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# Community identities as visions for landscape change

William P. Stewart [a,*], Derek Liebert [b], Kevin W. Larkin [c]

[a] *Department of Leisure Studies, University of Illinois, 104 Huff Hall, 1206 S. Fourth St. Champaign, Champaign, IL 61820, USA*
[b] *Urbana Park District, 1505 N. Broadway, Urbana, IL 61801, USA*
[c] *White Mountain National Forest, 719 Main St., Laconia, NH 03246, USA*

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**Abstract**

Residents' felt senses of their community can play substantial roles in determining visions for landscape change. Community identities are often anchored in tangible environments and events of a community, and have the potential to serve as visions for landscape planning processes. Photo-elicitation is applied in this study to connect community-based meanings to environments and events. Twenty participants took photographs of landscapes just outside the southwest fringe of the Chicago metropolitan area and were interviewed while viewing their photographs. Analysis of interview texts focused on meanings of environments that connected participants to their community, and were organized into three overlapping themes: (1) places to learn about community landscapes, (2) places to enact community, and (3) places to improve community landscapes. These meanings are explicitly connected to landscape features through participants' photographs and could form the basis of visions for landscape change within strategic planning processes.


*Keywords:* Empowerment; Stakeholder perceptions; Human dimensions of holistic landscape ecology; Photo-elicitation; Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

## 1. Introduction: protecting community while changing landscape

The growth of towns and cities, and their encroachment upon agricultural and forest lands, is conventionally viewed as both inevitable and largely uncontrollable. In United States and many other countries, the boundaries of urban areas are moving outward due to growth of residential developments, retail districts, and other related land uses. Communities that were once rural are now experiencing significant economic expansion, changing traffic patterns, infrastructure development, increasing demands on schools, and other issues connected to urban growth (e.g., Wilkinson, 1991). In this paper, the inevitability of growth is not an issue; the primary concerns are the ability of communities to influence the nature of their growth and their relationship to changes in land use.

Depicting rural or suburban communities as victims of urban sprawl, with their decision-making controlled by powerful local or extra-local groups, is a common and sometimes justifiable portrayal of growth. Several studies have supported notions of pro-growth policies imposed on hapless communities whose residents either fail to recognize the cumulative effects of incremental development, feel powerless to affect constructive change, or lack alternate visions of their

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-217-244-4532; fax: +1-217-244-1935.
*E-mail address:* wstewart@uiuc.edu (W.P. Stewart).

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collective future (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Orum, 1991). In contrast to this popular depiction, another line of research, which has local autonomy as its focus, argues that social processes and the mix of public values within decision-making forums are the strongest factors in determining the nature of community growth (Moxley, 1985). Lending support to this approach, other researchers have provided arguments and evidence that the development of extra-local community relationships does not necessarily disempower a community (cf., Warren, 1963; Richards, 1978; Wilkinson, 1991; Donner, 1998). Many communities have relationships with urban centers that are mutually beneficial (Richards, 1978; O'Brien, 1999). As Cronon (1991) concludes, just as urban centers are important factors in the development of rural areas, so, too, do rural areas influence patterns of development in urban centers. His explanation for development of the 19th century American West has application to contemporary land-use planning and is succinctly stated as the "frontier and metropolis turn out to be two sides of the same coin" (p. 51).

A growing area of study involves the understanding of local forces that influence the way people think about their community (Chavis et al., 1986). As argued by Wilkinson (1972, 1986) and extended by Bridger (1996), the sharing of local living spaces and history of cooperation among local groups provide socially created senses of purpose. To the extent that such felt senses of purpose are shared, they ultimately can improve a community's ability to affect change in land-use development (Bridger, 1996; see also Stokowski, 1996, where a shared but latently expressed sense of purpose failed to affect locally desirable change). Richards (1984), for example, discussed various strategies that communities have employed to maintain control over land uses in the face of external forces. The strategies were related to shared community values and public decision-making processes. It is clear from his discussion that a community's ability to control the nature of growth is intimately tied to citizens' sense of their community within a larger geographic locale (see also Hummon, 1992; Cuba and Hummon, 1993).

A number of studies have indicated that citizens' felt sense of their community, referred to as "community identity," is reflected in the way individual residents think about themselves and interact with their community (Lofland, 1991; Cuba and Hummon, 1993; McCool and Martin, 1994; Huang and Stewart, 1996; Wiesenfeld, 1996). As used in this paper, community identity is centered on individual residents' felt senses of "we" that connect them with one another by means of visions for a collective future (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Summers, 1986). Although created through informal socialization processes (Greider et al., 1991), community identities are connected to tangible environments, events, and/or material history. For residents, certain environments and events function to link the past with the present (Cuba and Hummon, 1993) resulting in a felt sense of coherence (Linde, 1993). As residents make such connections, these environments and events become emblematic of stories residents tell about themselves to explain their values and life contexts. To varying degrees, the environments and events of community life have the potential to create and reaffirm community identities.

Bridger (1996) refers to "heritage narratives" as representing community identity and suggests they influence the direction of localized land-use change. From a different approach, Stokowski (1996) suggests that community identity is a reflection of heritage. She argues that the public rhetoric about heritage provides contexts to frame development decisions (pp. 61–88). Research that explores the development of such narratives, and their links to certain environments and events, is still emerging.

This study allows for plurality regarding community identity. The intentions of this research do not require, nor are they aligned with, notions of a monolithic community identity as an ideal. Within any locale, there are expected to be several community identities felt by a collection of residents. Bridger (1996) (see also Canan and Hennessy, 1989) argues that conflicts concerning landscape change are often embedded within inconsistent visions of community identity (Robbins, 1999), and that such inconsistencies affect land-use decision-making. However, planning processes are not always sensitive to articulating environmental meanings nor representing a plurality of visions for a community (Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995; however, see Gobster and Westphal, 1998 and Gobster, 2001 for exceptions to this point). Indeed, several scholars have argued that a major problem of

land-use decision-making is its lack of opportunities for citizens to articulate their perspectives and learn from one another (Reich, 1988; Yankelovich, 1991; Lee, 1993; Yaffee, 1994).

Without a vision that connects people with each other and to the places of their local landscape, the desirable end-state of planning is left incomplete and opportunities for community-building through civic debate are lost. Resulting plans will be disproportionately devoted to infrastructure development details, without due attention given to community identities that would distinguish one locale from another. Sometimes referred to as "strategic planning," Carmona and Burgess (2001) provided examples of 15 cities in which such visioning re-created the nature of urban spaces. Haines and McCoy (1995) provided an explicit process for visioning the "essence of your ideal future" (p. 54), and specifically argued that the technical details of "how to" are not part of the visioning process. In addition, although "holistic landscape ecology" has been connected with the physical landscape, its integration of human dimensions addresses problems with fragmentation through designs that connect people with their community and local environments (Li, 2000). The emergence of the holistic approach is a reaction to reductionism in planning and the need to make coherent the landscapes in which we live and work (Antrop and Van Eetvelde, 2000). A premise of this paper is that opportunities for citizen discussion about community identities are part of the visioning process to frame elements of subsequent plans.

As an ultimate goal, this study is directed toward developing strategies that integrate community-based values into planning processes. The specific objective is to explore ways in which local environments and events reflect community-based meanings. In this sense, the purpose is not focused on community identity, but on assessing a way in which community identities can be articulated and implemented as visions into a planning process. Grounding visions for land-use planning within the social contexts of a community is a step toward protecting a community's identities within processes of landscape change. The development of grounded visions can be facilitated by understanding connections between local environments and the meanings they evoke from community members.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Landscapes around Midewin

The study area lies just outside the southwestern fringe of the Chicago metropolitan area, and encompasses the communities and landscapes around the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, referred to as Midewin. Prior to the 1800s this area was a diverse complex of ecosystems consisting of a tallgrass prairie matrix interspersed with wetlands, savannas, and woodlands, inhabited and managed by various Native American cultures. Although Illinois officially refers to itself as the "Prairie State" because 60% of the state at one time was covered by prairie, less than 0.01% of this native prairie exists today (Pielou, 1991). The establishment of Midewin is a reflection of the growing public interest in native ecosystems, and in this particular case, in restoring prairie to the Illinois landscape.

Anglo pioneers began settling the area in the early 1800s, and by the mid-1800s it became home to scores of families who drained and farmed what became some of the most productive agricultural landscapes in the country (Bogue, 1994). During the early 1940s, the Department of Defense identified the site for an army munitions plant and purchased approximately 23,000 acres (9300 ha) for use in the manufacture and storage of dynamite and other explosive materials. It was still employed as a munitions facility, known as the Joliet Arsenal, during both the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. Various citizen groups in the area (e.g., Midewin Tallgrass Prairie Alliance, Chicago Wilderness), the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, private/public partnerships (e.g., Prairie Parklands Partnership), and elected officials have been instrumental in shaping the idea of a tallgrass prairie reserve and in passing the Illinois Land Conservation Act of 1995 (PL 104–106). The act resulted in a transfer of land to the United States Forest Service in March 1997 for purposes of ecological restoration, education and research, recreation opportunities, and agricultural uses. Part of this act allowed for a national veterans cemetery, a county-wide landfill, and two industrial parks within the site.

In close proximity to Midewin is a diverse mix of land uses, including several state conservation sites, petrochemical processing plants, and a large power

utility. Communities to the east, south, and west of Midewin are largely rural but comprise some of the fastest growing places in Illinois. To the north is the City of Joliet, long a distinct entity from Chicago but now considered a southwestern anchor for metropolitan development with the impending potential to surround Midewin. Joliet has a complexity of images linked to its location as a federal prison site, its "blue collar" industrial heritage, the recent development of gambling casinos, its prospects to add a commuter train link to downtown Chicago, and now, Midewin. In short, the communities and landscapes around Midewin comprise a diverse collection of land uses mixed with various land-use histories. Many of the rural communities near Midewin are in the process of exploring and/or re-defining their visions for growth as the boundaries of the metropolitan region draw nearer. Midewin thus provides a context to explore a plurality of community identities in which meanings of the landscape connect people to each other and provide a sense of community.

During the time period of this study, the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie was undergoing a comprehensive planning process for land and resource management. Workshops and public hearings were directed at understanding stakeholder viewpoints about prairie restoration, wildlife habitat, endangered species protection, appropriate recreational opportunities, hunting, cultural heritage sites, agricultural practices, and contexts for regional land-use changes. While the majority of Midewin's public involvement opportunities were part of a formal Environmental Impact Statement process, there were a few opportunities related to drafting guidelines for architectural design and planning for interpretive programs. Midewin has been closed to the public due to residual contamination and toxicity of previous munitions manufacturing processes. Although there are plans to de-contaminate the soil and wetlands of various places in Midewin, like prairie restoration, the cleanup is projected as a long-term process.

### 2.2. Procedures

Resident-employed photography coupled with long interviews, referred to as photo-elicitation, is the primary method of study. There are several planning processes that potentially allow for community-based meanings to surface (Lee, 1993; Cortner and Moote, 1999; Marcucci, 2000), yet tools to identify them and understand their connections to local environments and events are not well developed (Reich, 1988; Yankelovich, 1991; Kruger and Shannon, 2000). Photo-elicitation provides a straightforward way for residents to discuss their perceptions and interpreted meanings of specific land uses (Harper, 1986; Sell and Zube, 1986; Phillip, 1993), and thus holds promise as a technique to connect meaning to environments and events.

Photo-elicitation has been employed in various contexts (Chenoweth, 1984; Botterill and Crompton, 1987; Taylor et al., 1995; Markwell, 1997). In the outdoor recreation and leisure field, for example, Cherem and Driver (1983) asked park visitors to take pictures of places in the park and then write descriptions of the places they photographed. From their analysis, the authors were able to identify places meaningful to visitors. Similarly, in a travel and tourism research context, Haywood (1990) issued cameras to a sample of visitors to Toronto and held interviews with them about the pictures they took. He found photo-elicitation to be a useful way for "recording experiences while on a holiday," and argued that the richness of details about visiting places in Toronto would not have been developed without the use of photography. And in the context of visual sociology, Banks (2001) (see also Collier and Collier, 1986) suggests that photo-elicitation can help to understand the meanings assigned to places and events. With land-use planning in dire need of techniques that allow people to articulate their perceptions, meanings, and values for landscapes, photo-elicitation was selected as the appropriate method for this study.

Twenty-five participants were recruited at various workshops related to Midewin planning processes during fall 2000 and spring 2001. The sample was not intended to represent residents of the communities near Midewin. However, the sample is characterized by residents who have thought about regional land-use changes and who think of themselves as stakeholders in the Midewin planning process. Because participants self-selected to be part of Midewin land-use planning, they would be expected to have thought about local environmental issues in a more deliberate fashion and feel more responsible to influence agency deci-

sions compared to the general public (Burch, 1976; Wellstead et al., 2003). In this sense, participants may be similar to stakeholders in other park and land-use planning processes—even though they are not representative of the full spectrum of local citizenry.

Representativeness is a complex issue (Denzin, 1994). In this study it was addressed by enhancing stakeholders' ability to represent their perceived connections between themselves, their community, and their landscape. A goal of this research was to enhance the "civic culture" of planning processes in ways that facilitate debate (Nacht and Goodwin, 1995) and further transform planning into a collaborative activity between citizen-stakeholders and experts (Forester, 1998). Photo-elicitation shows promise to foster public dialogue about meanings of places, and in doing so, to enhance stakeholders' ability to learn from each other.

Each participant was provided with a disposable camera and asked to take pictures of places, people, and environments that were important to them. Since Midewin was officially off-limits to visitors, participants were specifically directed to take photographs from locales outside its boundaries and within the nearby vicinity. A follow-up letter was sent to recruits reiterating instructions on their role as a study participant:

> With your camera, take pictures of places that are important to your living and working within the Midewin vicinity (say, 20 to 30 mile proximity of Midewin). It is not expected that your important places will be the same as another person's places. The places you choose to take pictures could be as "simple" as your backyard, the neighborhood park, the diner in town, your church, or whatever place has been meaningful for you. The places you take pictures of could be related to positive feelings (of areas you like) and negative feelings (of areas that you don't like or are source of bother and trouble) ... If you have just a handful of places important to you, then just take enough pictures to cover your sense of meaningful locales. After you are finished taking pictures, send the camera back to us. We will develop the film and schedule a time to talk about your special places. During our follow-up discussion, we will ask about the places in your pictures and their importance to you.

After returning their cameras, film was developed and interviews were scheduled and conducted with each participant to discuss their pictures.

### 2.3. Analysis

The study approach was interpretive, and relied on understanding the meanings that participants linked to environments and events (Puddifoot, 1996). Data generated was the consequence of interactions between researcher and participant (McCracken, 1988; Daitch et al., 1996; Schwandt, 1997). The interviewing approach sought meanings in which participants explicitly connected themselves to their community or connected their community to local environments during a conversation while viewing photographs (Harper, 1986; Phillip, 1993).

Two sets of photographs were used during the interviews. The participants held one, and the interviewer held the other. The photographs were numbered consecutively on the back so we could track the text of the interview with corresponding photographs. An "interview guide" approach was used to allow participants to have expectations of the format of the semi-structured interviews (Patton, 1990). Participants were told at the onset of the interview that we would like to know why they took pictures of the places that they did, and to explain the importance of each place that was photographed. The interviews generally followed the sequence of photographs, discussing each one in turn. However, there were many occasions in which conversations strayed from the pictured places. In general, straying from the visual images of the photographs was not considered a problem, and actively encouraged if it elaborated on connections between participants, their community, and the local landscape. In this sense, the photographs were used to elicit meanings and to facilitate dialogue about environments that provided a sense of community. In the final segment of the interview, participants' viewpoints were summarized by the interviewer and checked to ensure that the meanings were accurate. As part of the final segment, participants were asked to identify three photographs that best represented their special places and to explain their choices in more detail. This final exercise provided further elaboration of, and the ability to verify, their perspectives. With the permission of each participant, conversations were tape-recorded.

Photographs were examined in conjunction with text from the transcribed interviews. The first author was the primary analyst of the data and adapted a three-phase approach (listening carefully, digesting thoroughly, and forming knowledge) developed by Witz et al. (2001) in conjunction with guidelines on data analysis and verifying conclusions developed by Huberman and Miles (1994) (see also Strauss and Corbin, 1998, for a similar technique). During the first phase of "listening carefully," the data were reviewed several times and general themes were identified in an iterative process of grouping and partitioning. During this phase, marginal notation on the transcripts and bracketing was done to highlight text. Themes were developed through a comparison of meanings related to the highlighted interview text.

During the second phase of "digesting thoroughly," themes specifically related to community identity were further developed. This phase was directed at moving between first-level data and more general categories (Huberman and Miles, 1994), and by finding relations between themes or sub-themes (sometimes referred to axial coding, Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The purpose of the study provided a strong framing for the data analysis. There were several meanings identified related to environments and events. Some meanings were linked to personal or individual meanings of environments, such as spiritual aspects of natural scenes, tranquility and relaxation of particular places, scenic beauty of natural environments, personal history of childhood places, or personal preferences for environments (e.g., "I like rural areas and farms"). There has been substantial progress already made in the development of personal or individual meanings of environments and natural landscapes (for reviews see Knopf, 1987; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1993). However, investigations related to meanings of environments that link people with other people, or that link people to their community, are still in a developmental stage (for a comprehensive example see Stokowski, 1996; also Williams and Carr, 1993).

This paper is directed at themes reflective of a felt sense of community identity, themes that in some way characterize community life, local heritage, or bonds between residents. Thus individual-based meanings of landscapes or text that were not related to some collective sense of "we," were not the focus of the themes presented herein; individual-based meanings will be part of a forthcoming and separate analysis. Examples of text that was relevant covered topics that included descriptions of feelings about local culture and heritage, emotions evoked by a photograph of a community festival, statements about the local significance of pictured places or peoples, representations of participants' sense of belonging to a group of people or community, or comments that championed aspects of their community or the lifestyle of local people. Meanings that were not relevant to characterizing community identities included elaborations on physical features just outside the border of the photograph (beyond the range of the camera), discussion on the physical features depicted in the photograph that further described the content of the photograph (e.g., "... this is up by the lodge, up by the restaurant, where they got a big open café with a deck."), or other text that did not provide insight into informants' significance of community-based meanings of the landscape. Participants were not explicitly asked to discuss their "community identity"; this is an academic concept that would have stifled the flow of discussion. By asking them to discuss the significance of their special places, contexts for identifying their notions of community identity emerged in the conversations and were further developed through the analysis.

In the final phase of "forming knowledge," a coherent understanding of the data set was developed, which included developing constructs to characterize the range of variability of participants' community identities. The primary themes were elaborated within a "cross-case analysis," in which participants' texts and photographs were compared with each other. There was one participant whose text did not connect with meanings that would link her to other people or a community (and her perspective is not represented within this paper). However, analyses of texts from other participants provided ample evidence connecting participants to other people, and their aggregation converged on the identified themes without force, or without a need to reconcile any particular participants' meanings with the general themes presented (Huberman and Miles, 1994). As part of this final phase, a presentation was made to most of the participants (as a group) after the analysis. The study was explained using a format and content similar to

that presented in this paper. Copies of the presentation were distributed, as were drafts of this paper, and in doing so, participants were asked to comment and, if necessary, revise their perspectives either at the presentation or on individual follow-up. Along with comments suggesting that the presentation reaffirmed participants' perspectives, there were requests for additional copies of the paper.

An important part of photo-elicitation is the pairing of text with photographs. The following results discuss meanings of places emerging from interviews with corresponding photographs being referenced during the discussions. The photographic images are printed in color to provide a close representation of the images that elicited participants' discussion. Some ideas would probably not have been discussed had the photographs been black-and-white.

## 3. Results and discussion

Of the 25 recruits, 20 completed their roles as participants of taking pictures, returning the cameras, and being interviewed. Although we attempted to follow-up on the five recruits who dropped-out, we were unable to contact four of them through telephone, email, or regular mail. The one recruit who was contacted would not indicate his reasons for dropping-out except to say that he was unable to complete the study and that his inability was not related to difficulties in using a camera. Participants ranged in age from approximately 30 to 70 years old; eight were female. Collectively they took 429 photographs of which most were taken within a 30 mile (50 km) radius of Midewin; the minimum number of photographs taken was eight and the maximum was 27. Each interview lasted between 20 and 120 min and collectively resulted in 304 single-spaced pages of interview text.

The meanings of landscapes relating to a sense of community identity are represented by the following three inter-related themes: places to learn about community landscapes, places to enact community, and places to improve community landscapes. These themes have overlapping content, and are useful to organize the community-based meanings that emerged from the analysis. Each theme is further developed and discussed in turn.

### *3.1. Places to learn about community landscapes*

Several participants appreciated landscapes from which they could learn about their community and its environment. Sometimes the learning was focused on functions of a natural ecosystem, and other times on connections between human society and the landscape. A recurrent sub-theme centered on the need to teach the history of local community landscapes, in this case, as instrumental in transporting natural resources and raw materials from the Lake States to the Pioneer West. The important point about the teaching and learning was not so much that participants appreciated their awareness of community landscapes, but felt others needed to learn about ways in which the local landscape functions and/or has functioned. In other words, several participants were able to deconstruct aspects of local landscapes, and felt others needed to have similar understandings and abilities.

Several participants felt that their community needed places where others could visit natural environments in order to "connect with nature." David, a retired chemist, appreciated public opportunities to learn about the natural history of prairie plants and animals. He felt that the beauty of Midewin was its proximity to the Chicago metropolitan area and the potential to encourage people to learn about a prairie landscape. David felt that many people go to parks to enjoy spring blooms or fall colors, and that these were the "little hooks" that start the "never-ending education process." In his discussion of a photograph with some naturalized daffodils blooming (Fig. 1), David stated:

> ... [People] come out to see the really spectacular stuff, then you start parking your car and walking back and seeing other stuff and becoming interested in the prairie and learning more about it. And that's sort of the thread that draws you in ... There's something about beginning to attach names that make it nicer to people. You go out and see things like the pretty flowers. Well, once you put a name on those pretty flowers, you start to learn how they grow, what sort of areas they grow in, why do they grow here rather than over there.

Carol, a state employee in her 40s, took several pictures during a local festival called "prairie days,"


Figs. 1–6. Several participants indicated that important landscapes were those from which they could learn about their community and its environment. Sometimes learning was focused on functions of a natural ecosystem, and other times on connections between human society and the landscape. Landscapes that provided learning opportunities included a field of wildflowers (Fig. 1), a special event at a local park (Fig. 2), a trailside interpretive sign explaining the flow of water at a sewage treatment plant (Fig. 3), a local community dulcimer festival (Fig. 4), a backyard vegetable garden (Fig. 5), and a community "children's garden" (Fig. 6).

which celebrated the cultural and natural heritage of the local landscape. She was involved with programs catering to school children that came to learn about the prairie (Fig. 2):

> Here's part of the 5th graders that came ... they had different checkpoints ... and it worked out really good. They had some out at the cabin, and some on the trails to take them

to different checkpoints to show them the prairie.

Thomas, a librarian and avid bicyclist in his 30s, was one of several participants who took pictures of signs or markers meant to represent community values and, in some sense, educate those who pass. Thomas took a handful of pictures near sewage treatment plants. He felt that locating bike paths and trails next to water treatment facilities provided critical opportunities to educate the community about the water they use, and thought that signs were an appropriate educational tool. In his characterization of an interpretive sign at one such plant, Thomas stated (Fig. 3):

> ... this is nice because number one, they educate you on what the sewage treatment facility is and how it works ... Secondly, you know that they're not doing anything too bad because now they're constantly being watched ... And it's just a reminder that every time I flush my toilet, you know. It's a very educational thing.

Rather than a sign or marker, some participants felt that the education of others is best done through social interaction, such as that found at local festivals. Meg, a retired doctor and hospital administrator, was particularly concerned about local knowledge being passed from one generation to the next. She appreciated places that encouraged people of all ages to learn from each other. In response to a photograph taken at a community dulcimer festival (Fig. 4), Meg explained:

> ... it's important to involve children in things that adults do. Getting them involved in prairie restoration, for example. Getting them involved in volunteer activities ... If you don't teach the next generation to value the same things that we currently value, where are they going to learn it? Who's going to teach them? And if you don't take value on events like this, it's all that they see on television and in videos. We're going to lose a lot of what we have, and if we cherish it I think we want it to be *not* lost ... to be saved so it can be carried on by the next generation and generations down the line.

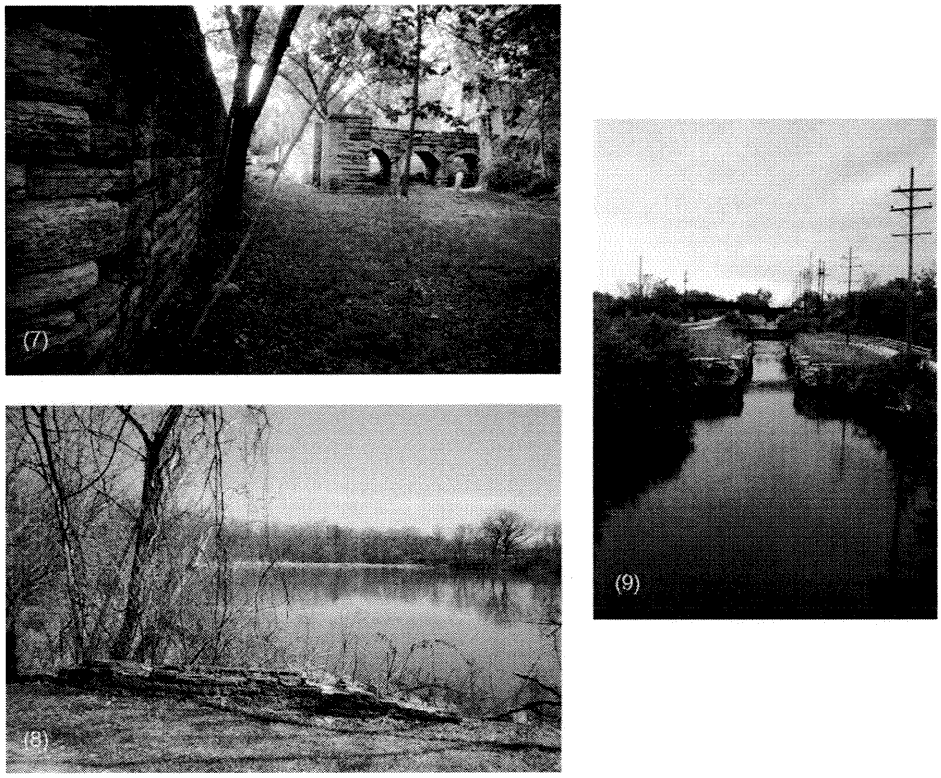
Several participants felt that community members and the public at-large needed to understand connections between food found in the grocery store and farm communities such as those of Midewin. Jerry, an employee of the federal government in his 30s, appreciated farm and garden landscapes because it was important for people to know linkages between grocery stores, farmers, and growing crops. In his response to a photograph of a vegetable garden (Fig. 5), he stated:

> My dad had a wonderful garden. We would eat a lot of the stuff that we grew right in our backyard. Fresh vegetables ... as a kid you would find a slug or something on it because you can't get them as clean as in a grocery store (laughter). In retrospective [sic] I realize now that it kind of connects you with the earth and you realize where your food comes from. It doesn't come from a grocery store.

Other participants also lamented that society has become so removed from earthly connections that "some people don't even know that milk comes from a cow!" (Alice, who is a fourth generation farmer of the area in her 70s). Such statements suggest not only an appreciation for farming landscapes, but a feeling that communities need places that allow others to witness or experience gardening, farming, and the production of food. Will, an engineer in his 40s, was proud of his community's "children's garden" which provides hands-on gardening experience (Fig. 6):

> The children's garden is a big project for the community to come in and build this area for children. It's in walking distance from the grade school. They have just about every conceivable kind of flower and shrub you can imagine in there. They have a garden in there with sunflowers and corn and tomatoes for the kids to go in and pick ... It's a community thing so volunteers go out there and help with watering and weeding.

The features of the community landscape that garnered the most pride and whose importance as a focal point for learning was shared by the most participants involved places with historic ties to transportation of goods from the east to the west, and the north to the south. In particular, many participants felt that stories related to the Illinois & Michigan (I&M) Canal, an historic network of waterways of the mid-1800s whose purpose was to haul goods from the east (mostly the Great Lakes area) to the waterways of America's Pioneer West, needed public representation. For example, Henry, a retired real estate agent and volunteer at a local historical society, told a story about the significance




Figs. 7–9. Features of the community landscape that served as a focal point for learning were places tied to historic transportation of goods and raw materials. Stories related to the Illinois & Michigan (I&M) Canal and its "opening of the West" permeated a significant portion of community history as re-told during the interviews. Landscape scenes related to such heritage narratives included remnants of structures used for the canal (Fig. 7), parks that line the waterways of the canal (Fig. 8), and views from bridges that cross the canal (Fig. 9).

of towpaths along canal routes (Fig. 7) and afterwards encouraged the interviewer to "see for yourself" by providing detailed directions to these places:

> On the I&M Canal, they pull barges down there. They were pulled by mules upon the towpath ... The locks should be preserved ... it's just a feeling of history. That's too much history to plow back into the ground ... and destroy it.

Maggie, a nurse in her 50s, also appreciated opportunities to "re-live history" through first-hand knowledge of landscapes around the I&M Canal (Fig. 8):

> It was really a big deal with this I&M Canal and how they brought commerce from the East down to the Mississippi River... immigrants came over to find work, they settled there and became part of the community ... there's a group called the Canalers trying to get on one of those canal boats and take people on rides ... at least history will live on.

Bob, a housing contractor in his 40s, would like to enhance the public opportunities to learn about Midewin area as a national transportation hub (Fig. 9). Along with his discussion of the need for people to know about railroads as a strategic development for growth of Chicago and the Anglo expansion westward, he also envisioned ways to tell about commercial transportation on the area's waterways:

> This is a shot ... showing that the canal, even though it hasn't had any boats in it for 130 years it's still a viable waterway. With just a little amount of care, it could be restored to a replica of the original waterway. My plan would be to put in a towpath along the side and to allow people to walk along the

canal if possible. Have a replica of a barge boat and have it pulled by a mule ... The canal represents that pipeline that gave people work and provided for the continued growth of the western United States ... This is the lock that I would like to see rebuilt and reused to provide a canal heritage park. The type of experience where people could actually get into barge boats and go up and down ... have a bunch of mules pulling along the lower canal.

It was clear from participants that their senses of community identity needed to be reflected in the public places of their community. Such places would allow others to learn, and community members to reaffirm, past and present relationships with the land. Landscapes that allowed people to learn about their inter-connections with each other and with their environment included places for first-hand experience of locally-based nature, places that tell landscape functions through signage or markers, and places (like festivals or parks) with opportunities to bear witness to connections between community members and landscape. This theme aligns with Proshansky et al's (1983) discussion of "environmental competence," in which individuals need to understand their landscapes in order to behave appropriately, and ultimately, to be able to function well in them. Manzo (2003) also suggested that individuals need competency in reading environments by arguing that "relationships to places are a dynamic phenomenon" (p. 51) in that we are constantly reacting to places, even those familiar to us, due to insights from the array of other places in our lives.

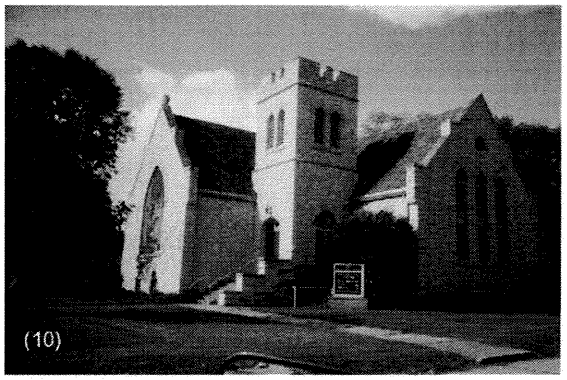
### 3.2. Places to enact community

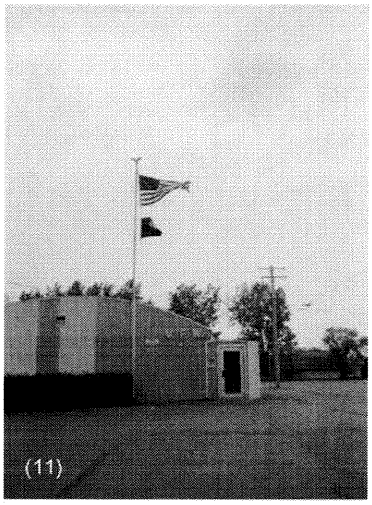
Several participants appreciated gathering places, public or semi-public indoor and outdoor sites, where people would meet and work toward shared goals or demonstrate shared beliefs. Such gathering places gave participants a sense of community they might otherwise not have. Wilkinson (1986) (see also Tilly, 1973) suggests that community enactment is an essential element to indicate a community's identity. Without places or events in which people act in consort, or without some degree of unified action and resultant feelings of solidarity, one would not have a community (Wilkinson, 1986, pp. 5–6). Although Wilkinson framed community enactment within contexts of action against outside threats or resistance to external forces, several participants in our study were able to connect a variety of collective behavior to enhancement of their sense of community. Enacting community was related to places where people would gather to negotiate shared goals and reaffirm their relationships. This does not mean that all goals were shared; it means that there were enough shared to motivate people to gather, and as a result, foster a sense of community.

Photographs of churches elicited comments related to collective behavior and shared values. Several participants took pictures of churches, and not necessarily the churches of which they were members. Teri, a former rodeo circuit rider and current horse-breeder in her 50s, appreciated churches within a small town setting because they reminded her of a community church "that wasn't strictly Baptist or Methodist or anything like that, it was just a community church ... and the community supported it ... and that people in the community would go to it." On a similar sub-theme, Henry took pictures of churches that elicited a discussion of various baptisms and weddings of family members, past Christmases, rituals or procedural details of various church services, and other memories related to the churches as well as linking his stories to other church congregations around Midewin that he did not photograph. Churches, as places to hold events for his family and others in the community, were a significant part of Henry's important places of Midewin (Fig. 10). For Henry, churches function as a "kind of community center."

Besides churches, places for fraternal organizations or restaurants also elicited discussion related to enactment of community. Jill, a clock and watch vendor in her 50s, took a picture of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) club house. She and her husband were active with this organization and felt the VFW influences community togetherness through weekly dinners for community charity, assisting local funerals, and sponsoring various youth activity programs. In her response to the VFW club photograph (Fig. 11), Jill stated:

Tonight they're having food. A ham and bean supper for the Boy Scouts. And they do a lot of things. Members handle the funerals at the Abraham





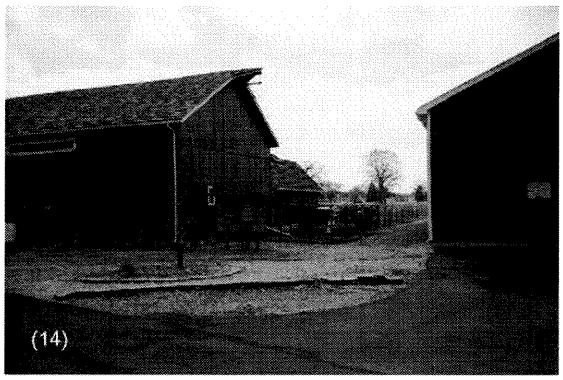
Figs. 10–12. Several built environments represented gathering places where people would meet and work toward shared goals or demonstrate shared beliefs. Such places provided participants with opportunities to reaffirm their commitment to one another and provided a sense of belonging. Places where segments of the community would gather included a church (Fig. 10), a local VFW Club (Fig. 11), and a diner (Fig. 12).

> Lincoln National Cemetery ... Our guys on Monday handle the funeral services for all the soldiers that come. They'll be doing something for the veterans over in Mattoon [another town] ... There are a lot of special programs for the kids that start early and run late... it combines the community together and gives them a sense of cohesiveness.

Cristina, a school teacher in her 40s, feels a part of the community because of the many places in town where she meets people she knows, coupled with her development of caring relationships. The public demonstration of "helping each other out" leads Cristina to feel she is part of a community. In comments about her photograph of a local restaurant (Fig. 12), she stated:

> Basically it's the only restaurant that's really close to us so we go there a lot. And there's nice people. My husband's a carpenter and contractor. One other carpenter's girlfriend bartends there. And we just kind of know everybody ... If something bad happens, our local people come out. I know a woman who found out she has cancer. On the way to cancer treatment, she was in a really bad car accident ... and so all of the people had a huge benefit, and everybody gave things. And they had raffles and auctions. And you see that all of the time. We come together and do benefits when somebody dies, somebody's kid is sick. You see, we feel a lot more a part of the community in Manhattan than we did in Bloomington [a larger city to the south].

Public places for family activities were appreciated by several participants. Meg indicated that community festivals reflect "wholesome" values of a community in that they allow people of all generations to celebrate



Figs. 13–15. Participants appreciated public places for family activities, particularly when the activities were opportunities to connect with the cultural heritage of the community. Such places included a local festival (Fig. 13), a living history "farm theme park" (Fig. 14), and public murals painted by local artists (Fig. 15).

together (Fig. 13). Local festivals are often linked to historic themes that could define a community's sense of itself. Meg said that in contrast to the "non-reality of Disney World," community festivals are:

> so much more creative and so much giving of one's self, even for the audience that claps and sings along when the artists want you to sing along. Real people having a good time with their families. It's sort of like one big party. Not a wild party, just a quiet party ... it is the whole community together.

Thomas appreciated "Perry Farm," a farm that was donated to the local park district and now serves as a living history farm, complete with a diversity of stock animals, gardens and orchards, wildlife sanctuary, children's museum, and restored farmhouse. Thomas took several photographs of sites in Perry Farm and for each often discussed the things that families could do together. In discussion of his photograph of the barn (Fig. 14), He stated:

> This is not really preservation of farming history. I took the picture to show the farm animals and barn, and the fact that you can take your kids there and do something.

Sometimes community places do not function as a current gathering place, yet are capable of representing enactments of community. Bob took photographs of murals painted on a wall of a railway underpass. The murals were painted by local Latino artists and youth volunteers, and depict stories of the past 150 years of human settlement within the area. Although Bob mentioned the *content* of the murals, most of his discussion focused on the *production* of the murals by community artists and volunteers. His interview suggests that it was the social context related to

community groups acting in consort that gave the murals significance (Fig. 15). The murals not only depict local heritage, but more importantly they:

> portray local pride and craftsmanship ... where local art and civic groups can take pride in restoring part of the city's history ... helps to promote the spirit of the city.

For several participants, their senses of community identities were enhanced by places that represented people working together toward shared goals. These places allowed community members to reaffirm their social relationships in ways that demonstrated they cared for one another. In all cases, the places were not gathering spots for the entire community, but were gathering spots for a segment of the community that shared similar goals. In addition, the places depicted by participants were rarely used as gathering spots. Rather, they represented an ability (or perhaps potentiality) for the "whole community to come together." The potentiality for like-minded people to gather, even if just for a one-time gathering such as Joliet's Latino murals, helped frame several public places as reflective of the community spirit.

As a curious observation, not one picture was taken of a local high school or football field. For many towns both big and small, pride in the local high school football team is a powerful force that shapes the public culture and leads to Friday night gatherings during the fall at the school stadium to demonstrate community support (Bissinger, 1990). A few participants discussed the changing of school boundaries due to expanding population as well as the construction of a new school, yet the lack of attention to local high school sports was noticeable. Most likely this was due to participants who did not represent the range of variability within the communities near Midewin.

### 3.3. Places to improve community landscapes

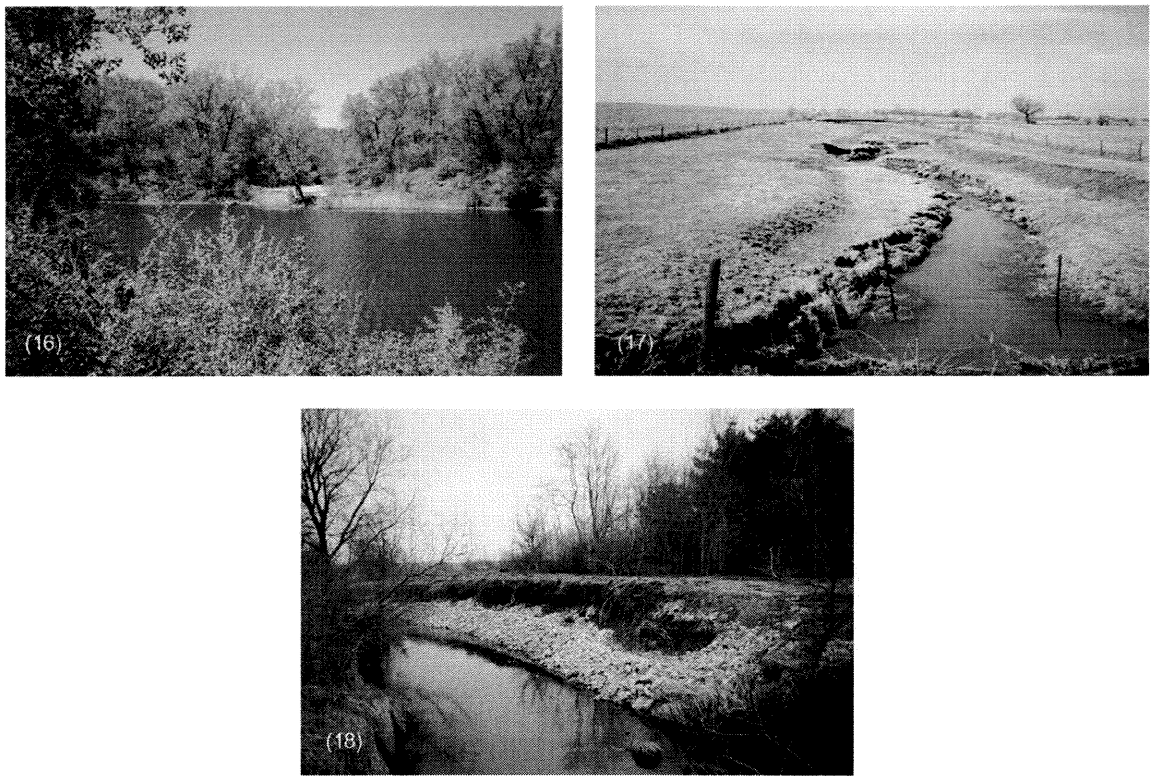
Several participants told progressive stories about their community, in which landscapes got better due to people working together to improve, restore, and/or beautify them. Although this theme could be considered a sub-theme of "enacting community," it often emerged outside of the contexts of collective action, and instead was embedded in stories about landscape change. With a few exceptions, participants were generally positive about past land-use changes and optimistic about future change (see Zube et al., 1989, for a similar finding). Improving local landscapes often was done through collective action and appeared as sources of community pride, even though neither of these attributes were necessarily noticeable within the discussions of participants. However, it was clear that several participants were aware of landscape change and favorably impressed with their community's ability to affect positive change, and in some sense, embrace the improvement of various local landscapes as a point of hometown pride.

Several participants' visions for landscape change were mindful of local history and noticeably not affected by traditional environmental discourse. Environmentalism has a longstanding affinity for concepts such as "wilderness" or "pristine land" (Cronon, 1995), or within the short life of restoration ecology concepts such as "pre-settlement conditions" or "historic range of variation" (Egan and Howell, 2001). These concepts suggest visions for landscape change with intentions to erase the human imprint. In contrast, participants were creative in their appreciation of worked landscapes (White, 1995; Goin and Raymond, 2001) and centered their visions for landscape change on human industry and intentions. For example, Luke, a special education instructor in his 40s, was so proud of the restoration of an abandoned coal mine into an outdoor sporting club that he felt "kind of spoiled by the high quality lakes" of the sporting club (Fig. 16).

> Previously it was used to mine coal. Coal companies came in and strip mined the coal, and made these features which have pretty much by themselves re-vegetated a lot of cottonwood ... in general, this shows the kind of restoration of an area that could have been pretty bleak.

Walt, a retiree in his 70s, is a member of a citizen-based environmental monitoring group. He was concerned about a farmer grazing cattle in a particular creek and the implications it had for environmental degradation (Fig. 17), but nonetheless was hopeful that someday the site would improve.

> There's no law that says he can't graze cattle on the creek and this is the land he couldn't put into




Figs. 16–18. Most participants were comfortable with the accumulated human impact on the landscape and their visions to improve the landscape did not include restoring it to some "pre-settlement" condition. For examples, sporting clubs use abandoned mine pits as lakes to fish (Fig. 16). Or, improvement of water quality while accommodating pasture for cattle is an ideal vision for landscape change for one participant (the scene in Fig. 17 is downstream from the scene in Fig. 18).

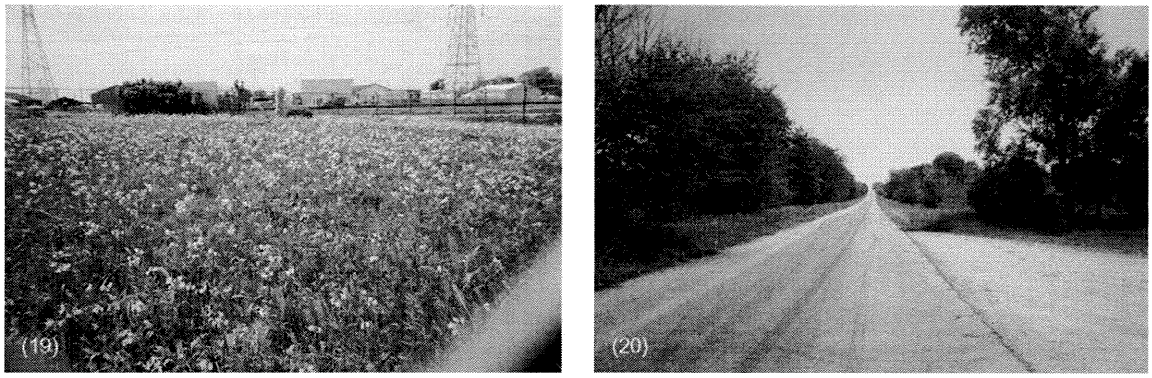
> production obviously so he uses it for cattle. To me it's not a good idea but what are you gonna do? ... Especially as you start getting more development upstream, you're going to have more runoff into the stream and it's going to cause more erosion, it's going to cause more meandering as the stream picks up speed it has a tendency to meander, cut in to the banks, there's no stopping that ... If Prairie Creek Preservation got to the point where we had finances, we would do something, we would buy that from that guy. Get his cows out of the there. I hope to see that someday.

Walt was hopeful for Prairie Creek restoration because he was involved with a riparian restoration project upstream from the site of Fig. 17. Fig. 18 shows the site of Walt's restoration project upstream from the site where cattle are grazed in the stream.

> That's showing a stream bank restoration project that I was doing this past November and is completed now. It should be growing in pretty good. We'll see how that works out, stop some of the erosion from filtering into the creek.

For several participants, the target of improving local landscapes was the restoration of prairie ecosystems with success being indicated by the flourishing of native plants and wildlife, even on the smallest of land parcels. David characterized his vision for landscape change at Midewin by championing the virtues of a nearby prairie even though it was surrounded by development (Fig. 19):

> This is what a prairie should look like but it's not likely they're ever going to get much bigger than this because you can see there are industrial buildings and the railroad runs along this side. There are




Figs. 19–20. Midewin is effectively a long-term restoration project encompassing the conversion of more than 15,000 acres into a restored prairie. These photographs are especially salient to the purposes of prairie restoration efforts in that participants' visions were linked to a *contemporary* prairie compatible with mixed uses and human development, rather than an *historical* prairie that would erase the past 150 years of human settlement. As examples, one participant indicated a nearby restored prairie surrounded by development was an excellent model for Midewin to follow (Fig. 19). Another participant was keenly aware of the human effort necessary to restore prairie, the need for public participation in restoration efforts, and public access through trailhead development (Fig. 20); his visions for Midewin were represented by a road leading to a Midewin trailhead.

> houses starting to be built around the other side. So this is sort of one little acre that's isolated, but this is what Midewin could be in 200 years if we do it right. This is what the goal is.

Joseph, a US veteran with a disability, was intimately familiar with the process of restoring the Midewin site into a tallgrass prairie, and enjoyed discussing markers of a healthy prairie ecosystem. Yet many of his photographs elicited comments about the human effort needed to improve such sites, such as the work needed to develop a prairie trailhead (Fig. 20):

> We had a volunteer workday the day we opened the trails up. We had several truckloads of volunteers. And what they did was with the trucks on the road the volunteers would go up on both sides and pick up any trash that was laying around. When I say trash, I'm including downed tree limbs, stuff like that. Just a cleanup.

Two exceptions to optimism about improving community landscapes were related to casino development and the recently built tracks for NASCAR races. The race tracks were viewed by several participants as inconsistent with other local values. Jill indicated that the race tracks "just mess things up. It's not made for us. It's made for Chicago." Luke indicated that the race tracks were built "with very little prior public discussion" resulting in a "done deal ... that just in terms of physical appearance, it's really out of place for this part of Illinois" (Fig. 21).

Casino development did not surface as much as the race tracks within participant interviews. However, the few interviews that mentioned casino development

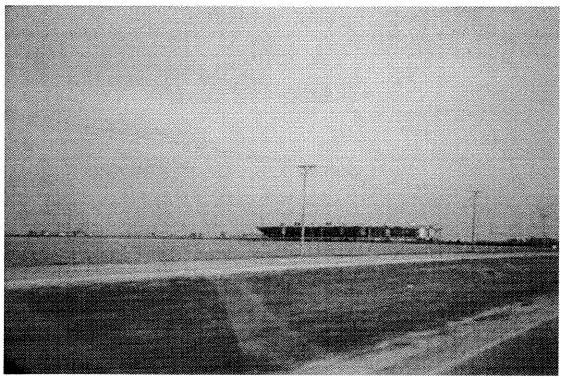


Fig. 21. Meanings elicited from participants' photographs were often connected to progressive narratives in which landscapes improved due to people working together. Two exceptions to this optimism were related to the development of gambling casinos and race tracks built for stock cars. Both of these developments were viewed as being imposed by outside forces without sensitivity for local communities and their public histories. Fig. 21 shows one of the local racetracks taken through a car windshield.

cast them as detracting from the downtown life of the City of Joliet and bringing in strangers from outside the community. As succinctly stated by Maggie, "the [casino] hotels on the river make the place ugly, and I feel alienated from those that think it's exciting." Both casinos and race tracks cater to outsiders, or tourists, and were developed largely for their perceived economic impact on Joliet's tax base. The literature on tourism impacts has documented scores of places in which local residents effectively lose their community due to tourism development gone awry (e.g., Stokowski, 1996).

The improvement of community landscapes was an important part of some participants' community identities. "Improving" current conditions is different than erasing or eliminating current conditions. In general, participants' envisioned landscapes were ones that showed signs of past human use. Of those who discussed improvement of community landscapes, they were aware of incremental landscape change and could attribute the change to various actors in the community. In this sense, there were not any landscapes considered "sacred" or "untouched by humans" at Midewin, nor was there any felt need to mask the human imprint on the land in an attempt to revise its history. The perceptions of participants generally aligned with humans as caretakers or stewards to protect vestiges of a long line of humanity that has affected landscape change. This was a surprise finding for several of the Midewin staff; they anticipated that the desirable vision for landscape change (and in particular for the lands they administer) to be an historic prairie restored to pre-settlement conditions—appearing vast, pristine, and nostalgic. Instead, the findings herein claim that a contemporary prairie, complete with visible reminders of human development, should be the target.

The architecture, design, and/or physical appearance of these "improved" places were less important than the social contexts by which they are known. As indicated by Stokowski (1996) in her study of gambling development in two small towns, landscape features may improve in terms of newer buildings and infrastructure, but if the context for change is not connected to community values, such "improvements" run the risk of destroying a felt sense of community. No doubt community identities adjust through time in some cumulative sense of development, yet the changes with the least social upheaval are typically incremental and grounded rather than punctuated or viewed as being from the outside (van den Berghe, 1993; Freudenburg and Gramling, 1994). At Midewin, the race tracks, and to a lesser extent the casinos, were not viewed as improvements by participants nor were they viewed as large enough threats to warrant a local resistance movement (Wilkinson, 1986).

## 4. Conclusion

Landscape change was embraced by most participants. The positive allure of change was due to prospects of enhancing community-based meanings of local places and events. These meanings served as both visions for change and as collective motivation to contribute to change. To look toward community members as a source of planning visions is not a new thought, although its implementation has had difficulties (Freudenburg and Gramling, 1994; Fischer, 2000). The contribution of this study is the relative ease in eliciting community-based meanings that could represent visions for landscape change. The overlapping themes are each directed at aspects that further empower community members within landscape planning processes. Participants felt that people needed to know for themselves how a landscape functions; they needed public places to gather to negotiate (and reaffirm) community identities; and they needed to change landscapes in ways that align with their senses of themselves.

Although the findings generally support landscape change, participants only supported landscape change when it enhanced a sense of locality in which landscapes revealed connections between people and their environments (Sell and Zube, 1986; see also the special issue of *Landscape Journal*, 1998, entitled "Eco-revelatory design: Nature constructed/nature revealed"). Several of the themes could be elicited by landscapes and features that do not necessarily involve large capital outlays. However, implementation will require the voices and collective action of citizen-stakeholders to articulate visions different than the creep of ex-urban sprawl. Most communities already have citizen-stakeholder committees formed in some capacity of planning, but they may not feel empowered to affect change nor have an understanding of alternative visions for landscape change. The

findings illustrate the ability of stakeholders to know, and be able to express, important meanings of their community. When these meanings are legitimized through planning processes and represented in local landscapes, they will further enhance a sense of community.

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**William P. Stewart** is an associate professor in the Departments of Leisure Studies and Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He teaches courses in the campus-wide environmental program related to social values and natural resource development. His research interests include community-based conservation, including strategies for empowerment within contexts of park and protected area development.

**Derek Liebert** is the environmental steward for the Urbana Park District in Urbana, IL. He received an MS degree in park and natural resource management from the Department of Leisure Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research is focused on understanding the integration of ecological change within agencies related to preservation mandates such as the National Park Service.

**Kevin W. Larkin** is an assistant recreation program leader on the White Mountain National Forest, New Hampshire, and doctoral candidate in the Department of Leisure Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include community relations to natural resources, social construction of landscape change, personal identity development as part of outdoor recreation experiences, and interpretive research methods.