

# The Peculiar Relationship of the Exurban Commuter to the Southern City and its Hinterlands

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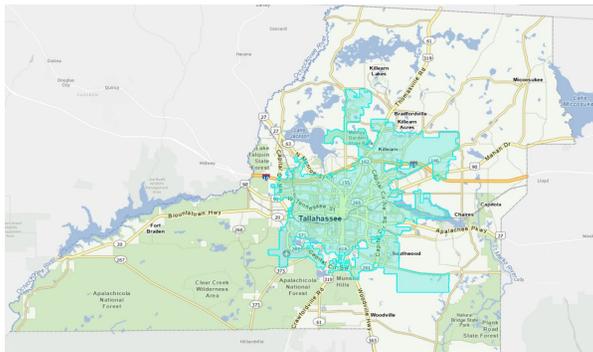
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## Introduction

- Exurbs are suburbs beyond the suburbs, typically attached to a small town or surrounded by undeveloped land
- Created by large commute range of cars; development is possible in any direction from a city and at much larger distances
- Dendritic, disconnected street network; large lots sometimes supporting hobby animals (e.g., horses) or recreational agriculture
- Historically were consumed by newer suburbs as growth proceeded, but comprehensive planning has limited this in some places
- Present-day exurbs are above-median income and, under comprehensive planning, are preserved in amber; new power relations and politics produced

## Study Location

- Tallahassee-Leon County; city of about 200,000, county of about 300,000
- Key economic power centers include the state government and universities
- Comprehensive planning began in 1981, but the plan was rewritten in 1990
- Emphasizes natural beauty and conservation, but allows developments with lots of 3-10 acres on rural land
- Lot requirements and utility restrictions increase cost of homeownership; resulting land use is large country estates for upper-middle and upper class
- City is also redeveloping with sub/exurban preferences in mind; "Return to the city" narrative; Cascades apartments and Gaines Street redevelopment



Map indicating the location of Tallahassee within Leon County (1)

## Research Questions

- 1) How do exurban commuters situate themselves in relation to the city to which they commute?
- 2) How do exurban commuters situate themselves in relation to the "traditional" rurality which they both displace and coexist alongside?
- 3) How might the self-situation of exurban commuters serve to alter personal and societal understandings of their political agency and interests?

## Place-Framing Theory

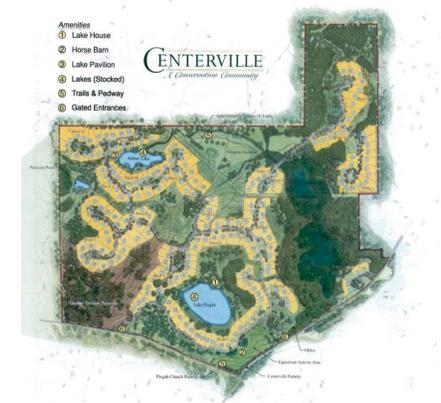
- Narrative construction of place by individuals or groups
- Key scholars include Deborah Martin, Joseph Pierce, and Sarah Elwood
- Emphasizes certain aspects of place and minimizes others
- Used to guide discourse in the direction most favorable to one's aims
- Can obscure inequities or abuses of power by simply not talking about them
- "Color-blind" or "business-friendly" local politics rely on place-framing to avoid discussing race or class-specific issues
- Can be realized in space; Smokey Hollow was framed as an unhygienic slum, which enabled the city to continue concentrating pollution there
- Exurban commuters may employ them to imply disconnect from the city and mitigate their class status in relation to the city, even if the city caters to their interests

## Methods

- Semi-structured interviews with adults living outside in unincorporated Leon County and commuting into Tallahassee
- Sampling conducted through snowballing- participants refer researchers to other prospective participants
- Asking about participants' perceived relations to "rural" and "urban" features in the home, at work, and in commercial/religious/other social realms
- Also asking about relations to neighbors and coworkers; probing for class relations
- Inquiring about how participants feel a changing city may disturb these relations; do they find their spatial situation "secure," and what does it mean for them if not?
- Analyze this information through a place-framing lens to answer the research questions

## Preliminary Results

- Participants find the city's social ills (e.g. lack of community and crime) to be fatiguing and consciously avoid it as such
- Attachment to nature is secondary to detachment from certain kinds of people, though "neighborliness" is vocally desired
- Participants insist that they are frugal, but many requested to meet at trendy Midtown restaurants for interviews
- Participants are highly anxious about and uncomfortable with city's current state and trajectory
- Sense of solidarity is limited; mostly resigned to self-aware personal seclusion and "helping" through their work
- Place-frames vaguely align with narratives and policies of growth regime, but for fragile and conditional reasons; discontinuities could weaken this regime
- Future work should more closely analyze the institutional frames used by the growth machine



Site plan of Centerville Conservation Community, which emphasizes its disconnection and "rurality" (2)



Scan for References

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