In this process, “What stands out most clearly from this... is that European Americans at every class level sought to create, maintain, or extend their privileged access to racial entitlements in California.”¹²⁹ This history is the underpinnings of why many in the Latino community see sustainability as a utopia that could only exist in a culturally homogeneous society. History has demonstrated that those in power will do anything to keep it. From the failed articles of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, to the ever-changing immigration policies at the border, Latino communities across the country are left questioning the systems in place. It is evident that the Latino community continues to struggle with justice. “The past twenty years have taught another lesson: minorities cannot always depend on the passive fairness of the system to defend their

¹²⁸ Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: the Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982) 4.

¹²⁹ Tomás Almaguer, *Racial fault lines: the historical origins of white supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 210.

rights.”¹³⁰

This raises the question of how to organize our political systems in order to achieve sustainable communities. In a conversation with a City of South Lake Tahoe representative, I was told that, “You have to create a system here, and elsewhere, where the government has to serve and get their business taken care of. We face the same problems here as they do at the state level, ‘if you don’t have money, don’t bother us.’ The whole system, from that standpoint, is rotten to the core.” Questioning our government leaves us questioning our true intentions. “Can we achieve sustainable development and sustainable communities by tweaking existing policies, which we are doing at present, or do we need a rethink, a paradigm shift.”¹³¹

The philosophy and practice of sustainability has the potential to be the source of such a shift. With cooperation, with organization, with understanding, local residents, organizations, and politicians can come together on a common ground. Sustainability “...will also require promoting citizens’ initiatives, empowering people’s organizations, and strengthening local democracy.”¹³²

5.2. Creating Space: What Sustainability Can Provide

An important goal in achieving sustainability is creating space for those who are marginalized by the status quo. In that process residents have the ability to create a sense of place where communities can thrive economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally.

¹³⁰ Richard Griswold del Castillo, Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: a Legacy of Conflict (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990) 175.

¹³¹ Julian Agyeman, Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Environmental Justice (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 61.

¹³² World Commission on Environment and Development 63.

To foster a sense of place, communities must nurture built environments and settlements patterns that are uplifting, inspirational, and memorable, and that engender a special feeling of attachment and belonging. A sustainable community also nurtures a sense of place by understanding and respecting its bioregional context - its topography and natural setting, its rivers, hilltops, open lands, native flora and fauna, and many other unique elements of its natural history. A sustainable community respects the history and character of those existing features that nurture a sense of attachment to, and familiarity with, place.¹³³

In a lecture by Luis Valdez, “The Power of Zero: The Mayan Key to Vibrant Communities,” on the third of November 2008, he stated, “Cities should be inspiration for the soul.” For the wealthy class in the Tahoe region, this sense of place can be felt in the ski resorts they go to, the boats that they display on the lake, and their mountain cabins. For the Latino community in the Tahoe region, that sense of place is more challenging to find. Many Latino families living in the area do not own boats, they can’t go skiing, and their homes are often times deteriorating, neglected, and hidden behind the wealth. However, their sense of place can be found in the communities they are a part of, the organization and family resource centers, the Boys and Girls Clubs around the lake, and even the schools. These institutions help to foster a sense of place because they provide for a space where community members can come together. A place where their children can bond, a place where they can be educated on city policies, more simply put, these institutions help to foster a sense of community because they allow locals to feel as if they are part of a greater community. My conversations and tours of Tahoe’s Latino communities give me an understanding of their perception of invisibility. Many of the roads in these communities are rarely and inadequately plowed. Many of these

¹³³ Beatley and Manning 32.

communities consist of worn out hotels from the 1960s Olympic hotel boom that shot up all over the basin. Many of these residences do not meet the environmental standard mandated by the TRPA. Cultural reproduction, social identities, and economic mobility are issues that are daily struggles with the Latino community. A sense of place and the ability to belong are essential, because “...in a sustainable place, special effort is made to create and preserve places, rituals, and events that foster greater attachment to the social fabric of the community.”¹³⁴

In a conversation with the local contractors union in South Lake Tahoe I was told how important the “local” was. “Without this union,” one Latino construction worker told me, “I wouldn’t be here.” This organization helps with far more than just finding jobs; it helps with fostering a sense of place. “When I first came here, this place helped me not only find a job, but they housed me until I was able to live on my own. Now that’s family.” As our conversation developed he led into how this organization was about community and the production of culture. “Every year during Hispanic Heritage month we have a *fiesta*. It brings together different people from throughout the area. Last time, we had over two hundred people. And they weren’t all Latinos.” This local union has benefited the community by helping to create a local culture. “We had over twenty kids dancing the *baile folklórico*. And about a quarter [of them] were Anglo.” By crossing cultural barriers that have historically been roadblocks, this organization is more focused on caring for the local community, regardless of skin color, than it is about perpetuating ethnocentrism.

¹³⁴ Beatley and Manning 32.

Two local elementary schools within the Tahoe basin have established a dual language immersion program. From kindergarten to second grade, students selected by lottery are taught the California state standards in both English and Spanish. In South Tahoe there are two classes in one school, whose neighborhood is occupied by a large Latino population, which uses this educational strategy. In each class there are ten native English speakers and ten native Spanish speakers. The goal is to not only to teach these kids two languages at an early age, but also to teach them about different cultures. “It allows them to be proud of their heritage,” a family resource director told me. “In the U.S., we tend to break down that pride, but these programs help to perpetuate it.”

These are two examples of how a community can help to create a sense of place, which helps to construct a local identity. In a sustainable community, “The goal is to teach about the world, through the lens of one’s community and region, while at the same time instilling a sense of love and caring about the places in which we actually live.”¹³⁵ As these children grow within the community and as the local contractors union continues to be an active participant in the community operations, these organizations continue to help create a sustainable way of living through the spread of local values.

A good sustainability plan has a unique opportunity to create a community culture. “Culture is the soul and life force of a community – the collective expression of values, perceptions, language, technology, history, spirituality, art, and social organization in the community... culture is a way of life...”¹³⁶ If a sustainability plan can use current community values, share new ones, and create collective ones, then it truly

¹³⁵ Beatley and Manning 197.

¹³⁶ Roelofs 173.

has the potential to not only help govern a community, but to also help create a “local” community. Sustainability as a way of life also has the chance at the production of local culture. Within these local communities art becomes an expression of culture, as José Burciaga puts it, “Art is the reflection and expression of life.”¹³⁷ This is what sustainability is about. It is not about creating rules and regulations, though they are needed, it is about creating a sense of place.

Valentina Napolitano explains in, *Migration, Mujercitas, and Medicine Men*, “Belonging to and identifying with a specific land are very important for people... [in Mexico] ... and this is easily discerned in everyday speech.”¹³⁸ In my interviews I asked where my participants were from, the responses were, “Michoacan,” “Jalisco,” “Guadalajara,” and in some cases they informed me down to the specific *barrio* or neighborhood. Some interviewees were born in the U.S. but still associated as *mexicana/o*, an expression of “*nacionalismo*” I was told. During one of my discussions a Truckee man originally from Durango said, “In *Mexico* I have a home, here I can only afford to live in a trailer with my wife, my three kids, and my two brothers.” He said, “In the winter the kids have nowhere to play because no one plows [the trailer park]. Cars are always getting stuck. In the summer, the kids still have nowhere to play because we are right next to a busy street and a highway.” When I asked one local why there was no Latino council members anywhere in the Tahoe area, he simple stated, “Because they are in survival mode.”

¹³⁷ José Antonio Burciaga, *Drink Cultura: Chicanismo* (Santa Barbara: Joshua Odell Editions/Capra Press, 1993) 73.

¹³⁸ Valentina Napolitano, *Migration, Mujercitas, and Medicine Men: Living in Urban Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 41.

The common perception among Lake Tahoe community elites is that sustainability is about enhancing the environment by protecting it against CO₂ and soil erosion. Many in the Latino community feel this neglect has marginalized them all the more. I had a conversation with a Latino father living in the Tahoe area. He shared with me his frustration about the divide between the mainstream environmentalists and the predominately minority, low-income, environmental justice advocates:

Just because they eat granola for breakfast doesn't mean that they give a damn about the environment, because there are a lot of those people here. And there are some of them that are caught up in "let me go listen to some Grateful Dead and go smoke some herb, eat some granola and send my kid to school in tie dye, but those brown people are talking about jobs." They don't see our struggles. It's like they are totally gone, man. It's like if you want to help the environment, it has nothing to do with your skin color or your economics, but if you can't see these inequalities then you can't see my world. I've seen teachers do it, I've seen administrators do it...

Throughout the conversation, he explained a clear difference between the communities. The wealthy community believed in sustainable building through the promotion of green infrastructure, while the Latino community believed in sustainable living through the promoting of economic and social justice. This common divide can only be bridged with a holistic view of a community's current needs.

For the City of South Lake Tahoe, sustainability is becoming a more popular subject. The city issued a Sustainability Plan on November seventeenth of 2008. Through the plan, "Equity, Education, and Awareness will be the result of a partnership between the City, local organizations, and community leaders."¹³⁹ This was the first step

¹³⁹ City of South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Plan. N.p.: Regional Planning Partners and the City of South Lake Tahoe. 2008. 1.

in a long line of policy changes that are focused on green infrastructure, lake clarity and water restoration, a complete community, environmentally-friendly transportation, a vibrant local and regional economy, diverse housing, forest health and restoration, education, equity and community facilities, a healthy local food system, and green building. It is a long list, but with community cooperation and participation, this dream might be a reality because,

Sustainability... cannot be simply a 'green,' or 'environmental' concern, important though 'environmental' aspects of sustainability are. A truly sustainable society is one where wide questions of social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems.¹⁴⁰

When I asked local Latino residents about the city's push towards sustainability many of them just shook their heads. One Latino resident said, "...sounds nice, but in this town, I don't think so." If the city of South Lake Tahoe truly hopes to reach sustainability they will need to reach the Latino community. This not only means education but participation. By creating a collaborative community South Tahoe can receive input from all groups. "Restructuring within the context of environmental logic would benefit society in general and immigrant groups in particular."¹⁴¹

Perhaps the largest hurdle that sustainability must conquer is education because "...the idea of sustainable communities is born out of an understanding of the importance of individual human behavior, and the local governance context in which that behavior takes place."¹⁴² Education can also help in understanding how the individual fits in

¹⁴⁰ Agyeman 42.

¹⁴¹ Diez 443.

¹⁴² Agyeman 9.

relation to the institution. Through education residents will feel more informed and more connected to their community. In South Lake Tahoe's Sustainability Plan, element eight calls for education, equity and community facilities. It stresses the importance to, "Provide community facilities that support a healthy lifestyle for both residents and visitors. Create a public education, awareness and capacity building program that includes social equity as in important component of the plan."¹⁴³

The agendas to be carried out are to:

Create a vibrant social community that promotes safety and encourages residents to meet.

Develop a strategy to provide amenities and facilities that supports quality of life for all ages and groups.

As the City is currently spread out, locate facilities within proximity to public transit and surrounding neighborhoods.

Identify action items for residents and businesses that improve energy efficiency and reduce environmental impacts.

Social equity is important when dealing with sustainability issues because successful implementation is all about making appropriate choices and having the opportunity and ability to make those choices.¹⁴⁴

It is a bold step in attaining sustainability, however, it is necessary for the community in order to reach social equity. Regardless of the intentions of the City of South Lake Tahoe, without community participation these goals will not be met because

"sustainability is at least as much about politics, injustice, and inequality as it is about science of the environment."¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, "It represents an attempt to look holistically at the human condition, at human ecology, and to foster joined up or connected... policy solutions to humanities greatest problems."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ City of South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Plan 11.

¹⁴⁴ City of South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Plan 12.

¹⁴⁵ Agyeman 43.

¹⁴⁶ Agyeman 43.

A way to counter social alienation is to create a city center where all groups are welcome. A council member of South Lake Tahoe relayed this to me as, “There is not a heart to the community is what I’m talking about. Where do you go to the city hall, there is none. We have some offices spread out. That’s the sort of thing that I’m talking about. City hall is important because it is symbolic. But a lot of people don’t care.” His point was that by creating a central place in the city where the people could conjugate, the city could then support the presence of place. “The greater our separation from broader public, the easier it is to believe that we have few ethical obligations to others.”¹⁴⁷

Similar to central plazas throughout Mexico and Latin America, a place where South Lake residents could go for festivals, farmer’s markets, music and art, or just to relax in the sun would allow for residents to connect to others. In the town of Truckee, residents have a hard time finding a common area. The downtown, which was once a local place to be is now filled with only tourists. Longing for a sense of place, residents have spread further out into the woods. A Truckee council member told me that “Truckee was a model of sprawl when the town incorporated.” Separating wealthy residents in one area, middle in another, and low-income, mainly Latinos, closer to the center. “Sprawl breeds social isolation and undermines a sense of community and respect and appreciation for ‘otherness.’”¹⁴⁸

Until the perception of “otherness” can be eliminated, sustainability will not be reached. The City of South Lake Tahoe has a unique opportunity to construct a city system that is not only sustainable, but also autonomous to an extent. Because it is

¹⁴⁷ Beatley and Manning 15.

¹⁴⁸ Beatley and Manning 14.

difficult to reach, South Tahoe is not flooded with full-time residents. Therefore, many locals are willing to work towards sustainability. “Difficulty of access in one of the last defenses ski towns have against gentrification and homogenizations.”¹⁴⁹ As Hal Clifford explains, “A place is not an enclave, not an escape, not a magical part of the culture margin if it is easy to get to and if its economy and values mirror those of society at large.”¹⁵⁰ It is within the context of supporting the local that sustainability must be viewed.

We cannot understand sustainability through a careless view because of the seriousness of it. “The fantasy of romantic protection blends perceptions of social reality with desire and fantasy.”¹⁵¹ At a recent South Lake Tahoe city council meeting I heard a man speak about sustainability and what all of the area’s residents needed to do in order to create a sustainable city. He said he showers everyday, however when he showers he turns on the water and gets wet, turns it off and soaps himself, turns it back on to rinse off, and so on. It is a good idea for conservation but this is not what sustainability is. Unfortunately, this resident was part of a local sustainability community organization, so he had influence. What he should have said was, if we want to reach sustainability, we must bridge gaps, racial, economic, and cultural. We must create avenues for success for those who are constantly marginalized. In the process we will improve our local communities economically, socially, and environmentally. For sustainability is environmentalism, it is conservation and preservation, but it is also environmental justice.

¹⁴⁹ Clifford 95.

¹⁵⁰ Clifford 59.

¹⁵¹ Hellar 18.

It is promoting a good quality of life, it is promoting economic justice and social justice. What this resident failed to understand, as many wealthy residents commonly do, sustainability is not preserving or conserving wilderness, water, electricity, or air, it is the preservation and conservation of *our* quality of life, a collective quality of life, which entails all of the aspects of our social, economic, and environmental lives. “Rather than place the idea of humanity below or above the idea of nature, it is crucial to locate humanity *within* natural evolution in a historical and developmental relationship to other species.”¹⁵² This is essential,

Because we are social creatures, our understanding of nature will never be pure and free of social meaning or contingencies. Nature is not a thing from which we can separate ourselves and know completely, no matter how liberatory our culture or language may be. Instead of trying to grasp a romantic knowledge of a people-less ‘nature’ through abstract love, protection, and contemplation, we must begin to know and reconstruct the social and political institutions that determine both social and ecological practices. By engaging in a life long process of politicized critical self-reflection and action, we may become a society conscious of the historical origins of its own desire for ‘nature’; a socialized desire that begs to be developed in a truly radical direction.¹⁵³

If we as communities, peoples, or nations cannot see past the divides of culture and race, our romantic dream of sustainability will continue to be just that, a dream. Sustainability truly has the potential to be that driving force between environmentalist and environmental justice. Sustainability stresses the need for conscious decision making on the basis of the collective, not the individual. The understanding of *tu eres mi otro yo*, you are a reflection of me, can catapult a collective consciousness of the

¹⁵² Hellar 133.

¹⁵³ Hellar 37.

interconnectedness of our worlds. “If we don’t change the direction we are headed, we are likely to end up where we are going.”¹⁵⁴

Chapter 6. Identity, Place, and Agency

Every city, town, or village has a profound impact on the ways in which we live our lives. In each case, these settings help to create and alter our identities. Often times, U.S. cities have altered the Latino identity through the process of Americanization, both unintentionally and intentionally. However, in the case of small resort communities, this identity is often created out of the basis of “otherness”, social rules that define who is and is not “local” within the community. The divide between the haves-and-the-have-nots is continuously growing, and today, as the need for cheap and expendable labor is at a peak, these two worlds are now light years apart.

In mountain towns there is a clear divide between the Latino service workforce, and the predominately Anglo, management workforce, as “Foreign workers have become the backbone of the modern ski resort.”¹⁵⁵ In these small communities around the Tahoe area there is a disproportionally large number of low-income Latino residents. One Truckee city council member told me, “ There are prominent Latino business owners in town, but it is not equal to the population.” As I discussed these issues with the family resource centers around the lake I found that most Latinos feel that there is not enough Latino owned and operated businesses because of fear. “Fear,” said the family resource center, “...that is the main reason why our community isn’t out there in the public.”

¹⁵⁴ Clifford 240.

¹⁵⁵ Clifford 208.

Nicholas De Genova explains this fear, "...it is *deportability*, not deportation per se, that has historically rendered Mexican labor to be a distinctly disposable commodity."¹⁵⁶ A family resource specialist stated, "If we could get them to get over their fear and walk with confidence, then we could make some headway."

The concept of immigration and deportation has been rooted in the history of Mexican and Latin American identities for generations. This has been, perhaps, the sole reason behind the invisibility of the Latino workforce in the Tahoe area. Invisibility creates a collective identity of being a hidden service workforce, which therefore perpetuates social inequalities, economic inequalities, and an exploited workforce. At the family resource centers, directors and employees are not excepting this idea because according to one director, "...someone fought for us. That's why we are here, that's why my mom brought me here [to the U.S.]. And that is what we are working on changing."

The constant struggles that the Latino communities around the lake face daily are the building blocks of their identities. For the construction of identity, in terms of the realist theory, "It gives us a way of knowing and acting from within our own social location or 'flesh.'"¹⁵⁷ From within the critical realist theory of identities, these communities are creating their social identities on the basis of their everyday lives. Their struggles and their realities are what they live and know, and here in Tahoe, because of the image the area wants to portray, many Latino struggles are not known to tourists, visitors, and even locals. "Wherever you have wealth, you have poverty," said one

¹⁵⁶ Nicholas De Genova, Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005) 247.

¹⁵⁷ Paula M.L Moya, Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002) 57.

Latino worker, “and wherever you have extreme wealth, you have extreme poverty.” He later said that, “We have created here a caste [system] based on socioeconomic as well as skin color. I think it is easier to do the skin color because, like I said, you can see it...” This has an extreme impact on the perceptions of the Latino community. Many wealthy locals view this reality as those who are native to Tahoe, and those who are not. If you have money, if you ski, and/or if you speak English, then you belong, however, if you are a busboy, a dishwasher, a day laborer, or if you speak Spanish, then you do not. You are a transient, an “other”, here only to fulfill a service, even if you have been here your entire life. “Nativism must always privilege one or another notion of ‘identity’ against the rest.”¹⁵⁸ This has in turn helped to create the ideology of “us” and “them.”

The creation of identities of “us” and “them” has manifested itself into the creation of borders. In Gloria Anzaldua’s epic collection, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza*, she goes into the social constructed border of race, gender, sexuality, culture, language, and skin pigmentation. Her stand is that, “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*.”¹⁵⁹ Those of us who do not abide by those borders, or those of us who bounce back between those borders, culturally, linguistically, socially, or even sexually, are living in the borderlands. The Latino workforce that is constantly subjected to the “American way of life” is one of the many reasons that Latino communities are living in this world between worlds.

The origin of Mexican resistance against oppression has been a long and historic

¹⁵⁸ De Genova 61.

¹⁵⁹ Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987) 25.

development. For Mexican communities, the protection of the community has always been essential to everyday life. In the 1940s, shortly after the Zoot Suit riots, “Mexicans in southern California began to set up grassroots organizations for the protection of their communities.”¹⁶⁰ In many ways this protection was set up against the loss of culture and language, however, these grassroots organizations were predominately set up to counter social and economic oppression. Today, these organizations still exist for the same reason. Mexicans have historically been at the lower end of education, occupation and income,¹⁶¹ and today, not much has changed. One worker at a family resource center stated, “...education is what opens up kids to the world.” Many in the Latino communities lack education. One family resource director told me, “Most of our parents have only a third or fourth grade education.” The result of this has been low paying jobs and bad living conditions. A local Latino administrator said, “...if you have an education you can... it just helps in assisting to break down the barriers, those control barriers.”

In my study of the Tahoe area I have seen those control barriers as a socially constructed ideology. Many of the low-income residents are simply trying to survive in an area that is designed to be a playground for the wealthy. Regardless of their lack of institutional education, many residents know their history as a history of oppression, resistance, failure, and success. “For members of historically oppressed groups, understanding arrangements of this magnitude requires rejecting the paralyzing constraints of putative ‘marginality’ that alternately views outsiders as grateful

¹⁶⁰ Manuel G. Gonzales, Mexicanos: a History of Mexicans in the United States (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 182.

¹⁶¹ Gonzales 194.

ambassadors or unwelcome intruders.”¹⁶² Many in Tahoe’s Latino community forge their identities on the basis of acceptance and rejection. One local Latino said, “I understand development. With it my wife and I have jobs, but it is more expensive to live. Without it, life is cheaper, but we don’t have jobs. So what do we do?” He also understood his reality as, “downtown is for them [wealthy Anglos], we [Latinos] don’t go there.” This battling confrontation made within the Latino community is one that creates their identities. Because of the nature of the workforce in the Latino communities, they need high-end development even though it hurts them economically and marginalizes them socially, but without many other options, locals are left questioning, “what do I do”? How does one go about changing an economy in which those who are in power are those who benefit? Or can one even change it?

The persistence of oppression on the Latino communities around the lake by authority, whether it is police, city government, or ICE, it has rendered Latinos as the area’s scapegoats. Throughout the year there are often times several ICE raids that take place around the basin. “After a raid, people don’t know who they can trust,” one woman stated. “Ever since 9/11 we are... all Mexicans, terrorists. We are nothing else. But I can tell you, we are hard workers and we pay our taxes, we are not terrorists. The terrorists come with a lot of money... but if you look at us... our houses, we’ve come here to work, and work hard.” As explained by Rubén Martínez, many migrants go through all of the hard times not for the benefit of themselves, but rather for the benefit of their future, “Which is another way of saying that you create a future so that you can have

¹⁶² Patricia Collins, Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 5.

a past, a past that reflects our own will rather than the a past imposed by history.”¹⁶³

Throughout the Tahoe area residents are constantly looking over their shoulder for an ICE agent. Many local business, contractors, and even casinos use this fear to marginalize undocumented workers even more. “Many Mexican migrants’ subjection to such quotidian forms of intimidation and harassment was ultimately intensified by their undocumented condition.”¹⁶⁴

One of the biggest struggles that the local family resource centers deal with is the spreading of knowledge and information about rights and laws. Through a shared expression of values the Latino communities have created an atmosphere where their established goals will be accomplished. In this way, the local communities are helping to create an evolving local culture. “Culture is a system of information acquired by humans as members of society.”¹⁶⁵ And as these groups gather from their collective experiences and identities, these cultures will continue to change. Ultimately, the production of culture comes down to the construction of identity. The evolution of identities, “...allows for that sense of marginal discourses and creates a space for counterdiscourses that may spring up.”¹⁶⁶ This allows for the naming process. “Thus the naming of ourselves, the acceptance of that name, and the pride we feel in it should lead us from a position of

¹⁶³ Rubén Martínez, Crossing Over: a Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001) 58-59.

¹⁶⁴ De Genova 247.

¹⁶⁵ Morris Freilich, “Is Culture Still Relevant?” in The Relevance of Culture Ed. Morris Freilich (New York: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1989) 4.

¹⁶⁶ Tey Diana Rebolledo, Women Singing in the Snow: a Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995) 103.

fragility to a crossroads of survival and strength.”¹⁶⁷

When I first started my discussion on the creation of identity in the area, most of the responses I received sounded as if the Latino communities had little control over their own destiny. However, my later discussions with family resource directors, teachers, and activists in the area portrayed a completely different reality. A common perception among wealthy residents in the Tahoe area is that the Latino community is fatalistic, that they are content with the sole fact of having a roof over their head and food on the table. “Many of these guys [Latino construction workers],” stated one South Lake Tahoe city official, “just want jobs.” Aaron Widavsky, “Frames of Reference Come from Cultures: A predictive Theory,” claims that,

A fatalistic culture arises when people cannot control what happens to them. Since their boundaries are porous but the prescriptions imposed on them severe, they develop fatalistic feelings. What will be, will be. There is no point in having preferences on public policy because what they prefer would not, in any event, matter.¹⁶⁸

In South Lake Tahoe the community has set up a Latino Affairs Commission that works as a liaison between the Latino community and the general public. “What our goal is,” said one of the seven members, “is to better the lives for both communities [Anglo and Latino] by going beyond just reporting what is going on in the community to actually creating a space where the two can come together.” This helps to foster community, place, and identity.

The real question many city members around the Tahoe area need to ask: Is how

¹⁶⁷ Morris Freilich, “Is Culture Still Relevant?” in The Relevance of Culture Ed. Morris Freilich (New York: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1989) 107.

¹⁶⁸ Aaron Widavsky, Frames of Reference Come from Cultures: a Predictive Theory,” Relevance of Culture ed. Morris Freilich (New York: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1989) 65.

various planning agencies can be challenged and utilized in order for the Latina/o communities to empower and help themselves? Many believe that affordable housing is the answer, many say transportation, and others say jobs. But the truth is all of these and more. One family resource director told me, “we focus on empowerment.” In Laurie Schaffner’s research on youth in the prison system, *Girls in Trouble With the Law*, she poses the question of what the juvenile corrections system is designed to do. The question she asks is, “Do we empower them or protect them?”¹⁶⁹ The city as an institution is not all that much different. What would help the Latino community? Would protecting them by allowing for more affordable housing, or a better public transportation system, or more jobs help? Or does the city have to engage in a restructuring of the current systems by allowing more diverse community members in power, which would ultimately empower those who are disenfranchised? Perhaps the most important question that local governments need to ask themselves is: How can we support the self-empowerment of the Latino community?

Immigration has historically been a main factor in the construction of identities in the Latino community, and the Lake Tahoe region is no different. The recent trend of development has created a large number of undocumented workers. In my research I was unable to attain a formal number of undocumented workers but I was informed, “most of the people I work with are undocumented,” by many of my interviewees. Adelaida Del Castillo, “Illegal Status and Social Citizenship: Thoughts on Mexican Immigrants in a Postnational World,” states that undocumented workers are a form of social citizenship.

¹⁶⁹ Laurie Schaffner, *Girls in Trouble with the Law* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006) 171.

She argues, "...that the Mexican immigrants practice a kind of citizenship in the United States that results in an expression of social rights or *social citizenship*."¹⁷⁰ With this large population of undocumented workers, the documented Latino community has seen it also affect their common identities. The two groups of documented and undocumented workers are tied together by region, history, language, and culture. Unfortunately, this informal economy is often times a scapegoat for the area's ills. One family resource worker told me, "I have a plan to show the city how important the Latino community is. And we've even tried to organize it. It is for all of the Latinos to not go to work on the same day. And not on a Tuesday, I mean New Years, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Fourth of July. That would make them appreciate us." "By refusing to acknowledge these economic benefits to the state, California's electorate denies unauthorized immigrants legal access to their social rights, even though they fulfill the social duties of full citizenship by working and paying taxes."¹⁷¹ By engaging in this practice of social citizenship the Latino communities around Lake Tahoe are engaging in a form of agency. Using the family resource centers, the schools, and even the local jobs as a form a civic action, undocumented workers are very much a part of the local Tahoe society.

Because of U.S. policy around the border, many in the general public have created a belief that the border is a divide to keep 'them' out. This belief has affected the identities of the Latino community. "For most people in the United States (and in Mexico as well), the boundary has become decreasingly controversial - it has become

¹⁷⁰ Adelaida Del Castillo, "Illegal Status and Social Citizenship: Thoughts on Mexican Immigrants in a Postnational World," Woman and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: a Reader eds. Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 93.

¹⁷¹ Del Castillo 96.

normal.”¹⁷² This construction has reiterated the Mexican-Anglo dichotomy that shapes our perceptions and realities. Joseph Nevins explains the psychological construct of the border as,

The existence of such lines control over the movement of peoples is a very recent development in human history. That we accept these boundaries and their associated practices - largely without question - and have come to do so in a relatively short span of time is an amazing development. It also speaks to the extraordinary power of these lines of division and control in shaping the very ways in which we view the world and our fellow human beings.¹⁷³

Because of the persistence of the U.S. government and the media, what started as an institutionally constructed paradigm of power and control, the border has now become a socially constructed paradigm which concludes a nativist way to see the Latino community as the “other”. Gloria Anzaldúa proclaims that, “Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends the straddling of two or more cultures.”¹⁷⁴

The identities that Latino residents face in the Tahoe area are no more difficult to comprehend than any other city, however, because of the area’s small population, the constant movement of labor, capital, and employment, this area’s population has seen a constant change in their realities. The fear many of them feel is real and without the ability to counter that fear, many families then pass it on to their children. “Sometimes,” one family resource worker told me, “after a[n ICE] raid families are all spread out. Sometimes children go home and their parents aren’t there and it takes days before we find them again. What would you do if you didn’t know what happened to your

¹⁷² Joseph Nevins, Operation Gatekeeper: the Rise of the “Illegal Alien” and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico boundary (New York: Routledge, 2002) 148.

¹⁷³ Nevins 149.

¹⁷⁴ Anzaldúa 102.

parents?” How this affects identities is unclear, but what is clear is that this reality keeps the community struggling for change.

Chapter 7. Conclusion: A World of Possibilities

Lake Tahoe is one of the most beautiful sights in the world. There is no wonder why people want live and visit the area. The flocks of tourists, developers, and merchants are always going to be on the seat of controversy in the Tahoe area. With a new consciousness of how our actions are connected in all facets of our lives, Tahoe may be able to overcome the difficulties of the past. By creating space where locals can work cooperatively towards their future, the locals are placing themselves within the community rather than at the best interests of the developer. John Muir once said of the Sierra Nevada,

Oh, these vast, calm, measureless mountain days, inciting at once to work and rest! Day in whose light everything seems equally divine, opening a thousand windows to show us God. Nevermore, however weary, should one faint by the way who gains the blessings of one mountain day; whatever his fate, long life, short life, stormy or calm, he is rich forever.¹⁷⁵

And rich forever indeed. To some this wealth comes in the form of being outside in the fresh Tahoe air and to others this wealth comes in the form of greener and cleaner means of living. If this area can realize its potential by stressing the need for the local it too can be wealthy in the terms of a more cohesive community where community space and agency are prevalent.

Throughout this research I have demonstrated that the history of the lake

¹⁷⁵ Muir 61.

continually reoccurs as different expressions of exploitation. Hal Clifford states, “Vacation real estate development is the last in a long line of exploitative, colonial, export-driven, and unsustainable economies that typified the development on rural American mountain communities.”¹⁷⁶ This is the past Tahoe has unintentionally and intentionally chosen for itself. However, this research shows how communities, Anglo and Latino, are beginning to find ways to reaffirm the local.

The divide between the environmental movement and environmental justice movement must be closed in order for the area to benefit not just those who want to go skiing and hiking, but rather for those who simply want a better quality of life. This quality of life can be expressed as a common struggle. By placing the human experience at the center of environmentalism and urbanism we can find a common ground. The ways in which these two struggles will evolve over time is uncertain, but as this research demonstrates, neither one is benefiting if a step forward for one group means a step backwards for the other.

Douglas Strong states that, “The heart of Tahoe’s environmental problem is urbanism.”¹⁷⁷ Regardless of how clear this is to see, it is also near impossible to stop. But that doesn’t mean that the area cannot change the ways in which they develop, in this process they can also change what progress means. However difficult that may be, the restructuring of our political and social institutions might be one avenue. I have discussed how redevelopment in the Tahoe area is important for the well being of the environment. These new developments create green and more cost effect business and

¹⁷⁶ Clifford 225.

¹⁷⁷ Strong 200.

homes. However, at the same time this new green wave has priced many residents out of the area. Redevelopment has taken homes away from families, businesses away from locals, and replaced them with corporate structures. Redevelopment and the gentrification caused by redevelopment has spread across the basin. Some see this movement as a vaccine to dilapidated housing, empty storefronts, and poverty; others see redevelopment as a disease spreading from neighborhood to neighborhood, from town to town, all while destroying the character of these small towns and marginalizing low-income residents. “The solution to this problem”, points Michael Long, “lies in finding a program that encourages existing forces to revitalization while safeguarding the interests of original residents and their neighborhoods.”¹⁷⁸ The alternatives to our common perceptions of development are there, whether or not they will be used and used correctly is another question.

With all of the talk about sustainability around the environmentalist’s table, environmental justice advocates are beginning to jump aboard. One of the many views of sustainability is that we are all connected to each other economically, socially, and environmentally. If we fail to see these connections then sustainability is nothing but conservation planning. Sustainability truly has the ability to be the driving force between environmentalism and environmental justice. It has the potential to embrace new urbanism, sustainable development, and smart growth practices. All of which have the ability to create space for marginalized groups. At the same time, our romanticism of sustainability can blind us from reality and actually marginalize groups even more.

¹⁷⁸ Lang 144.

Without allowing for local control the policies put into place by sustainability programs we will not advance towards social equity.

Ultimately, our world comes down to our perceptions and our identities. The ways in which we function as humans is a byproduct of our society. The social nature of humans is how community is created and destroyed. This research demonstrates that communities around the lake are not subversive, they are not fatalistic, and they will not let the corporatization of the ski areas destroy their communities. Because of their marginality, the Latino community has always understood the importance of supporting local businesses, and today, as corporate stores and businesses have flooded mountain towns, middle-class Anglo communities are also realizing this. This common local identity has the ability to create local culture and local place.

Land ethic is what Aldo Leopold stressed over forty years ago, and finally today there are organizations and communities outside of the marginal discourses that are beginning to understand his principle. “We shall hardly relinquish the shovel, which after all has many good points,” he stated, “but we are in need of gentler and more objective criteria for its successful use.”¹⁷⁹ With a raised awareness of how our actions affect people in all areas of their lives, we can begin to embrace a land ethic. Devon Peña argues that through sustainable development alternative spaces grow. Here is where a new consciousness of our actions can inspire people.

The... path leads perhaps to a promised land where ecological integrity, social justice, economic democracy, community empowerment, and cultural diversity are practiced and celebrated. This is a world where rivers that never wanted to be borders are restored to ecological balance.

¹⁷⁹ Leopold 226.

This is a place of safe homelands and refuge, where the mixed communities of humans and non-humans can one again truly prosper and flourish, where the life of the earth is reclaimed as sacred and the specter of the power of money no longer haunts the land and the people in the nightmare called the terror of the machine.¹⁸⁰

In this space, where environmentalism and environmental justice merge, where alternative development methods are created, and our social and cultural worlds blossom, is where change can occur. Tahoe is no different than any other mountain town, and their issues are similar to those of large cities. However, if this area can embrace community and cherish culture, it has the potential of regaining the local.

The idea that we are entering a new millennium is, of course, a contrived, Christian way of making time passages. But it still affords a badly needed invitation to ponder the big picture of historical change. Just the idea that a thousand years should challenge us to move beyond our chronic myopia and lift our eyes to the far horizons of planetary possibility.¹⁸¹

For many people who have begun to embrace sustainability principles these possibilities are truly endless. For those who have struggled for social justice, for those who have struggled for environmental justice, and for those who have struggled for economic justice, the possibilities of a paradigm shift to a sustainable life where human-nature reciprocity can fulfill the needs of all humanity equals a future we can all embrace.

So where do we go from where? How can we take the utopian vision of sustainability and make it into something tangible? My observations have revealed that many people in the Tahoe area are ready to undo the past, but it also reveals that perhaps some are not quite ready to cross the borders needed to step towards the future. This research highlights differences of opinion where some believe social justice and

¹⁸⁰ Peña, *Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. 334.

¹⁸¹ Nash 379.

economic equity must be reached first, while others believe that more laws and restrictions will control growth and conserve environmental resources allowing the rest to fall into place. What this research also shows is that what has been done in the past and what is currently going on right now is not working, and until that paradigm shift comes, we will continue to use the same outdated methods of the past. So it is my belief that the first step to anywhere is dialogue. However, this research also expresses how power and control have put the Tahoe area in their current situation, and until the local people demand for that change, those in power will not relinquish it. So maybe the real question isn't where do we go from here, but rather, how can we begin to cross the borders that have been the dividing force for far too long? I hope to further explore and expand on the complexities that embody this question by using this information and knowledge already gathered with future research of the deconstruction of social, political, and even environmental institutions. This will bring light to the gray areas I was unable to cover in this research. Only through deconstructing these institutions will alternatives alter the status quo. Tahoe is simply one example of where thousands of marginalized individuals face the reality of our failing institutions.

Glossary

EIP – Environmental Improvement Plan

ICE – Immigration and Customs Enforcement

LEED – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

LTRA – Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Agency

LTVA – Lake Tahoe Visitor Authority

TRPA – Tahoe Regional Planning Agency

Appendix: Research Instruments

Elected and Appointed Officials

Goals:

A. General

1. What is the long-term goal for this organization?
2. What are some short-term goals for this organization?
3. How does this organization fit into the community?
4. How does this organization go about achieving its goals?
5. How do you feel about the progress this organization has made?

B. Environment

6. How important is the preservation of the environment to this organization?
7. What are the feelings about sprawl within this organization?
8. How does the organization feel about development/redevelopment?
9. How does this organization work with environmental preservation groups or city development groups?
10. Is sustainable development possible in this area?

C. Minorities

11. How does this organization work with the Latino community?
12. What steps does this organization take to insure that your policies for (re)development/environment don't negatively impact the Latino community?
13. How does this organization incorporate the Latino community into its policies?
14. In your opinion, does this organization insure the needs for all the residents?
15. What is the major factor in determining policies? (Sustainability or equality)

Economy:

A. General

1. In general, how does this organization factor into the city's economy?
2. How does this organization support the economic growth of the city?
3. How does tourism fit into the policies of this organization?
4. How important is tourism to this organization?
5. Is this area moving in the right direction towards a sustainable economy?

B. Environment

6. How does this organization relate the environment to the economy?
7. Can a booming economy be beneficial for the environment?
8. Can environmental preservation benefit the economy?
9. Are environmental policies beneficial to the economy of the area?
10. Are economic policies beneficial to the environment?

C. Minorities

11. According to this organization, what is the relation between the Latino community and the economy?
12. How does the cost of living here affect low-income people of the area?
13. Can the economy of this area benefit the immigrants of this area?
14. How important are Latinos/immigrants to the economy of the area?
15. How does maintaining a high land value benefit the low-income/immigrant community?

Development/Redevelopment:

A. General

1. How important is development and redevelopment to this organization?
2. How does (re)development benefit the city?
3. Is development needed for economic prosperity?

4. How much longer can this area continue to develop the way that they are right now?
5. How is this organization helping towards sustainable development?
- B. Environment
 6. Do (re)development policies take the environment into account?
 7. When making policies, how does this organization work with (re)development/environmental organizations?
 8. What effects does development have on environmental ethics?
 9. Can development have a good affect on the environment?
 10. Can development and the environment coexist? How?
- C. Minorities
 11. How does this organization factor in the Latino community into their (re)development policies?
 12. How does redevelopment benefit the low-income/Latino communities of the area?
 13. How does redevelopment hurt the low-income/Latino communities?
 14. If a goal of (re)development is to increase land value, how does this organization help low-income/Latinos live in the area?
 15. Can low-income/affordable housing be seen as a form of segregation?

Environment:

- A. General
 1. In regards to the environment, how does the organization see itself?
 2. How important is the ecological integrity of this area to this organization?
 3. How does this organization incorporate the environment with the community?
 4. What is the environmental impact we have on this area?
 5. Is this organization doing enough to maintain ecological equilibrium in this area?
- B. Environment
 6. What does this organization do to benefit the environment?
 7. How does this organization gear itself towards sustainability?
 8. Is sustainability attainable in this area?
 9. What are the good/bad effects that tourism has on the environment?
 10. Does economic prosperity override environmental prosperity, or can they work together? How?
- C. Minority
 11. According to this organization, how does the Latino community fit into the environment?
 12. How do your environmental policies benefit the Latino community?
 13. Does your organization work with the community when establishing environmental policies?
 14. How important are minority communities to creating sustainability?
 15. In your opinion, is this organization doing enough to create environmental sustainability within the Latino community?

Minority Equality:

- A. General
 1. How does this organization see the Latino community?
 2. How does this organization relate to recent immigrants?
 3. Does this organization focus it's policies on equality?
 4. How does the Latino community interact with the environment?
 5. Do the policies of this area ((re)development/environmental) create space for the Latino community?
- B. Environment
 6. How does this organization gear itself towards environmental justice?
 7. Is it possible to create space for minority groups within the sustainability model?
 8. How important is equality in regards to sustainability?
 9. Do all minority groups take part in creating environmental policies?

10. Do you feel that there is any environmental racism in regards to any of the environmental policies established in this area?

C. Minority

11. Do all groups have equal access to the resources of the area?
12. Aside from creating affordable housing, can this area do more to create space for low-income groups?
13. Can a low-income resident live in there area comfortably?
14. Do the policies created by this organization hurt or help the equality in the area?
15. What does “progress” mean to you?

Latino Affairs

Goals:

A. General

1. What is the long-term goal for this organization?
2. What are some sort-terms goals for this organization?
3. How does this organization fit into the community?
4. How does this organization go about achieving its goals?
5. How do you feel about the progress this organization has made?

B. Minority

6. How does this organization work with other city organizations?
7. What is the major factor in determining policies? (ex. Sustainability, equality)
8. How does this organization make sure that city policies towards (re)development/environment do not negatively impact the Latino community?
9. How does this organization help to create bridges between the Latino community and city policies?
10. In your opinion, is this city insuring the needs for the Latino residents?

C. Environment

11. How does this organization and the Latino community see themselves in regards to the environment?
12. How is the environment viewed by the Latino Affairs?
13. How is that different form the mainstream view?
14. Is it possible to create a space where the two views can coexist?
15. What does sustainability mean to this organization?

Policies:

A. General

1. How do the policies established by the city affect the Latino community?
2. Do you feel that the policies established in this area a designed for the wealthy?
3. If they are, how can that change?
4. Do environmental/(re)development polices often time neglect the Latino community?
5. In what ways is this organization active in the establishing of city policies?

B. Minority

6. How has the Latino community benefited from city policies?
7. How has the Latino community been negatively impacted from city policies?
8. Because of economic factors, Latino residents are often times forced to work in the service and construction professions, how does this create economic inequalities?
9. Does the Latino community have equal access to creating polices?
10. Have city policies forced residents of the Latino community to relocate?

C. Environment

11. How does this organization interact with environmental policy making?
12. How do the environmental policies of this area affect the Latino community?

13. Do environmental policies help or hinder the Latino community?
14. Do you feel that there is environmental racism in regards to the environmental policy making in the area?
15. How does this organization confront that issue?

Development/Redevelopment:

A. General

1. How is (re)development seen by this organization?
2. How does (re)development benefit/hurt the Latino community?
3. Is development needed for economic prosperity?
4. How much longer can this area continue to develop the way that they are right now?
5. How is this organization helping towards sustainable development?

B. Minority

6. Is the Latino community often times left out of the (re)development decision making process?
7. How does this organization make sure the voice Latino community is heard in regards to (re)development policies?
8. Can the Latino community succeed in this area if their voice is not heard?
9. If a goal of (re)development is to increase land value, how does this organization help low-income residents live in the area?
10. Can low-income/affordable housing be seen as a form of segregation?

C. Environment

11. How does this organization see (re)development in relation to the environment?
12. Is this area more focused on economic development or economic/environmental sustainability?
13. Do the (re)development policies help or hurt the environment?
14. How does the Latino community see progress in relation to the environment and (re)development?
15. In regards to the Latino community, does (re)development hurt the culture of the environmental community of this area?

Working With Other Groups:

A. General

1. What purpose does this organization serve the community?
2. Can groups other than the Latino community benefit from this organization?
3. How does this organization bridge across ethnic lines?
4. How do you feel other organizations view this organization?
5. What is the public's view of this organization?

B. Minority

6. What resources does this organization provide to the Latino community?
7. How does the organization work with the city to create sustainable ethnic communities that encourage affordable living?
8. What other groups does this organization work with?
9. How can these different groups work together to benefit each other?
10. Being isolated here, what is the importance of "localness?"

C. Environment

11. Does this organization work with environmental groups?
12. Being from such a rich environmental area, how does this organization factor into environmental sustainability?
13. How does this organization spread environmental knowledge to the Latino community?
14. What is the perception of the Latino community in regards to the environment by other ethnic groups?
15. Does environmental racism find its way into this community?

Environment:**A. General**

1. In regards to the environment, how does the organization see itself?
2. How important is the ecological integrity of this area to this organization?
3. How does this organization incorporate the environment with the community?
4. How does this organization see the environmental impact we have on this area?
5. Is this organization doing enough to maintain ecological equilibrium in this area?

B. Minority

6. According to this organization, how does the Latino community fit into the environment?
7. Do the environmental policies of this area benefit the Latino community?
8. Is the Latino community often times left out of the environmental issues of the area?
9. How important is the Latino community in creating environmental equilibrium in this area?
10. In your opinion, is this organization doing enough to create environmental sustainability within Latino community?

C. Environment

11. How strong is the connection with the environment within the Latino community?
12. Are there job outlets within the environmental sphere for the Latino community?
13. Is this organization part of the ecological democracy (environmental decision making)?
14. When I use the word "community" what does that include?
15. What does the term "progress" mean to you?

Latino Residents**Daily Life:****A. Economic**

1. Where are you from?
2. What is your profession?
3. How much money do you make a week? Spouse/partner?
4. How many people are in your family?
5. How much do you spend on rent each month?

B. Development/Redevelopment

6. How does (re)development benefit you?
7. How does (re)development hurt you?
8. Is (re)development directed more at the wealthy?
9. Has (re)development created a bigger gap between the wealthy and low-income residents of this area?
10. With all of the (re)development in this area, what will this area look like in ten years?

C. Environment

11. How important is the environment to you?
12. Do you feel a connection between yourself and the environment?
13. Have environmental policies affected you? How?
14. How do you describe the community in which you live in?
15. How do you describe the environment in which you live in?

Cost of Living:**A. Economic**

1. After paying rent, how much money does your family have left each month?
2. Does that effect how and where you live?
3. What role does tourism have on the cost of living in this area?
4. What role does (re)development have on this area?

5. Are the economic benefits for the wealthy more important to the city than the well-being of its residents?
- B. Development/Redevelopment
 6. Has (re)development made life more expensive here?
 7. Has anyone you've known been forced to leave the area because of the high cost of living here?
 8. How much of that is because of (re)development?
 9. Do you feel that the city thinks of the Latino community when it decides to (re)develop areas?
 10. How affected is the Latino community because of (re)development?
- C. Environment
 11. Where do you live?
 12. Do you rent or own your house?
 13. Would you say that your home is comfortable/safe?
 14. How easy is it for you to keep your house warm in the winter?
 15. Do you feel that the area you live in receives as much attention from city in regards to cleanliness (snow removal, trash pick up, etc.) compared to other areas?

Jobs:

- A. Economic
 1. How is the job market in this area?
 2. Does the Latino community have access to all types of jobs in this area?
 3. How did you get your job (friend/family connection, interview, etc.)?
 4. Do you feel that the Latino community has a wide variety of job options in this area?
 5. Do you feel that your job pays you a just wage?
- B. Development/Redevelopment
 6. Does your job rely on (re)development?
 7. Do you know anyone who has lost his or her job/business because of (re)development?
 8. What are the economic benefits to (re)development?
 9. What will happen when the development slows in this area?
 10. Will the Latino community be forced to expand into other professions?
- C. Environment
 11. Does your job help create an eco friendly atmosphere?
 12. Does your job preserve resources?
 13. Does your job encourage ecological sustainability?
 14. Do the businesses in this area do their part in helping the environment?
 15. Is your job more concerned about making money than ecological sustainability?

Income:

- A. Economic
 1. In order to live in this area, how many days a week must you work?
 2. How often are you able to go on vacation?
 3. Have you ever thought of leaving the area because of the high cost of living?
 4. Do you think life would be easier elsewhere? (ex. Reno or Sacramento)
 5. Why are there no Latino politicians in this area?
- B. Development/Redevelopment
 6. How has the development of the area helped you out economically?
 7. How does the tourism in this area benefit you?
 8. Do you feel that the development has hurt the Latino community in any way?
 9. Do you feel that because of development, the Latino community is segregated to the rest of the community?
 10. How has development changed your way of life?
- C. Environment
 11. Do you enjoy living in this area?
 12. With your income are you able to enjoy the environment in this area?

13. How important is the environment to you?
14. How does your income effect how you live in the winter?
15. How is your interaction with the environment different from someone that makes more money than you?

Environment:

A. Economic

1. How do you feel this area treats the environment?
2. How do you feel the businesses of this area treat the environment?
3. In your opinion, is this area more concerned about making money or conserving the environment?
4. How does tourism effect the environment?
5. How does this area benefit from the environment?

B. Development/Redevelopment

6. Is the development of this area good for the Latino community?
7. Because of development and tourism, how much Latino culture is in this community?
8. How do developers treat the environment?
9. Is development good for this area?
10. Will development ever stop in this area? Will that be good for you?

C. Environment

11. Do you think the city is doing enough the help the environment?
12. Is the Latino community doing enough to help the environment?
13. What will this area look like in ten years if this kind of development continues?
14. What will the Latino community look like in this area in ten years?
15. What does "progress" mean to you?

Comunidad Latina/o

La Vida:

A. Económica

1. De dónde eres?
2. Cuál es su ocupación?
3. Cuántos ganas cada semana? Su esposa/o? novia/o?
4. Cuantas personas hay en su familia?
5. Cuántos gasta cada mes por su renta?

B. El Desarrollo

6. Cuál son los beneficios del desarrollo de esté área?
7. Cuál son las implicaciones malas del desarrollo por usted?
8. Es el desarrollo de esta área más mejor por los ricos?
9. Hay una gran diferencia entre los ricos y la comunidad Latino a causa del desarrollo?
10. Con el desarrollo, esta área cambiará, como?

C. Medio Ambiente

11. Cómo importante es el medio ambiente a usted?
12. Tiene una conexión entre usted y el medio ambiente?
13. En su vida, cuál son los afectos de la política medio ambiente?
14. Descríbame su comunidad?
15. Descríbame el medio ambiente que usted vive?

El Costo de la Vida

A. Económica

1. Después usted paga la renta, cuánto dinero tiene?
2. Qué significa el salario en dónde y cómo su viva?

3. En qué forma el turismo afecta los precios en esta área?
4. Cuales son las cosas que afectan a la gente de esta área?
5. En su opinión hay algún grupo que parece ser mas beneficiado en esta comunidad? Si es así, puede elaborar su respuesta?

B. Desarrollo

6. Es muy caro para vivir aquí a causa del desarrollo?
7. Conoce alguien que se fue, a causa de los los expendios de la vida?
8. Lo fue porque del desarrollo?
9. Piensa que la ciudad piense sobre la comunidad Latino en las políticas del desarrollo?
10. Cómo afectado es la comunidad Latino a causa del desarrollo?

C. Medio Ambiente

11. Dónde vive?
12. Se alquila?
13. Es su casa cómoda y seguro?
14. Es fácil a mantener una temperatura cómoda en el invierno?
15. Hay bastante atención a esta comunidad por la limpieza (remoción de la nieve, basura, etc.)?

Las Oportunidades Laborales:

A. Económica

1. Que tipo de empleo hay en el área?
2. Por la comunidad Latino, hay bastante acceso a todos los trabajos de esta área?
3. Cómo buscó su trabajo (familia, entrevista, etc.)?
4. Hay muchas opciones por trabajos por la comunidad Latino?
5. Por su trabajo, gana un salario justo?

B. Desarrollo

6. Es su trabajo dependiente en el desarrollo de la área?
7. Conoce alguien que pierda sus negocios a causa del desarrollo?
8. Cuales son los beneficios del desarrollo?
9. Que pasará en la comunidad Latino si el desarrollo es más despacio?
10. Es posible que la comunidad Latino trabajará in otras ocupaciones?

C. Medio Ambiente

11. En su trabajo, es la ecología de la área importante?
12. Su trabajo le permite mantener su calidad de vida?
13. En su trabajo, apoya el mantenimiento del medio ambiente?
14. Es el medio ambiente importante por los negocios de la área?
- 15.Cuál es más importante por su trabajo, ganar dinero o la ecología?

El Ingreso:

A. Económica

1. Cuantos días cada semana necesita trabajar para vivir in esta área?
2. Cuándo fue a la última vez usted fue a vacación?
3. Piensa que necesita mover a otra ciudad un día a causa de los precios de la área?
4. En su opinión, es la vida más fácil en otro lugar? (por ejemplo Reno o Sacramento)
5. Por que no hay políticos Latinos en esta área?

B. Desarrollo

6. Cuál son los beneficios del desarrollo para usted?
7. Cuál son los beneficios del turismo para usted?
8. Es posible que el desarrollo de la área no sea bueno por al comunidad Latino?
9. A causa del desarrollo, es la comunidad Latino segregado al resto de la ciudad?
10. El desarrollo ha cambiado su vida?

C. Medio Ambiente

11. Disfruta su vida in esta área?

12. Puede disfrutar el medio ambiente con su salario?
13. Es el medio ambiente importante a usted?
14. Hay una diferencia entre su vida en el invierno a causa de su salario?
15. Tiene una interacción con el medio ambiente diferente que una persona que gana más dinero que usted?

El Medio Ambiente:

A. Económica

1. Cómo sienta sobre la relación del medio ambiente de la gente de la área?
2. Cómo sienta los negocios usan el medio ambiente?
3. En su opinión, es el dinero más importante que el medio ambiente por la gente de la área?
4. Cuál son los afectos del turismo por el medio ambiente?
5. Cuál son los beneficios del medio ambiente por esta área?

B. Desarrollo

6. Es el desarrollo de la área bueno por la comunidad Latino?
7. Piensa usted que el turismo y el desarrollo del área fomenta la cultura Latina en esta área?
8. Cómo los negocios tratan el medio ambiente?
9. Es el desarrollo bueno para la área en general?
10. Cuándo terminará el desarrollo? Seré bien para usted?

C. Medio Ambiente

11. Piense que la ciudad esté haciendo bastante para ayudar el medio ambiente?
12. Es la comunidad Latino haciendo bastante para ayudar el medio ambiente?
13. Si el desarrollo continua, esta área mirará diferente?
14. La comunidad Latino será diferente en diez años?
15. En sus palabras, qué es progreso?

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